

Cultural Awareness; A Key Element in Teaching English in the Globalization Era

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Abstract

As our globe is becoming more unified and less diverse in the sense of the cultural behavior, English teachers in the contact zone context may confront a number of dilemmas created by the universal unifying standards in the field of education and the diverse cultural values among their students under the conditions of globalization. This paper has been conducted to find out how a teacher may put effort to make his/her students familiar with a global culture without offending their own identities and values. To do so this study investigates on a professional linguist teacher's assumptions about the cultural process of globalization and identity via interviews and classroom observations. The highlight of the interviews and classroom observations reveal how a teacher may adopt different tactics and tasks in order to establish a mutual cultural learning. The aim of this study is to introduce a range of strategies and tailor made techniques to give voice to his students enabling them move towards SELF development keeping abreast of the global cultural flows.

Key words: Agglobalization, Cultural awareness, contact zone

1. Introduction

Teachers' dilemmas in cultural globalization

The education systems in the international environment have led the scholars to pay a specific attention to the cultural processes in the globalization era. It appears that without cultural awareness* maintaining an effective communication with students from other nationalities would be difficult, let alone teaching them.

Furthermore, teachers, at the front line of educational globalization, are expected to keep a wary eye on their students' identity formation. In this era of globalization, even though the concept of morality is changing rapidly, teachers need to negotiate how to handle the different backgrounds learners bring with them to the classroom. Teachers usually try to develop strategies for managing these diversities in order to put social and educational values into practice so as to maintain fruitful communications among learners from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. However, this task would be more difficult in a contact zone where "cultural action, the making and remaking of identities, takes place" (Clifford 1997, p. 7.)

In order to see how a teacher may put effort to get the best out of this chaotic process of identity formation in globalization era and the nature of dilemmas in recent era, I have consulted my colleagues to find out how teachers can get the best out of the global flows to give voice to the learners to purposefully go towards what the researcher terms as aglobalization** - a deliberate, cognizant journey towards globalization adopting the globalized standards selectively.

The very two questions that served as the researcher's motivation to conduct this study have been

- How do teachers ethically navigate the classroom dilemmas to make their students familiar with a global culture without offending their own identities and values?
- Plus, how are the students' identities heeded in the process of aglobalization?

The present study aims to explore into a linguist English teacher's perception of such global flows. The reason that the researcher chose this person to conduct a case study on is his uniquely creative methodology to teach the controversial, culture- laced issues. She is hopeful that a precise scrutiny of the participant's classes through an exploratory practice might shed light on the path of other interested teachers like me. By means of observation, she would try to portray how the participant faces such predicaments via adopting creative, tailor made techniques. She would also interview him to trace the cultural theory of his mind. That's why this study can be categorized as an exploratory practice.

2. Observing how professional researchers approach the issue

Hereafter, the author of this study is going to review cultural globalization school of thoughts as well as identity in the related literature.

2.1. Cultural globalization Cultural River on the Global Run

Globalization itself is more or less another problematic concept which reminds the researcher of a poem by Rumi (Masnawi-collected poems; 1258-1273).

Everyone befriended me from an angle of their own

They sought me not and my secrets went unknown

The vastness of globalization has made the scholars accept the fact that it is rather impossible to define it within a single theory. The term globalization denotes the process of worldwide interconnections. Steger (2003, p. 19) defines globalization as "a multidimensional set of social processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening

connections between the local and the distant." He classifies globalization into five historical periods. The "prehistoric period" from 10,000 B.C.E to 3500 B. C.E when some hunter-gatherers settled in South America. "The premodern period" from 3500B. C. E. to 1500 C.E. Coinciding with the invention of technology. The third period is "the early modern" between 1500 and 1750 when Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, France, and England started to establish colonialism. Then " the modern period" from 1750 to 1970 as the heyday of capitalism. And finally, " the contemporary period" from 1970 to date as the global trading and exchange hit the rocketed. (Cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2008, pp.32-33)

Despite the fact that globalization is not a new concept, the impact of this very wave is so considerable. As mentioned, the global electronic world connects billions of people around the globe in a second. The internet easily has broken down the borders. Therefore, the ideas, values, and information can be transferred in a real time.

Cultural globalization indicates cultural flows across the globe. Spring (2001, p.7) defines global culture as "the growing uniformity and homogenization of the world's cultures." Nowadays, "cultural images far-off lands flashed across small screens in our living rooms and big screens in multiplex cinemas have made the world a global neighborhood. Foreign cultures are no longer cultural islands unto themselves." (Kumaravadievelu, 2008, p. 38.)

The consequences of foreign and local culture interconnection in the process of globalization have transpired three schools of thought; the homogenization thesis, and the hybridization, and glocalization.

The first group consider globalization as a process of reaching uniform standards of the west which is also termed as 'McDonaldization' or 'westernization'. This can be achieved not only through an international language but also through media and entertainment industry. For sure, globalization has resulted in spreading the western cultural values; however, to my understanding, this process cannot linger for two reasons. First, it ignores and undermines the democratic values of the individuals, and second, due to the fact that globalization is not a one way flow.

In contrast, the second schools of scholars believe that nonwestern countries have has a significant impact on the western countries. As Giddens (2000, pp. 34-35) claims globalization is a decenterization process what he dubs as "runaway world". However, Kumaravadivelu (2008, p.44) cleverly criticizes them and points out that " Localizers vehemently dismiss the idea that a single, unified global culture is emerging. They insist that a diffusion of cultural fads from the West does not denote cultural domination on the part of the West." To put it in other words, they do not suggest any practical solution for the cultural power of the West but they rather do the talking instead of doing the walking.

The third schools of thought sees cultural transmission as "a two way process where cultures in contact shape and reshape each other directly or indirectly" (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 44.) In other words, global and local are seen as two sides of the same coin that modify each other so as to meet the needs. Robertson (1992, pp. 177-178) defines glocalization as "the two fold process of particularization of the universal and the universalization of the particular." A language educator who follows this pattern tries to help the learners to accommodate the globalized world without losing their dynamic self identities.

As these three schools of thoughts' argumentations seem to be open to endless interpretation, language teachers, particularly, may find themselves uncertain about which to follow.

Kumaravadivelu (2008, p. 164) has suggests that cultural realism is a "realistic response to the challenges and opportunities arising out of cultural globalization." He maintains that cultural

growth is possible but only with individuals, communities, and nations, commitment towards identity formation. It can be achieved via a global cultural consciousness. He argues "such a consciousness requires the cultivation of a critically reflective mind that can tell the difference between real and unreal, between information and disinformation, between ideas and ideologies. Only such a critical mind can help the individual develop the knowledge, skill, and disposition necessary to deal with the challenges of contemporary realities."

What might be a practical response then to the identity formation of the language learners (English in this case) in the globalization era? And, how can we raise their consciousness in order to help them think critically in the process of aglobalization. Aglobalization: incorporates both local and global aspects of any language and culture tailored for the individual needs of each and every learner to reach global consciousness.

2.2. *i "D"ENTITY:*

Identity has been associated with sameness. That is the sameness of the members of a social class. However, in postmodern parlance, identity is referred to as the difference and it is based on how different somebody is from somebody else. As Bauman (1995, p.18) explains "if the modern problem of identity was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the post modern problem of identity is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open. In the cases of an identity as in other cases, the catchword of modernity was creation the catchword for post modernity is recycling." While, in reality, identity politics may marginalize some groups in a society or even some nations in the world, we cannot overlook the role of "self" in each and every individual's identity formation. Pavlenko & Blackledge (2004, p.27) claim that "individuals are agentive beings who are constantly in search of new social and linguistic resources which allow them to resist identities that position them in undesirable ways."

To the best of reviews, individuals are not in a vacuum to create and develop their individualities but they are in a society which has its unique historical, regional, national and international background. The relationship is an interactive one and it may have different impacts on individuals under different conditions. Giddens (2008, P. 65.) says "the very basis of our self-identity-our sense of self is sustained largely through the stability of the social positions of individuals in the community. Where tradition lapses, and lifestyle choice prevails, the self is not exempt. Self-identity has to be created and recreated on a more active basis than before." (P. 65) However, being exposed to the concept of identity would not suffice. Clearly, such a goal cannot be achieved by learners without their teachers' help and support. To learn how the researcher, as an English teacher, may assist her learners in the voyage of self-realization and becoming acquainted with the others, she has conducted this study.

3. Methodology

This exploratory case study that falls into the interpretive paradigm focuses on a specific cultural globalization phenomenon in pedagogy with some elements of critical paradigms. Fred&Perry (2011, p. 80) believes "any study that is done in a real life setting, involving intensive holistic data collection through observation at a very close personal level without the influence of prior theory and contains mostly of verbal analysis, could be classified as a qualitative study." In this line, my aim is to discover a professional English teacher's perspective regarding identity formation of students and his strategies to meet their needs in the globalization era and in a contact zone context through thick description. As for construction of meaning, interpretivists assume that "the view that all knowledge, and therefore, all meaningful reality as such, is

contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted an essentially social content." (Crotty, 2008)

Participant

The linguist teacher whose practice is being observed and discussed here was a 39 year old, PhD candidate in Linguistics, who has been involved in TESOL for over 17 years. He was chosen for this study on the basis of his reputation as a professionally committed L2 teacher in his work places. As Fred & Perry (2011. P.67) assert the main goal of intensity or expert sampling is "to use a case that concentrates the trait(s) being studied. The inquirer selected her case on two grounds of "purposiveness and intensity" and "expert case", with an emphasis on the quality of the information that she could take from him. Since the researcher has been his colleague for two years and, in our team discussions, she found out that he has some novel ideas to enhance his students' higher order thinking.

Data collection

The inquirer has not been looking for any established knowledge but a possible hypothesis from this study to develop and further my own knowledge. She tried to follow Allwrights' Exploratory Practice that is based on three philosophies: the quality of life in the language classroom is much more important than instructional efficiency, ensuring our understanding of the quality of classroom life is far more essential than developing ever "improved" teaching techniques; and understanding such a quality of life is social." (Kumarvadivelue, 2008. P.195).

Here, the data is mutually created by the professional and the researcher to figure out a better understanding of a phenomenon. As for data collection, the researcher observed his intensive American English Phonetics classes where there were five Iranian, three Arab, two Afghan, three Kurd, and two Turk students as a full participant to see the outward tactics and strategies he uses in the classroom. In order to avoid any interruption and to capture valid natural behavior, the students were unaware that they were being observed. The advantage of this full observation technique is that the research may contribute to a sort of "access to less obvious data, such as attitudes or intentions" (Fred& Perry, 2011, p. 123.)

Besides, the inquirer tried to access the inner thoughts of the participant through interview. The interview schedule contained open ended questions on three central themes of cultural globalization, student identity formation, and strategies and tactics to obtain deeper responses.

For adding weighted data and increasing the credibility, the researcher depended on triangulation by using the spiral technique via collecting information at different times to support her conclusion. In the beginning, the resulting themes were affected by the research questions. However, later on the categories were redefined along the course of the interview sessions. Themes and interpretations emerged from the input as she shifted through the transcripts, coded and categorized them. She used the technique of constant comparison starting with a particular episode in the data from the interview and comparing it with a similar episode that was gathered through observation as well as literature. Moreover, she created a table displaying the participant's information which has been checked with him to conduct member checking.

To extend credibility of her clarification, the researcher provides the readers with rich, thick description of the participant, and content by adding excerpts from the data where an explanation suits to be supportive. What follows is a description of the participant's perspective towards globalization, identity and identity formation along with his practice in a real classroom context.

4. Data analysis

Hereafter, the inquirer would like to weave her interpretations throughout the participant's interviews illustrating his vision on inception of globalization as well as its effect on peoples' lives. To identify the issues, she initially considered his responses to the interview questions. The process of determining the issues was recursive; the researcher worked through the transcripts, wrote initial draft of the article; and then returned again to the data to check if she had accurately represented the participant's concerns. In the following, she has attempted to categorize the highlights of the interviews as they emerged based on occurrence frequency. Afterwards, a detailed description and/or clarification would be given.

Analysis of the data revealed that the participant has a historical perception towards globalization and peoples' objectives to shape a new form of interconnection. In the interview sessions the participant introduced a new idea- what he terms as "*e-reunification*"- that is a sort of unification triggered and pushed forward by virtual engine of electronic links. Inspired by the teachings of Persian mysticism, he wishes to imagine "there has once a One. This One turned into many through a process of divergence. However, at some not-too-distant point in time and due to the emergence of telecommunication means and the so-called standardization of languages, dress codes, etiquette and the like, convergence is summoning the Many into a novel One. This new One is a more aware One, a more vigilant One, a One which has been experienced, a One which has been understood." He believes that one of the teachers' responsibilities is to help students to become more aware one in order to reach self-awareness. To do so, he applies three kinds of tasks in his classroom.

4.1. *What is being conducted in a real classroom context? (the researcher's field notes from the observation)*

4.1.1. *Assimilation task*

On the first day of the phonetics course, the participant brought along a puppet. Soon as the amazement of the students died down, he introduced him to the class as JohnAli that brought a smile to the face of many students. John is a typical Western name and Ali is a typical Muslim's name. The combination of this two names in a creative way could raise students consciousness towards both familiar and unfamiliar dichotomies of culture. As JohnAli began to talk, you could trace the typical mispronunciations of the students on his accent. The participant of the study believes that the students, who laugh at an inanimate puppet in chorus, would get a chance to become "aware" of their own errors, and, in order to dissociate themselves from him, they try the best to mimic the teacher.

JohnAli's English is vividly and internationally at a low level, he carries with him his local accent, intonation, grammar, and even idioms that are translated literally into English. Not only does it create a humorous atmosphere inside the classroom, but it shows the students where their own weaknesses are in an indirect way.

Furthermore, it is JohnAli who faces up with the cultural similarities and differences and asks the students to help him to make a right decision in various situations. In this way, the students are engaged in critical reflection tasks without being worried of clarifying their thoughts, since the focus is not on them. In my understanding, as Kumaravadiveldu (2008, p. 193) claims "one way of formulating effective classroom strategies for raising global cultural consciousness is to design reflective tasks and exploratory projects centered on familiar dichotomies and popular themes." Doing so, the participant not only uses students as cultural informants but also as decision makers. Therefore, learners feel safe to express their inner thoughts and values through exchanging the information.

4.1.2. *Reflective tasks*

One example of reflective task that the researcher observed was when the participant touched the values and notions of students with some common examples for instance to teach /ʌ / for mother (short) and /ɑ/ for father (long). Then, he popped the discussion of women's rights as if the sound has had a role in that the gender based discussions among the students is then predictable, where the teacher finds a chance to catch to correct the students' mispronunciations. In such a way, students used their necessary background information in order to take part in discussion and they exchanged their ideas and possibly left the classroom with a why and how question that helps them to become a critical thinker not only to other cultures but to their own cultural values. Such reflective tasks allow the learners to write whether they like to change any aspects of their thoughts and identity so that they fit any other cultural group around the globe or not and why is so.

4.1.3. *Exploratory task*

4.1.4. After a few sessions when students were engaged with cultural differences and similarities, he explained the concept of identity and identity formation as follows.

"Each person is regarded as an entity among the endless animate and inanimate entities. Each person's entity is reflected in their self-image. Identity is a dynamic individual-social phenomenon." Then he introduced a metaphoric journey of identity formation which is in line with postmodernism view towards identity formation.

He mentioned in order to distinguish one's SELF and/or ENTITY from those of others', whether knowing or not, every human undergoes an on-going, dynamic process of contrasting SELF's entity against other entities from one's own outlook. The process, as he puts it, is a more of a journey of "I" (self), as a member of any community within any context, destined to find its place and status among other members, and maintain communications with them. Then he asked the students to fill the blank by any verb that begins with "D". He introduced this journey in a dramatic way as:

I first Declare my ENTITY. Then, in contact with the others, I need to Define my ENTITY. Interaction with the others requires that I, at times, Defend, and sometimes, Deny my ENTITY. Deliberating on my ENTITY, I may decide to DECORATE or even Deconstruct my ENTITY. In some cases, I Divide my ENTITY to certain Sub-Entities in order to address my societal needs. These all help me to Develop, Define ever anew, and Declare my ENTITY on an incessant basis. That's how I "D" my ENTITY in order to form my desired IDENTITY.

After that, he asked students to think how they have defined, defend, decorate, divide, or deconstruct themselves in order to declare their entities in their own social groups. And also, if they like to make any changes in the accepted self in their own cultural group or not. This kind of task is termed as exploratory projects that help learners to "explore a slice of their own cultural self, and to write a critical account of the process of their identity information." (Kumaravadiveldu, 2008, p. 205.)

These examples are few and far between. There were many other tasks and projects that he applied in the classroom. Obviously, I suppose it could be enough to demonstrate how a teacher

can design a task and/or project based on familiar theme so the differences can be shown. This is what can give students voice to define themselves, to deconstruct, or to develop themselves and create a mutual learning atmosphere for both the teacher and other peers.

5. Discussion

People live in a society and are willy-nilly in interaction with one another. Language is the handiest, most ubiquitously applicable means that human beings use to communicate with each other. Sometimes this communication leads to miscommunication when participants follow different conversational maxims or violate one of them. It may happen more often in a contact zone where people with different cultural backgrounds and values interact, particularly in the new century when “globalization changes the conditions in which language learning and language teaching take place.” (Block & Cameron, 2002, p. 2.)

The interconnection between language and culture has long been a controversial issue. A well-known theoretical perspective is a linguistic determinism, where Sapir-Whorf hypothesized “language determines thought”. Some linguists dismissed this idea as Fishman (1980, p.33) notes that “we are far more valiant, nimble, experienced and successful strugglers and jugglers with language- and- communication problems than Whorf realized.” However, to my understanding it is safe to assume that language and culture are linked and we as language educators can put this theory to good use by seeing how cultural factors underlie the possible conflict and clashes among people from different background values and beliefs. This knowledge can help us overcome culture shock while we are communicating our thoughts. As Brook (1964, p. 85) argues, “Language is the most typical, the most representative, and the most central element in any culture. Language and culture are not separable; it is better to see the special characteristics of a language as cultural entities and to recognize that language enters into the learning and use of nearly all other cultural elements.” Consequently, each point of views to culture has affected language pedagogy in a way or so. For instance, one group of scholars believes in the cultural assimilation as a solution to the cultural contact. Park and Burgess (1921/1969, P.735) define assimilation as “ a process of interpretation and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.” According to this point of view, teachers are the source of cultural information for their students. In this approach, the students need to acquire the cultural knowledge and move towards acculturation. In other words, the students get familiar with the discrepancies between the culture of origin and that of the targets, in the classroom in order to move forward in the process of assimilation in everyday life. Nevertheless, this approach is blind to the pupils' agency. It classifies the learners' needs based on nationality, ethnical group, and social class. Not having a notion of culture in education is a problem that cannot be ignored anymore as there is no afford to resist it in the new millennium with the World Wide Web having a great impact on the daily life of peoples throughout the world. Along with the information exchange, obviously, much cultural knowledge about different nations would emerge and transfer through this global interaction.

In this study, the researcher tried to outline the debates on the stance of culture in language teaching under conditions of globalization. Rather than subscribing to a particular position, she suggests that one may understand the identities and merits of a teacher within him/herself via broadening their own sociological view point. Teachers as the active agents can get the best out of the global exchange of notions through interaction. It is the interaction between beliefs that may construct our global consciousness. To put it in Wenger’s (1998, p. 45) words “we interact with

each other and with the world; we tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly. In other words, we learn."

Furthermore, the researcher provided a detailed view of a professional in the field of TESOL along with his strategies in the classroom to portray how a teacher may adopt different tactics in order to establish a mutual cultural learning in his classroom. Such a global cultural awareness is likely to help our students cope with the challenges of possible cultural clashes in this new era and to maximize their opportunity to move forward in the voyage of self development.

The findings reveal that the participant's perception is in line with what Kumarvadivelue (2008) terms as "cultural realism." Cultural realism demands critical self reflection. It has the potentials to lead to a better cultural transformation. As Kumarvadivelue (2008, p. 165.) says " in understanding other cultures, we understand our own better; in understanding our own, we understand other cultures better... when we do that, and do that right, we are not culturally melting. We are not hybridizing. We are, in fact, culturally growing." In this way, we recognize and value diversity. And it encourages us to have an ongoing inquiry to become more aware of ourselves and help our students effectively to become more aware of themselves. This may not be achieved without respecting the differences and making wise decisions in the complex, chaotic, and dynamic globalized situations.

6. Conclusion

In short, instead of promoting homogenization or hybridization we may need to do something practical based on our students' needs. To do so, one as a teacher can teach culture not as an informative product but as a kind of information that needs to be explored and shared in a collaborative way to be understood better. This helps students and teachers to go towards aglobalization and critical cultural reflection. Kumarvadivelu (2008) believes it requires knowledge to understand, analyze, and assess "how cultural stereotypes determine the way people perceive themselves and others; and how difficult and sometimes disturbing dialogues can bring about a change of basic attitudes toward one's own culture and toward other cultures."

The way the inquirer looks into it, a teacher who is aware of the cultural globalization can design tasks and projects based on familiar theme which, in turn, gives students voice to declare, define, and to develop themselves and create a mutual learning atmosphere for both teachers and students. Clearly, teachers can assist their students to position themselves in the global flows and to create global cultural consciousness so as to evolve their self into their SELF. As Kumarvadivelu (2011, p. 72.) claims " Teachers have to learn to recognize and renew not only their own identities, beliefs and values but also strive to shape those of their learners as well."

The researcher tried to maximize her understanding by linking the three components of exchanging ideas through an interview, observing what really goes on a professional's classroom, and linking these two with what she learned from the related literature and the scholars' intellectual content. This triangle allowed me to avail myself with a colleagues' experience with my dynamic self and with the existing literature so as to feed my mind. However, it would not be the end of the story as it is a recycling procedure of learning and developing which shall be done constantly and critically.

She should like to wrap up this paper by seeking the support of Edge (2011) as she tries to expound the last comment:

“None of us wants to get stuck in the riverside mud, or to burn up over the ocean, but the mutually-shaping interactions between our roots and our wings, our self knowledge and our environmental knowledge, as we bring them to our awareness and the commit ourselves to future action based on that combined awareness that constitutes our development, and that constitutes our life.”

The inquirer hopes that in future, as much as we try to promote the English knowledge of our students, we do our best to improve self critical awareness among teachers and learners so that it would shed light onto our path to understand ourselves and the world around us as well.

Glossary

*Cultural awareness: Exploring into new worlds, excavating similarities and discrepancies between different cultures and having a critical reflective mind “that can tell the difference between real and unreal, between information and disinformation, between ideas and ideologies. Only such a critical mind can help the individual develop the knowledge, skill, and disposition necessary to deal with the challenges of contemporary realities.” (Kumaravadivelu (2008, p.164).

**Agglocalization: Unlike acculturation that is a one-way process of adjustments and adaptations of minority group, agglocalization entails a two-way process of a deliberate, cognizant journey towards globalization by adopting both localized and globalized standards selectively and consciously.

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