From "local "FL classroom communication to intercultural communication

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Abstract

Le présent article est centré sur le développement d'un aspect de la compétence de communication notamment la dimension interculturelle dans la communication orale en langue cible. Il essaye de souligner l'impact de la classe de langue étrangère comme environnement de communication limité et limitant sur les compétences culturelles des étudiants. Le but de ce travail est de faire un lien entre les difficultés ainsi que les des apprenants et de ce qui se passe ou plutôt ce qui ne ce passe pas dans leurs classes. Il est clair que si nous souhaitons de réels échanges étudiant/étudiant et étudiant/enseignant; il est nécessaire de réviser nos pratiques et de réexaminer les « ingrédients » que nous favorisons dans nos classes de communication orale.

Efficient skill of communication has become a passport to success during these last decades. People are judged according to how well they master the skills of communication in various aspects of their lives: professional, social, and private. Many competencies are measured according to our ability to express ourselves in a clear and convincing and why not elegant way.

The evolutionary character of language education suggests that in order to offer effective teaching, university language departments need to revise their programmes and methodology, and adapt them to current related research. Thus evolution in the field of foreign language education cannot take place in a vacuum. It has to be based on an understanding of basic issues as the nature of language knowledge, culture and communication and the impact of context on the outcome of foreign language pedagogy.

The cultural dimension in oral communication

Two aspects of communication namely language and culture are indissociable. In this respect, any attempt to understand how oral communication should be taught and/or evaluated without taking into account the ethnological dimension of the target language is restricted. A conventional view of communication widely adopted by most applied linguists and foreign language teachers consists of the following well-known scheme:
SENDER → MESSAGE → RECIEVER.

Such traditional model proposes a schematization that is of little use and help to applied linguists and language teaching methodology in the sense that it does not reveal nor reflect the complex mechanism of spontaneous interaction.

Before stressing the relationship between FLT and culture, it may be interesting to examine first the concept of culture and attempt to explain the sense in which this paper uses it. "Culture" has at its origin the Latin word "cultura" derived from "colere" which means to build on, to cultivate. Culture has been and is still being defined on different grounds. The fact that this concept has been defined extensively and in various and

context of the classroom, the individual is one of a group, a member of the class, and the activities which are to set the process in train are determined by the teacher. In any language classroom there seems to be a specific general pattern of teaching/learning: some tasks, types of interaction, activities, and attitudes appear to be more common and customary than others. It is these that are believed to affect the outcome of a classroom experience.

In this respect, students' lack of cultural awareness and their frequent inappropriate communication exchanges, reactions are due to their limited exposure to the target culture. Very little reference is made to the culture of the language they are learning as well as the people who use it. This may be due to two main reasons:

1- Some teachers do not give the culture of the target language enough importance, and stress the linguistic aspect instead.

2- Some teachers believe that since their students are learning the TL in a typically foreign language situation, they have very little chance to engage in NS/NNS type of interaction and that consequently, they do not need to communicate as native speakers do.

3- Many teachers have themselves a limited awarness and familiarity wth the culture of the language they are teaching. Many teachers have never come into contact with a native speaker of English and so never experienced a NS/NNS interaction and many have never travelled to a native speaking coutry to get in contact with its culture and way of life of its poeples.

Assessment of various aspects of oral communication

Designing communication tasks for students ought to be done in accordance with their needs. Tasks should promote opportunities for spontaneous fluent language use whereby learners' primary preoccupation is meaning. In order for tasks to be motivating and challenging some material should accompany their design. Today Technological Instruments of Communication (TIC) are varied and used in most parts of the world. Internet has allowed the realisation of so many complex communication operations. Foreign language methodology ought to take advantage of sush advances in technology and invite learners not only to become familiar with them, but also use them as communication means in and out of the classroom in order to gradually develop further skills in the target language and its cultural norms of communication.

Besides, if the oral class is to reflect inter-cultural communication what aspects of this skill should be evaluated? What should teachers look at and/or listen to when the difficult task of evaluation is required? Teachers often find it difficult to test their learners' oral production capacities as there are no reliable objective tests so far. Thus, some use the reading of texts and dialogues as a written support to oral testing while others make individual interviews or do their assessment through 'exposés'. Ther is no doubt, however, that such techniques give teachers little 'information' on how well learners can use the TL in true and natural communication.

The assessment of oral communication with its various facets (cultural awareness, appropriate and correct language use, naturalness, fluency, etc.) may be done individually or by assessing pairs or even small groups of learners at the same time. A first step towards designing adequate assessment of fluency in oral communication may be to identify the 'ingredients' or features of this skill and set them in an analytical scheme. Assessing students' performance is made easier and more dependable when/ if the assessor has a detailed account of what he/she will assess, and in this respect he/she will need to be acquainted with the mechanisms as well as norms of target oral communication.

Research perspectives

First a purely theoretical research needs to be undertaken to examine the various concepts (communication, cultural awareness, and assessment) related to the subject. Besides, in order to find out the way oral communication and culture are taught as well as assessed; an emperical research will be needed. Thus teachers and learners ought to be interviewed, recorded; they will be requested to answer questionnaires. Oral classes will be observed, recorded and then transcribed. It is on the basis of these transciptions that the analysis will be made and the final discussions and conclusions may be drawn.

Issues related to the process of assessing interaction include concepts such as rating scores, assigning evaluatiopn tasks, rating checklists, validity and reliability of assessment techniques and procedures.Furthermore, future research may contribute to answer the question that may be asked at this level: should teachers help foreign language learners use a fluent inter-communication with its local characteristics and specificities or should they try to make them develop a near-native skill of communication knowing that such learners are learning this TL in a foreign language environment in which they are most likely to be engaged in NNS/NNS than in NS/NNS interaction?

What is at stake today, is an attempt to revise the way oral communication is "taught" in most English departments (as is the case in Djilali Liabes University) together with an adaptation of a more targeted methodology which is most likely to help us (both students and teachers) progress towards more genuine classroom communication exchanges. Changes need to take place in our classes: new attitudes, ways of doing things and simply a revised way of looking at our responsibility as influential partners in this learning/teaching experience are highly desired.

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