

INTEGRATING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE TEACHING: THE APPLICATION OF READING NOVEL

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Abstract

As English becomes the global lingua Franca, the correlation between the English language and particular culture is problematic. Consequently, English Foreign Language (EFL) learners should have intercultural competence while improving their linguistic competence. Moreover, intercultural communication is more complex than communication between persons of the same culture. Thus, the practitioners of English language teaching need to know how to integrate the knowledge of intercultural communication in English language classes. This paper emphasizes the strategy of integrating the language learners' intercultural communication competence in English literature teaching, especially in reading novel. Through reading novel, students are exposed to more cultural varieties and understand the culture concepts. The strategy mostly encompasses activating learners' cultural awareness, considering context, and understanding obstacles in English reading comprehension from the perspective of cross-culture, and designing classroom tasks for the intercultural competence. By employing these, it is hoped that learners can improve their intercultural communicative competence during reading English literature.

Keywords: *intercultural communication, novel reading, cultural awareness*

INTRODUCTION

The changing global environment brings the increasing cultural diversity in many contexts. Thus, there has been a growing recognition for the need for an intercultural competence in English teaching. English teaching has entered the era of cross-cultural communication. In traditional perspective, English Language Teaching (ELT) emphasizes on the linguistic competence and trains the learners to master the phonology, lexis, and syntax. However, the contemporary view shifts the emphasis to the ability to use the target language for communication successfully in the diverse sociocultural settings. Achieving a good comprehension on sociocultural setting for the learners is very important and challenging since the communication situation is in constant change. It is not sufficient for the learners to merely understand a certain native-speaker community's sociocultural norms, but it should be accompanied by an extensive comprehension of various cultural contexts (Baker, 2012). The knowledge about culture certainly helps intercultural communication, but culture knowledge learning is not equal to cultivating intercultural communication competence.

Baker (2012:64) recognizes a strain between standard forms of communicative practice and the dynamics of communicative practice of a target language. This indicates the significance of intercultural communicative competence, and the ability to adopt appropriate communicative strategies based on the sociocultural setting.

Generally, teacher uses oral communication skill as a vehicle to train the learners' cross-cultural communicative competence. However, the aim of cross-cultural communication is not only for effective communication, but also for a proportional understanding of their culture. Communication encompasses oral speech and reading comprehension. Reading is not a one-way and passively accepting information process. It is a highly active and creative behavior. It involves the process of readers screening, classifying, and interpreting knowledge according to what they have got. It is the interaction between the reader and the text. Reading skill is the comprehensive expression of vocabulary, language structure, cultural background knowledge, and reading speed. In the process of reading comprehension, readers have to use their cultural background to comprehend effectively the content of the article. Thus, cross-cultural communication can be found in English reading when the readers begin to read.

It is no doubt that reading a novel can expose the learners to a large amount of language inputs and push them to improve their reading comprehension. Reading a novel does not only contribute linguistically for the learners, but also benefit culturally. The learners can understand the culture concepts through drawing on examples from the novel. Moreover, novels also provide the authentic language texts which are loaded with real language and provide the learners with the chance to get in touch with the people, traditions, norms, taboos, and other distinctive cultural products of a certain product (Byram, 1997).

This paper proposes the idea on strategy of integrating intercultural communication competence through reading novel. The strategy contains three main stages: understanding context, understanding obstacles in English reading comprehension from the perspective of cross-culture, and designing classroom tasks for the intercultural competence. By employing these, it is hoped that learners can improve their intercultural communicative competence during reading English literature.

DISCUSSION

The Concept of Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is a communication which occurs between people from different national cultures (Gudykunst, 2002:179). It is a transactional and symbolic process involving the attribution of meaning between people from different culture (Novinger, 2001). Intercultural communication comes primarily out of an interpersonal orientation and addresses the mutual negotiation of social reality among participants. Intercultural communication refers to the verbal and nonverbal interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds. This is used sometimes to describe a single person trying to interact in a foreign environment but more often, it is a two-way street, where people from both cultures try to improve their communication.

Nowadays, intercultural communication comes out of a mass media and political orientation; it addresses information flow between and among nations and other large groups of people. While these areas are constantly in the news and represent the more visible issues confronting us, it is needed to recognize that these concerns subsume the more personal aspects of interpersonal communications (Hill, 2009).

The context of intercultural communication varies depending on the participants in conversation, their relationships and their membership in particular cultural groups. Intercultural communication therefore focuses on cultural identity—the self-concepts of individuals as having certain cultural traits (e.g., a set of beliefs about the world, values, and thought patterns) that characterize the members of a national culture vis-a-vis members of other national cultures. It is assumed that participants in intercultural communication view the similarities and differences they see in one another are attributed to their membership in their national culture. Thus, people simultaneously participate in many groups based not only on our nationality, but also gender, age, profession, family background and so forth. People should not, therefore, presuppose that it is always cultural identity derived from membership in a national culture that predominates in intercultural communication, because the enactment of a particular identity by participants in communication depends on their specific relationships in the situation. It could be their personal identity characterized by individual traits they share or social identity derived from their membership in the same profession that can guide their interaction in a given situation (Janik, Z, 2014).

In order to develop their communicative competence, English language learners need to recognize the rich and diversified context to intercultural communication. Moreover, since the process of communication is the process of complete interaction, the learners must have awareness that it's not an easy thing to fully communicate because of different histories, cultures, social habits in different peoples (Samovar, 2001).

The Concept of Intercultural Communication Competence

The ultimate terminal of intercultural communication competence is the preparation of learners to interact appropriately and effectively with those from other cultural backgrounds. Consequently, culture is often considered as the main concept in intercultural communication. Nieto (1999:48) proposes definition of culture as the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people. An additional complicated dimension of intercultural communication competence relates to the goal of those who are preparing individuals for intercultural relationships as numerous contexts and multiple models of intercultural competence exist that include international business, study-abroad, international schools, medical careers, living abroad, and education.

Intercultural communication competence occurs when people of different cultural background interact, but this definition seems simplistic and redundant. To understand properly the intercultural communication, it is necessary to describe four building blocks of intercultural communication, which are: culture, communication, context, and power (Martin and Thomas, 2008:28). Culture can be viewed as learned patterns of perception, values, and behaviors, shared by a

group of people that is also dynamic and heterogeneous. Culture is communication and communication is culture (Novinger, 2001:14).

Finally, intercultural communication competence is needed as a result of technological imperative. Technology has increased the frequency with which many people encounter multilingual situations and so must decide which language will be used and how to create a cross-cultural understanding with the target language speakers.

In a living and dynamic circle, culture governs communication and communication creates, reinforces, and re-creates culture. Culture also provides identity for humans. It is the total communication frame-work for words, actions, body language, emblems (gestures), intonation, facial expressions, for the way one handles time, space, and materials, and for the way one works, makes love, plays, and so on. All these things become complete communication systems. Communication is a symbolic process whereby meaning is shared and negotiated. In addition, communication is dynamic, may be unintentional, and is receiver-oriented (Martin and Thomas, 2008:58). The relationship between culture and communication is complex since culture influences communication and communication reinforces culture, and communication is a way of resisting the dominant culture. The context- the physical and social setting in which communication occurs or the larger political, societal, and historical environment-affects that communication. Then, power plays an enormous role in intercultural communication interactions. Power relationships are determined mostly by social institutions and roles which influence communication.

Byram (1997) describes someone who gains skills in intercultural communicative competence as an individual who is successful in building relationships while speaking the foreign language of the other participants; negotiating how to effectively communicate so that both individuals' communicative needs are addressed; mediating conversations between those of diverse cultural backgrounds; and continuing to acquire communicative skills in foreign languages not yet studied. This final characteristic stresses that when an effective intercultural communicator learns to interact with those from specific culture, a foundation of language and culture learning has been built, and the individual is more likely to continue to gather linguistic information from other cultures in order to broaden his/her spectrum of intercultural encounters.

In the context of English language teaching, the learners are guided through the process of acquiring competencies in attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to intercultural competence while using English as a foreign language. The English teachers must lead learners through activities in which attitudes about the other cultures with the intent of becoming more willing to seek out and engage with otherness in order to ultimately experience relationships of reciprocity (Byram, 1997). As learners continue to engage in analysis of other cultures, certain knowledge must be acquired.

It is imperative that English language teachers allow time to explore the national identity of the home culture and the target culture in relation to history, geography, and social institutions. Once learners have taken time to discover the similarities and differences between their culture and that of the target culture, the teacher must craft activities that will prepare learners to build relationships with

people of diverse backgrounds and languages (Byram, 1997). Then, English language learners must be facilitated the time and the space to develop skills in interpreting and relating the meaning among different cultures. When learners begin to identify ethnocentric perspectives and misunderstandings related to cross-cultural situations, they become able to understand and then explain the origins of conflict and mediate situations appropriately in order to avoid misinterpretations (Byram, 1997).

Finally, skills in the discovery and interaction allow intercultural speakers to identify similarities and differences between home cultures and foreign cultures resulting in successful communication and the establishment of meaningful relationship (Byram, 1997). A successful intercultural speaker seeks out opportunities to meet individuals from diverse cultures in order to share information through communication in a foreign language.

Moreover, it is a must for English teachers to reconsider methods for teaching language and culture in the classroom if the goal is to create true speakers who have true intercultural competence in using English. Thus, the focus of teaching must shift from preparing learners to communicate accurately in order to survive a foreign culture to communicate openly in order to construct relationships so that they can thrive in a foreign culture. When the teaching of intercultural communicative competence includes models of reciprocal relationships in which learners play the role of a “social actor”, learners experience the mutual discovery of another language and culture, and language classrooms become places where learners and teachers consider questions of values and morals.

Dimensions of Intercultural Communication Competence

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has defined by many researchers in a variety of ways. It has been investigated under different labels, such as cross-cultural adjustment, intercultural understanding, intercultural effectiveness, cross-cultural awareness. According to Chen (2010) that intercultural communication competence is defined as the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors to elicit a desired response in a specific environment.

ICC sets the path towards effective intercultural communication by emphasizing the concept of otherness and appreciation of differences: the ability to interact with others, to accept other perspectives and perceptions of the world, to mediate between different perspectives should help us recognize and understand others and their meanings (Byram & Fleming, 1998:5). Recognition of other realities, rather than the assumption that people are all the same, coupled with knowledge of multiple cultures and identities will enhance each person's capacity to discover and relate to new people from other context (Byram & Fleming, 1998:12).

By examining the many dimensions of intercultural communication competence proposed by intercultural communicational scholars, it is found that most of the dimensions more or less overlap. Essentially, The dimensions of intercultural communication competence can be defined as four categories: (a) Personal Attributes, (b) Communication Skills, (c) Psychological Adaptation, and (d) Cultural Awareness. Comparing dimensions of

communication competence with those of intercultural communication competence, it can be seen that Personal Attributes indicate the ability to be relaxed in social interaction and the ability to self-disclosure or be open with others; communication skills mean the ability to send and receive messages and the ability to demonstrate social skills.

Cultural Awareness implies the understanding of environmental varieties. Psychological Adaptation focuses on the ability to handle problems such as frustration, stress, alienation and ambiguity which are caused by cultural differences. Scholars have consistently suggested that only through intercultural communication competence can people from different cultures effectively communicate with each other (Chen, 2010). This definition shows that competent persons must not only know how to interact effectively and appropriately with people and environment, but also know how to fulfill their own communication goals by respecting and affirming the multi-level cultural identities (Chen, 2010).

Integrating Communication Competence in Reading Novel

Some stages can be considered in integrating intercultural communication in teaching oral communication skill: understanding the context, understanding obstacles in English reading comprehension from the perspective of cross-culture, and designing tasks for intercultural communication.

Understanding the Context

Context often plays a significant role in determining how people communicate, and the same context may call for different behavior in different culture. Context may consist of the physical, social, political, and historical structures in which the communication occurs (Martin and Thomas, 2008:47). Communication styles that relatively focus more on words to communicate and less on behavior-the context in which the words are used-are called as *low-context*. On the contrary, *high-context* cultures rely relatively more on nonverbal context or behaviors than they rely on abstracts, verbal symbols of meaning.

Novinger (200:6-7) explains that a high-context message is one in which more of the information is contained in the physical context or internalized in the person receiving it, and less in the coded, explicit, transmitted verbal part of the message. A low-context communication is just the opposite in which it focuses on vesting more of the information in the explicit verbal code. Thus, a low-context person consciously focuses on words to communicate, but a high-context person is acculturated from birth to send and receive a large proportion of message through behavioral context, both consciously and unconsciously. When this high-context person receives a verbal message from a low-context person, misunderstanding is necessarily created when the high-context person erroneously attributes meaning to nonverbal context when such meaning is not intended. This same high-context person will then, in turn, communicate much by context along with a verbal message. The low-context person may not apprehend, much less understand, much of the contextual nonverbal message that is being expressed. The low context person relies primarily on words themselves for meaning when, in fact, the context probably contains the real message.

The distinction between high- and low-context cultures means that context is meaningless in low-context cultures. It means that culture dictates a large

variation in degree of importance of the context to communicate (Novinger, 2001).

The Obstacles in English Reading Comprehension from the Perspective of Cross-Culture

The obstacles in reading English text from the perspective of cross-culture can be seen in three levels: the vocabulary level, the idiom level, and sentence and discourse structure level. It is easy to improve the learners' ability in reading comprehension if they can understand relevant cultural background of the vocabulary, phrases, sentences, and discourse while using reading skills.

As the foundation of language structure and the main pillar of the language system, vocabulary must be the most prominent and reflection of the cultural distinctiveness widely. The barriers in vocabulary level are mainly found in denotation and connotation. Denotation refers to direct meaning which is associated to the world objectively. Each culture has words which describe its unique local conditions and customs. Connotation of words reflects the social cultural psychology, attitudes, and emotional color. The same words may contain different cultural implications in different cultures.

The English language has idioms like any other highly developed tongue. Idioms consist of set phrases and short sentences, which are specific to the language in question and steeped in the national and regional cultural and ideas, thus being colorful, forcible and thought-provoking. Briefly, idioms are expressions which are not readily understandable from their literal meanings of individual constituents. Some idioms may contain several means which depend on the context. Thus, the learners should understand correctly the meaning for that they all contain the variation of cultural information with distinct geographical and ethnic color.

Good control in practicing English sentence and discourse structure is important in promoting the learners' reading speed. For instance, Chinese emphasizes comprehensive thinking while the Western people concentrate on analysis. Chinese express themselves through euphemistic style while the Western people are more direct. Chinese verb has only one prototype form, and does not change with person, tense, and number, but verb forms in English include infinitive, participle structure, and etc.

Designing Task for Intercultural Communication Competence

There are certain components that can be modified in designing task for intercultural communication competence in the classroom. The components encompass defining the objective, providing input, proving learning activities, defining learner's role, defining teacher's role, and providing setting. The objective refers to the pedagogical purpose of the task.

There are some specific goals which might be used for intercultural tasks: investigating how everyday conversation maintains the solidarity of social groups; investigating how the individual's status in a group is negotiated through casual conversation; observing the different roles played by men and women in conversation in the target culture. Input refers to the stimulus provided by the teacher for the learning to occur. The input may be a written or spoken text for discussion, or a visual image for interpretation and evaluation, or media text for

analysis (Corbet, 2003:42). In the context of reading novel, the input is the text of novel. The teacher can guide the learners to explore the text of novel for intercultural communication competence.

The learning activities contain full range of communicative activities which are used to serve the objective of an intercultural task. Learners may collect and share information through class presentation or group work. They may discuss their different observation and findings. After observing cultural behaviors, they may be asked to reconstruct that behavior in role plays or simulations.

The learner's role is regulated according to the kinds of learner's responsibility in the activity of collection, organization, evaluation, reporting, and reconstructing of materials exemplifying cultural behavior. In the early stages of a course, the learners are needed a support for the activities. In this case, the teacher needs to provide guidelines, models if needed, and lead the learners through speaking task. Later, it is hoped that learners have good self-confidence and active contribution to the construction and implementation of intercultural tasks.

The teacher's role relates to how the teacher provide materials for the task, to suggest and show how they may be used to increase intercultural competence, to provide models of evaluation, and to suggest language that might be used to explore or reconstruct cultural behavior. Intercultural tasks also allow for a range of setting: from individual work, pair work, and group work to whole-class activities.

CONCLUSION

Culture and literary text, especially a novel is symbiotic and blended. A novel can be used as a vehicle to inspire the learners' cross-cultural awareness, arouse the enthusiasm of learners in learning culture, and improve the learners' humanistic quality and English intercultural communication competence. Thus, it is important to integrate intercultural communication competencies in the activity of teaching and learning English literature for preparing learners becoming success in a globally interconnected world. When intercultural communication competence is an integral part of literature classroom, learners have knowledge and experience on how to use the target language to create relationship and understanding with members of other cultures.

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