

ESP Teaching in the Light of globalization: A Cross-Cultural Proposal

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Abstract:

Taking into account that learning any language -be it in the inner or outer centers- is closely bound to learn about its social, political and cultural contexts, the intercultural awareness to language teaching/ learning is, consequently, believed to be one among the other paradigms required to display a kind of intercultural communication among members of the same discourse community. It becomes necessary, thus, if not compulsory, for the EFL as well as ESP teachers to adopt or adapt a range of intercultural activities so that to promote the learners' cross-cultural understanding enabling them at the same time to have a global access to knowledge.

This paper is in fact an attempt at shedding some fresh lights on the underlying assumption of incorporating the intercultural aspect in EFL teaching in general and ESP in particular. This latter, however, requires a basic understanding of the role of the ESP teacher in designing an innovative framework based fundamentally on the new perspective and strategies for teaching the intercultural sensitivity and consequently training their Intercultural Communicative Competence. In this vein, the main problematic would be as follows *how one - as an ESP teacher- may manage an intercultural approach with our ESP learners' requirements?*

Key-words:

ESP Teaching; Intercultural Communication; Intercultural Competence; Strategies.

Our global era is characterized by the use of English as a language of high-tech environment and international work-place, thus, whatever language of instruction; learners, all over the world, are getting engaged in the field of science, technology and business that respectively corresponds their academic or professional purposes.

There is a general consensus among educationalists (FERNANDEZ, 2008; BASTERKMAN (2006), that in all the local, national and worldwide environments, the

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tendency towards the process of globalization is nowadays calling for new requirements as well as an urgent needs on the nature of interactions taking place between both native and foreign language speakers, and, consequently, the kinds of skills desired to efficiently getting involved in gradually more intricate and diverse exchanges.

Considering the fact learning a language does not occur in vacuum but rather used to carry out meanings and facts in a specific context. In this sense, it should be clearly stated that, in all ways, the ESP learners are involved in meaningful interactions between the members the same discourse community, depending on their field of interests; the cases in point are those occurring between the writers and the readers when reading up-date materials, the speakers and the listeners when engaging in vocal conversation. However, it is to be mentioned at this point that the cultural dimension is increasingly seen to play a critical role for successful communication to take place.

Additionally, it has been widely recognized among specialists that the reason for the most poor communication ability in some ESP occupational contexts which resulted in the loss of business is, first and foremost, closely linked to the insufficient of cross-cultural understanding on the part of the customers (CiLT 2005).

As a result, a new trend in education has been emerged to become nowadays as a significant challenge for our English language teaching in general, attempting fundamentally at filling the existing gap between the needs of the learning and target situations. Several speculations thus have been made on mapping the cultural dimension in language instruction, making use of an intercultural approach. In this sense, ALFRED *et al* (2002:351) point out:

in any society which expects its education system to prepare people for living in an internationalised culture and globalised economy, and also for the interaction between people of different cultures within and across national boundaries, the process of tertiary socialisation and the acquisition of intercultural competence are clearly desirable.

The rationale behind incorporating an 'intercultural dimension' in ELT is to develop the learners as intercultural speakers as well as to enable them to use language in its social and cultural contexts. In other words, the focus should be made not only on the acquisition of the

grammatical competence but rather preparing them to interact in discourse (written and spoken language) making use of appropriate and correct ways.

It has been widely asserted by educationalists (BYRAM *et al*, 2002; NEITO, 2010) that this activity is believed to be a reflective process; involves not only imparting learners with knowledge about the target culture but rather providing them with suitable tools to engage with it. In this stratum, the language teacher has to “... **rethink and confront their beliefs and biases**” (BODYCOTT *et al*, 2000:87), focusing, on the other stand point, on the *dynamic view of culture*.

This latter, accordingly, calls for a new responsibility on the part of the English language teachers, notably the *cultural identifications*, however, it is to be stated that this it is often seen as a multifaceted process and a challenging task, the reason behind this is that “**learning a culture that ...is an exceedingly difficult task, one accomplished only through direct, sustained, and profound involvement with it**” NIETO, (2010:144).

In this layer of analysis, achieving an intercultural competence is a process that should be subjected to skilful and intentional training by which ESP practioners might be able to confront the traditional programs for the sake of coping for the learners’ needs and requirements of the new profession as well as attaining a well-known better expertise. Conversely, in the case of Algeria, few interests have been devoted towards intercultural training. This field of enquiry, in our higher universities and institution, is still in its infancy and training efforts are still non-existent, or basically restricted to some occasions.

In this stratum, our government who appears to be entirely aware of the vital function for achieving a cross-cultural understanding and who attempts to establish one-world educational setting through the implementation of the LMD system; which is correspondingly devised to fully equip students as well as teachers to be better managed with the multiple-dimensional facets of the process of globalisation. However, in our ESP instructional settings, an “existing-gap” is constantly likely to figure when it is a concern of training which should be incorporated for our ESP tuition.

Taking into consideration that training the learners’ intercultural competence (henceforth IC) is often considered as an on-going process, several paradigms, accordingly, are to be

interplayed in the training sessions; these may include knowledge, attitudes and skills as summarized in the following diagram:

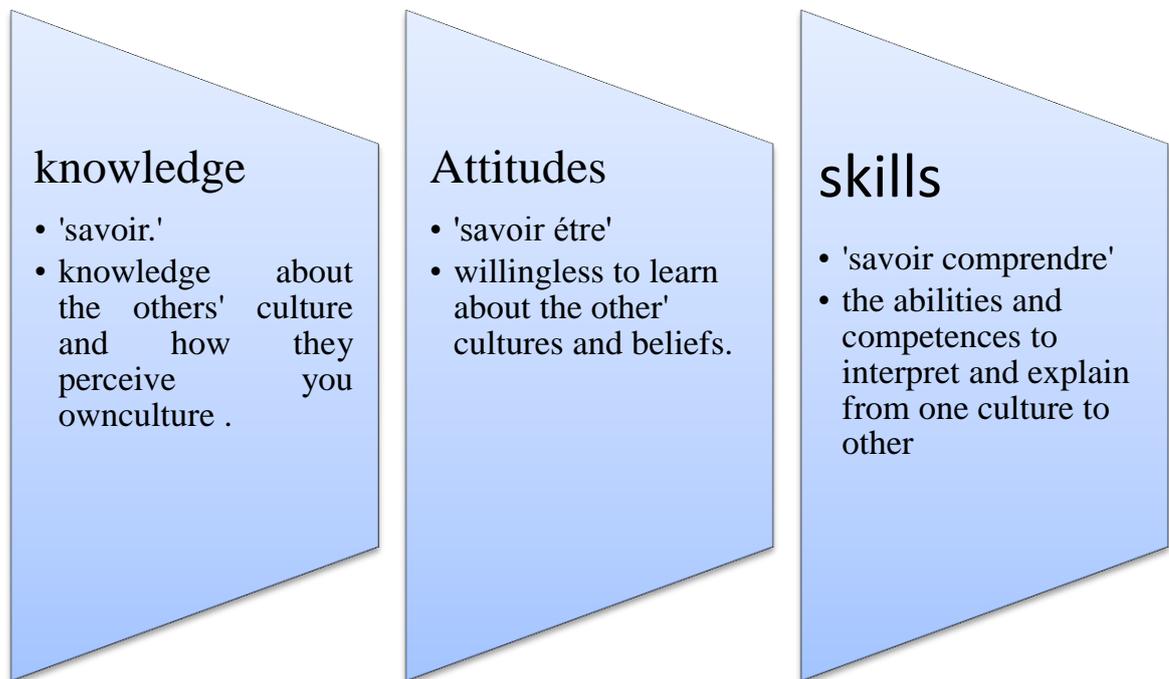


Figure 1. Aspects of Intercultural Competence adapted from BYRAM *et al*, 2002

As far as the first aspect is concerned, it is about possessing knowledge with particular reference to the speakers' social group that is involved in the cross-cultural communication. The attitude, conversely, is conceived to be about the willingness and self-motivation to know about culture of other speech communities. Skills, on the other hand, is defined as the ability to *compare, interpret and relate*. This latter is known under the label '*le savoir comprendre*' (BYRAM *et al*, 2002), it is by definition *the 'ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own'*. (BYRAM *et al*, 2002:13)

In addition to this, for both intensive and extensive educational arrangement, satisfactory tactics have to be planned and assigned in the ESP language teaching. The motive behind this is to help ESP learners bridging the 'missing-link' between the target and the learning environments, this may include, according to specialists, the integration of efficient strategies. Activities for acquiring intercultural competence may involve cross-cultural guidance through the implementation of different strategies such as those supported in the following diagram:

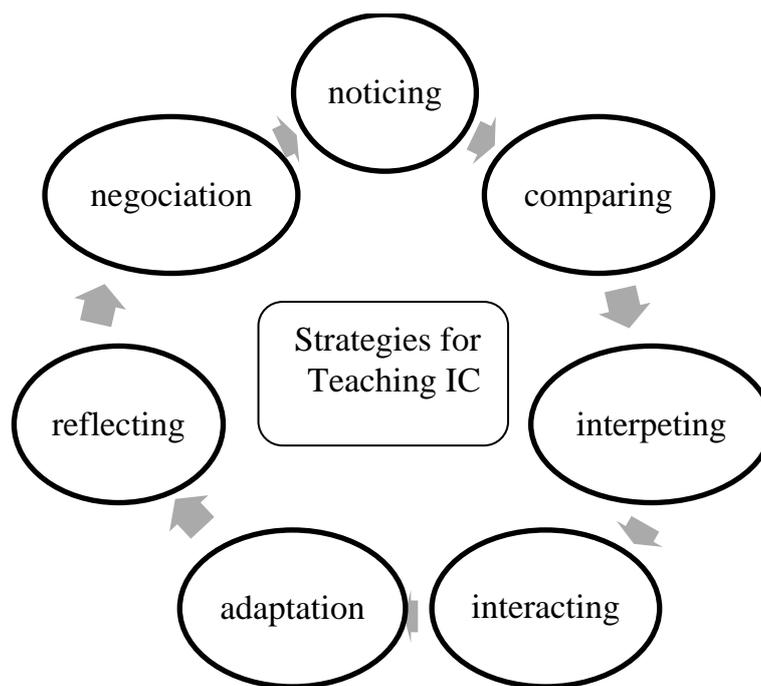


Diagram 2: Strategies for Teaching IC.

Noticing and *Comparing* are believed to be strategies undertaken by the trainer by which they are required to notice the culture of the foreign language then compared it after that with his own culture. Additionally, the ESP teacher has to present realistic knowledge as far as the life-styles of the target culture. The rationale behind this is to promote *comparative analysis* with their own culture (BYRAM et al, 2002).

Interpreting and *integrating* refer to a set of strategies by which learners are able to interpret a given discourse from a foreign culture, to elucidate it and linked it to documents from one’s own. In this line of thought, BYRAN et al, (2002:13) define it as “... *finding out new knowledge and integrating it with what they already have*”

Adaptation is generally defined as to purposely transfer into a different cultural framework of reference as a result adjusting our behaviors with response to the norms of another culture BENNETT (1998).

Negotiation is also considered as a powerful tool in ESP occupational situation enabling speakers to engage in cross-cultural communication. In this respect, BERTHOIN *et al* (2003: 16) define it as “...*an effective strategy of action in an intercultural interaction by asking*

themselves and each other aware of their culturally-shaped interpretations and responses to a given situation and expanding their repertoire appropriately”

However, it is to be considered that all the above strategies are interwoven and that there is no clear cut of when one strategy begins and the other stops as in most cases they are applied unconsciously. The adoption and/ or adaptation of these strategies in the ESP courses might be used through the application of a ‘*comparative analysis*’. This latter is supposed to be suitable in this context where they are required to compare the well-known theme with one of an unfamiliar situation i.e., the target language, in addition to this, they should be trained in a way to develop, at the same time, a self-awareness of their own culture so that to be seen from other people's standpoints. This has been pointed up by Jones (1998:21) in the following activity:

*Think of a traditional dish served in your country. Write a list of ingredients and say how it is served?

Designing ESP courses for tourism, for instance, can be illustrated in the following assignment when the learners are asked to:

* Get acquainted with a Japanese style and compare it with your own. (Dupicka *et al*, 2002).

To Sum up, it is to be stated that adapting an intercultural approach to ESP teaching might be of great valuable if the ESP practitioner is able to manage the teaching materials to his learners’ needs and requirements by selecting subject-specific themes, designing a series of language activities to impart them with the needed linguistic knowledge, enhancing, at the same time, their intercultural competence through analyzing texts and comparing them to their own culture.

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