

TEACHING ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

The existence of English as an international language has been approved by (and not only) the linguistic and applied linguists (e.g., Bolton 2005; Jenkins 2000; Kachru 1985; McKay, 2002; Seidlhofer, 2005; Smith 1976, 1978, 1981; Sharifian 2009) and the change from understanding English as a foreign language into English as an international language could be considered as the “paradigm shift” (Kuhn, 1970). Consequently, this shift implies the parallels in changes in teaching English as a foreign language into EIL teaching and cultural aspects of the international communication are considered as the most challenging issue in language teaching recognizing the possible positive influence of the increased cultural awareness of EIL users on the self-perceived communication competence with the possible positive impact on the communication competence of EIL users. In spite of the fact that English teachers have only very limited access to consisted language pedagogy procedures related to the intercultural aspects of communication in EIL, the existence of this phenomenon remains a challenge in teaching EIL.

Key words: English as an international language (EIL), EIL teaching, cultural aspects in language teaching, communication competence, self-perceived communications competence

Abstrakt

Existencia angličtiny ako medzinárodného jazyka bola priznaná (nielen) jazykovými a aplikovanými lingvistami (napríklad Bolton 2005; Jenkins 2000; Kachru 1985; McKay, 2002; Seidlhofer, 2005; Smith 1976, 1978, 1981; Sharifian 2009) a zmena chápania angličtiny ako cudzieho jazyka na angličtinu ako medzinárodný jazyk by sa mohla považovať za "zmenu paradigmy" (Kuhn, 1970). Táto zmena predznamenáva isté paralely aj v zmenách vo výučbe angličtiny ako cudzieho jazyka na vyučovanie angličtiny ako medzinárodného jazyka. V rámci tejto témy vyvstáva téma kultúrnych aspektov medzinárodnej komunikácie ako naliehavej otázky v jazykovej výučbe, pričom zvýšenie kultúrneho povedomia užívateľa angličtiny ako medzinárodného jazyka môže viesť k zlepšeniu vlastnej komunikačnej kompetencie vnímanej samotným užívateľom jazyka, čo následne môže pozitívne ovplyvniť reálnu komunikačnú kompetenciu používateľov angličtiny ako medzinárodného jazyka. Napriek faktu, že učitelia angličtiny ako medzinárodného jazyka majú iba veľmi obmedzený prístup ku konzistentným didaktickým postupom v rámci interkultúrnych aspektov komunikácie v angličtine ako medzinárodnom jazyku, existencia tohto javu ostáva výzvou vo vyučovaní angličtiny ako medzinárodného jazyka.

Kľúčové slová: angličtina ako medzinárodný jazyk, vyučovanie angličtiny ako medzinárodného jazyka, kultúrne aspekty vo vyučovaní jazykov, vlastná komunikačnej kompetencie vnímanej samotným užívateľom jazyka

1 The issues related to teaching English as an international language

The shift from teaching English as a foreign language into teaching English as an international language is a widely-discussed topic, especially from the point of view of language pedagogy. The inconsistency within the terminology and definitions related to the EIL has the impact on the related teaching implications discussed by the English language educators and the similar aspects are discussed within EIL teaching approaches.

In spite of the fact that the existence of EIL has been confirmed by the researchers and the necessity of the changes related to EIL teaching has been recognized, the consistent teaching procedures recommended for EIL teaching, as approved within language pedagogy, has not been generally agreed yet. Accordingly, English teachers have a very limited access to participate in language trainings providing the required EIL language teaching training. In spite of the mentioned limitations in language pedagogy related to EIL teaching, the challenging issues related to EIL teaching should be recognized since “no one can avoid being part of the current linguistic change or variation, and avoid bathing in the sea of linguistic variety” (Crystal, 1997).

Realizing the language varieties reflecting the diversity in the EIL users’ characteristics and respecting the variety communication purposes of the English language, there are differences in opinions about the model in EIL teaching, considering if a ‘monomodel’ (Kachru, 1996) or ‘a native-speaker’ model (Kirkpatrick, 2006) should be adopted to teaching the English language nowadays. The English language for a global communication can be no longer understand as homogeneous, considering its variety in accents, vocabulary and grammars. Consequently, any possible teachers’ efforts to focus on “native-like” accents of their students seem to be redundant since the acquisition of native like accent is no longer the ultimate objective of the majority of the learners (Jenkins, 2000). Accordingly, it is important for the English language teachers to realize within the English teaching objectives that native or native-like grammar, lexis, and phonology will not automatically result into appropriate communication and secondly, ways of speaking and discourse patterns of all fluent speakers of English are not the same (Smith, 1983).

Related to the curriculum of the English language courses, it should be reconsidered from the point of view of EIL and the aim to understand the wide variety of accents of non-native speakers should be respected as nowadays, non-native speakers speak more frequently with non-native speakers than native speakers. Realizing the discrepancies noticed in the definitions of a “native speaker”, the native speaker is understood within EIL teaching as a member of the “inner circle” countries (Kachru, 1996). Related to the interactions between native and non-native speakers, Smith and Rafiqzad (1979) noticed that native speakers admit the problems with understanding non-native speakers. Smith (1983) also points out that “native English speakers should study English as an international language if they plan to interact in English with non-natives or with other native speakers who use a different national variety”, emphasizing the fact that “English is the language most frequently used in international trade, diplomacy and tourism and that it is studied by more people than any other language” (Smith, 1983). Referring to the problems with understanding the wide varieties of non-native speakers’ accent of the English

language, Smith and Bisazza (1982) recommend for English speakers, including native speakers, the exposure to both native and non-native varieties in order to improve their understanding in communication.

Besides the mentioned issues related to the shift in the English language teaching, which have to be realized within the language pedagogy, the cultural aspect of the international communication is considered as the most challenging issue in language teaching within the effective communication in EIL. From the point of view of the specific features of EIL respecting the mentioned fact that EIL is used not only within the communication between native and non-native English speakers but also in the mutual communication within the cultural varieties of non-native English speakers, teaching the cultural aspects of the communication should be considered within both – native as well as non-native speakers. Although, it is agreed that culture is the interdependent part of the language and it should be taught within foreign languages, currently, it seems a problem to find the consistent recommendations within language pedagogy related to teaching culture in foreign languages and "unanimity on the value of culture should not be allowed to obscure the fact that, for most language teachers, culture is still a serious issue" (Jarvis, 1988). Brown understands teaching culture from the point of view of the social distance, focusing on "the cognitive and affective proximity of two cultures which come into contact within an individual" (Brown 2000). His conviction is influenced by Schurnann's research findings that "the greater the social distance will be between two cultures, the greater difficulty the learner will have in learning the second language, and conversely, the smaller the social distance (the greatest the social solidarity between two cultures), the better will be the language learning situation," (in Brown, 2000).

The attempts to introduce the culture often result into the problems. Valverde (2003) describes the issues defined within language teaching. They explain that poor teachers' knowledge of cultural aspects of the target language including the absence of the adequate training programs for teachers are considered to be as very limiting factor. They are convinced that it is "evident that there are important weaknesses in the EFL teaching concerning the degree of cultural elements included in the teaching-learning process students go through when learning the foreign language" (Valverde, 2003). It is understood that any language community may consist of numerous subcultures determining the variations of the language. Therefore, as pointed out by Valverde (2003) within the language teaching in general, teachers should understand cultural aspects of the language from the point of view of certain cultural frameworks. Consequently, they should be able to pass this message to the students within their language classes.

Related to the curriculum involving culture, Finnochiaro and Bonorno (1973) suggest to start with the presentation of cultural similarities and differences, in order to make students aware of the universality of culture, which should allow the students to explore their native culture and, at the same time, realize the differences in the other cultures. They are convinced that the cultural topics should be selected, respecting two important purposes. At first, the topics "should contribute to the intellectual, social, moral, civic, and emotional development of the individual," and secondly,

the topics “should provide the individual with insight into another way of life, not only as a means of neutralizing possible prejudices through understanding and appreciation but also as a way of developing a fuller, more complete knowledge of their own culture,” (Finnochiaro and Bonorno, 1993). Within the methodology related to culture teaching, Jarvis (1978) emphasizes that cultural educational objectives should follow strategies related to cognitive, skill and affective categories. Seelye (1993) also agrees that, within the cultural teaching, the language teacher should consider the strategies respecting the goals related to the accomplishment of cognitive, procedural, and affective skills of the language learner. Accordingly, Valverde (2003) defines major areas in culture teaching related its objectives and content. His understanding of effective culture teaching within the second language acquisition is determined by three main objectives. The first objective is to understand the importance of developing cultural knowledge and its effects in communication when learning a foreign or second language. This objective is followed by the second objective - to promote comprehension, tolerance, empathy and acceptance toward the differences that the source culture and the target culture may exhibit. The third objective is related to the promotion of the development of the strategies for cultural awareness and understanding. Following the general objectives, Valverde (2003) also describes the specific objectives within the cultural teaching. The objection to understand culture as a term within the different definitions seem rather difficult from the point of view of its complexity. The following objective relating to establishment of similarities and differences between the source culture and the target culture and the objective related to the understanding of the reasons of intercultural differences seems to be more realistic if considered from the point of view of the time pressure experienced by the teachers within their regular language teaching. The objective to make students aware of the importance of cultural knowledge in social interactions followed by the objective to integrate the cultural knowledge into communicative situations seem to be the most appealing within the aim of the effective communication in foreign languages.

From the point of view of the content in cultural education, Valverde (2003) suggests to follow certain topic areas related to culture as a term, its relationship to the language and cultural awareness. F. e., they recommend to focus on cultural varieties in the target culture with the emphasis on values and attitudes within the cultural behavior of the society. Stereotypes and ethnocentrism are suggested to be also discussed within the described specific objectives. Inspired by the Nelson Brook's Primary Message System (PMS) model (in Valdez, 1986), Valverde (2003) formulated the topic to be involved by the curriculum, focusing on the different cultural aspects within the topics of school, house, family, community, social relationships, etc.

Discussing the methodology in culture teaching, Seelye presents six organizing goals; “attitudes toward other cultures and societies, interaction of language and social variables, cultural connotations of words and phrases, conventional behavior in common situations, the sense or functionality of culturally conditioned behavior and evaluating statements about a society and researching other cultures” (Seelye, 1993).

The above-mentioned recommendations related to objectives, content and methodology in cultural teaching were presented from the point of view of foreign language teaching. The specific features of EIL should be considered in adopting these recommendations within the culture teaching in EIL, respecting especially the cultural diversity of EIL users respecting the fact that within the EIL, the diversity of the users' cultures including the subcultures leads to the endless list of the cultural variations.

Therefore, if teaching culture is considered as the challenging task in foreign languages, the problems are multiplied related to the teaching culture in EIL. From the point of view of the wide diversity of cultures within EIL, it is impossible to present the varieties of the related cultural features. Accordingly, the recommendations of Valverde (2003) should be considered especially within the EIL teaching that the teaching of culture, therefore, should be approached as a process and not as the inclusion of isolated bits of information. The conclusions of Will Baker (2012) explain that conceptions of cultural awareness stress the need for learners to become aware of the culturally based norms, beliefs, and behaviors of their own culture and other cultures. He points out the goal of increased understanding of culture and language leading to successful intercultural communication and he presents the definition of twelve features of intercultural awareness in three levels as a transition process from cultural into intercultural awareness is considered as the essential base and these three levels are aiming to provide the transition process from basic cultural awareness through advanced cultural awareness into intercultural awareness.

The above-mentioned findings resulted into the conviction that English for “wider communication”, recognized as English for an international communication, is influenced not only by the wide varieties of the users' first languages but especially by the diversity of their cultures. And consequently, from the point of view of the challenges related to cultural education within EIL, it should be realized that its main purpose is “to introduce the students to the study of general target cultural patterns as well as the strategies necessary to continue their own learning about different aspects related to the foreign culture” (Valverde, 2003).

2 The influence of self-perceived communication on communication competence within intercultural communication

Despite the mentioned issues related to EIL teaching, the communication competence of EIL users remains the ultimate goal of the EIL teaching.

Discussing the communication competence of EIL users, it is useful to understand the term communication competence in general. Communication is defined as “a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior” (Webster, 1983). To accomplish this process successfully requires certain degree of communication competence of the individuals. Therefore, the understanding of communication competence is recognized as important from the point of view of intercultural communication realizing that “...we communicate in the way we do because we are raised in a particular culture

and learn its language, rules and norms" (Gudykunst and Young, 2002). Spitzberg defines communication competence as "the ability to interact well with others" (Spitzberg, 2000). The term 'well' is further explained, as referring to "accuracy, clarity, comprehensibility, coherence, expertise, effectiveness and appropriateness" (Spitzberg, 2000). The communication competence with its relation to goal achievements is defined by Friedrich (1994) as "a situational ability to set realistic and appropriate goals and to maximize their achievement by using knowledge of self, other, context, and communication theory to generate adaptive communication performances." Communication competence is also understood with its relation to certain goal achievement by Parks (1985) explaining that communicative competence is "the degree to which individuals perceive they have satisfied their goals in a given social situation without jeopardizing their ability or opportunity to pursue their other subjectively more important goals".

Besides the understanding communication competence related to certain goals of the communication, it is also defined from the point of view of behavior, f. e., Wiemann and Backlund's suggest that communicative competence is "the ability of an interactant to choose among available communicative behaviors in order that he may successfully accomplish his own interpersonal goals during an encounter while maintaining the face and line of his fellow interactants within the constraints of the situation" (Wiemann and Backlund, 1980). Rubin (1985) also defines communication competence through goals and behavior, suggesting that communication competence is an impression formed about the appropriateness of another's communicative behavior.

Understanding the communication competence, consisting of three main components is explained by Spitzberg & Cupach (1984). They defined three specific components within their component model of competence: motivation, knowledge and skill. The components are understood as mutually interdependent; knowledge within the cognition, skills within the behavior and the affective component consisting of attitudes and feelings about the knowledge and behaviors. These components are defined respecting the specific context in which interactants act. All three components are related to some extent to behavior; motivation from the point of view of an individual's approach in various social situations, knowledge – besides the procedural knowledge it is understood as plans of action or how to act. The third component – skill – is linked directly to behavior from the point of behaviors actually performed. Related to the context within the component model of competence, Rubin (1985) also adds that "one goal of the communication scholar is to understand how impressions about communication competence are formed, and to determine how knowledge, skill and motivation lead to perceptions of competence within various contexts" (Rubin, 1985).

The component of motivation is further described by Shockley-Zalabak (1988) who describes motivation from the point of view of sensitivity and commitment. Sensitivity is understood as related to the dimension of empathy and commitment is understood as self-reflection and the ability to learn from it. Canary and Cody (2000) provide six criteria for assessing competence: adaptability, conversational involvement, conversational management, empathy,

effectiveness, and appropriateness with the impact on the perceived appropriateness and effectiveness.

All the above-mentioned definitions of the communication competence are explained from the point of view of the context of the performed communication. International and intercultural environment is recognized as the specific context in which the communication – intercultural communication is performed. The effective communication within international and intercultural environment requires specific communication competence of the communicator. To describe communication competence of the interactor, it is necessary to recognize the intercultural aspect of the communication context. It seems useful to use the Spitzberg's component model (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984) for this purpose. To understand the intercultural communication competence, its three components are recognized within the cultural aspects of the communication; knowledge as knowing what behavior is best suited for given situation, skill as the ability to apply that behavior in the given intercultural context and motivation as the desire to communicate in a competent manner, respecting the specific cultural features of the context. Spitzberg explains that communication will be competent in an intercultural context when it accomplishes the objectives of an actor in a manner that is appropriate to the context and relationship (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Related to appropriateness of the communication in foreign languages, Finnochiaro and Bonomo (1973) believe that it is essential to provide the list of aspects considered as taboo topics in the target society. This suggestion is considered as rather limited, as the appropriateness is discussed only from the point of view of the topics. Spitzberg's understanding of the competent communication from the point of view of appropriate manner is considered more suitable within the cultural aspects of communication. In spite of the fact that Spitzberg identifies the intercultural communication from the point of view of cultural appropriateness, assessment of the competent communication is rather questionable as the evaluation of what is appropriate in the certain context and especially within the certain relationship is not objective. Related to the communication competence assessment, Canary and Cody (2000) explain the assessing of communication competence from the point of view of perceived appropriateness and effectiveness. Their understanding of the communication competence assessment influenced the decision that the category of self-perceived communication competence could be considered within intercultural communication competence assessment. This approach is supported by the findings of researches explaining that self-perceived communication competence in foreign language learning is a crucial component in willingness to communicate (McCroskey, Baer, 1985; Yu, Li, Gao, 2011), which is considered as instrumental in the success of failure of foreign language learning (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998). Related to the relationship between higher self-perceived communication competence and communication competence, the researchers believe that "higher self-evaluative feeling equaled lower anxiety and better performance (Anyadubalu, 2010) and "increased perceived competence will lead to increased motivation which in turn affects higher frequency of L2 use" (Hashimoto, 2002). From the point of view of perceived appropriateness and effectiveness as mentioned by Canary and Cody (2000) within the communication competence assessment, it is assumed that perceived appropriateness in intercultural communication is closely

related to the perceived cultural appropriateness. This conviction implies that the increase of the intercultural awareness could lead not only to better understanding of the message (as perceived effectiveness) but it could also provide the perceived appropriateness within the intercultural communication which in turn can increase the self-perceived communication competence and higher self-evaluative feeling equals lower anxiety and better performance (Anyadubalu, 2010) which is considered as one of the priorities within (and not only) EIL language teaching.

Conclusion

The above-mentioned findings related to intercultural communication imply that effective communication in English, especially within the context of English as an international language, is not provided only by knowledge of its lexis, grammar, or phonology anymore. English teachers have to be aware of the fact that cultural aspects of the communication have a great impact on the efficient intercultural communication. It is important to realize that the recognition of the existence of the wide variety of cultural dimensions is necessary within the EIL teaching and the cultural aspect of the international communication is considered as the most challenging issue in language teaching within the effective communication in EIL. In spite of the fact that English teachers have a very limited access to any consistent language pedagogy procedures provided within this topic, they should understand that teaching English nowadays has to respect the important role of culture in language not only from the point of the cultural varieties of English speaking countries but also from the point of view of endless cultures of the EIL users.

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