

Impact Of English Language Textbooks On Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Abstract

The present study aims to find out the elements of the foreign culture in the English Textbooks being taught at Intermediate level in the Punjab (Pakistan) and to see how the content of English Textbooks affect the Intercultural Communicative Competence of the English language learners in EFL/ELS classes. This research is qualitative in design and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Model has been employed to find out the socio-cultural elements in the English Textbooks. The data of the research is the randomly selected text of the English Textbook-1 which is taught in the public colleges of the Punjab at Intermediate level. It is often supposed that the English textbooks are designed and added to the curriculum of the non-native speakers of English to enable them learn English as a foreign language. This study focuses to find the elements of the foreign culture. Some randomly selected chunks from the English Textbook-1 have been analyzed on textual and contextual levels to find out the aspects of the target culture in it.

Keywords: EFL, Intercultural, Communicative Competence, Suitability, Teaching Materials.

Introduction

Textbook is a significant and imperative aid for language teaching and learning in EFL/ ELS classes. English language teachers take these books as foundation while teaching the learners. The learners are also influenced by the content of the textbooks. They experience a variety of cultural, social, religious and linguistics issues through the process of learning these textbooks. The learners get familiarity with the target culture and develop positive response towards the content of the target culture. It further enhances their understanding of L-2 culture discussed in the textbooks. In Pakistan textbooks are adapted to meet the cultural sensitivity and ever increasing need of learning English as a foreign language.

The textbooks play a pivotal role in language learning and teaching process. They work as a gate way not only to deliver linguistic features of a particular language but also teach its cultural norms (Azizifar 2010). Textbooks can bring social and cultural changes in the lives of the EFL learners. Sardi (2002) believes that these cultural and social impacts sometimes create negative feelings as well in the minds of the EFL learners regarding their attitude towards the target culture. Tomlinson (2008) claims that many books on ELT contain such content as only focuses on linguistic features and ignore the other issues and it causes the failure of the EFL learners.

Now-a-days the countries of the world are so actively associated with one another that the world is called a global village. It enhances the need of learning and acquisition of English language as it is considered widespread and densely used language of the world. That is why English is now considered an international language of politics, business, science and education. Since the development of global business, English has become more important language as it is mostly used language of communication. People around the world use this language in their economic, social and political matters. When we learn English, we do not only learn the skill like reading, writing , speaking and listening rather we also learn the importance of behavior, habits and the cultural trends of the native English speakers.

Jiang (2003) believes that every language is a part of some certain culture, so learning a foreign language is also considered an acquisition of a foreign culture. This study aims to find how far English language textbooks are feasible to cultivate intercultural communicative competence among the Pakistani students of intermediate level. It further investigates how the content of English textbooks can familiarize the Pakistani students with the culture of the native English speakers.

Problem Statement

It is observed in Pakistan that learning English as a foreign language is given special importance in the curricula at all levels of education. Textbooks are designed and different activity books are published to assist the teaching and learning process in the EFL/ESL class rooms. However, the main focus is on learning English language but underlying English culture is ignored. It results into creating obstacles in getting jobs not only in English speaking environment abroad but also in Pakistan. Learning English language only and ignoring the target culture becomes a hurdle in the way of Pakistani youngsters. It hinders in Intercultural Communication as well and a Pakistani learner misses many of the socio-cultural shades of the foreign language and culture. It seems quite significant to find out cultural aspects in English textbooks to see whether these books satisfy the needs of the Pakistani learners of the English language or not.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to reach out the following objectives:

1. To find out the elements of the foreign culture in the English Textbooks being taught at Intermediate level in the Punjab (Pakistan).
2. To highlight the elements of the foreign culture in the content of the English Textbooks as to develop the Intercultural Communicative Competence among the learners of English as a foreign language.

Literature Review

It is not easy to define language and culture separately. Both of them are somewhat inseparable from each other as they are involved in a complex relationship. It seems proper to define language, culture and communication and their dependency and relationship among one another. Owing to the complex relationship between language and culture it seems inevitable to define these terms in a way that some conceptual basis can be developed.

Language

Language is a system of communication with the people through a set of sounds, symbols and words to convey some idea or thought. Sapir (1921) defines language as a human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, desires and emotions by means of willingly produced symbols. According to Hall (1968) language is an institution through which human beings interact and communicate with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols. Chomsky (1957) states the language is a set of finite or infinite sentences each of them is finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements. These views of the linguists show that there are some limitations attached to all of these definitions. However there are some common attributes of language that linguist seems to agree upon. For example language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols which human beings use for communication.

Culture

Culture is a multidimensional, ubiquitous and complex term. An anthropologist, E.B.Tylor (1920) defines culture as a complex whole which involves belief, knowledge, art, morals, law and any other tendencies of the people living in a society. Ferraro (1995) defines culture as something that people have, think and do as a member of a society. These definitions cover all the three aspects of culture: belief system, behavior pattern and material objects.

Language and Culture

The relationship between language and culture is so interesting and complex that many linguists probe it through their research. Language is an indispensable part of culture and plays a significant role in it. Malinowski (1944) believes that it is almost impossible to understand a language without constantly relating it to that culture in which it is used. This relationship of language and culture shows that learning English as a foreign language cannot be separated from learning the foreign culture as well. Byram (1989) asserts that both language and culture are interrelated and affect the

learners simultaneously. When learners learn a foreign language they also learn the foreign culture as well. So if a language is taught without that culture in which that language develops, it is a meaningless activity of teaching some symbols to which a learner attaches some meanings according to his own experience (Byram, 1989 p.22).

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICCC)

Many researchers have defined it in a variety of ways. It has been analyzed under different labels such as Intercultural understanding, intercultural effectiveness, cross cultural awareness and cross-cultural adjustment (Guthrie & Zektick, 1967; Harris, 1975; Ruben & Kealy, 1979; Spizberg & Cupach, 1984). For the recent two decades or so, intercultural communicative competence has been considered with more care and concern. Spitzberg (2000) defines ICCC that it is an expression which show whether a behavior is effective and appropriate in a given context. Chen and Starosta (1998) define ICCC that it is ability appropriately and effectively carry communication behaviors to elicit a desired response in a particular environment. So with this dual character communicator will be good at intercultural context when the desired objectives are fulfilled in a way that associates it to the context and relationship. Usually the concept of intercultural communicative competence is studied by the researchers in three different ways: behavior skill approach, cross-cultural attitude approach and developmental approach.

Culture and ELT

Some researchers believe that in the process of developing the second language of the non –native speakers of English language, their intercultural communicative competence is also affected. This is more possible when the learners` are exposed to the Anglo-American culture while learning English as a second language. Irvine (1998) relates that language ideologies possess social and linguistic characteristics within cultural paradigm. Therefore the Pakistani language learners necessarily learn target language culture coordinated with their own culture to communicate efficiently and to acquire communicative competence. They cannot achieve communicative competence without acquiring the knowledge of target culture. So the knowledge of second language learners must be aligned with the target culture. Tang (1999) maintains that this demand of compatibility of second language learning and the need of being acquainted with the target culture leads to a harmonious association with the target language. Language learning is closely associated with the attitude of learners towards a specific language (Starks & Paltridge 1996). A learner`s positive attitude towards learning the target language culture is a vital factor to foster cross-cultural understanding. So, when learners embark on acquiring second language, they must develop taste for the culture other than their own.

Textbook and Culture

Bartram (2010) believes that there are three types of influences that motivate a modern language learner: school-related influences, teacher-related influences and curriculum (textbooks). It always

invites a heated debate to talk about infusion of culture in ELT class rooms. Some linguists are of the opinion that course books should be initially based on culture and values. On the other hand, the textbooks should contain materials which taken from the respective cultures of the language learners. It is still a debatable issue whether ELT material should focus on regional or local culture or the general international culture should be preferred (Byram & Grundy, 2003).

Previous Studies on Language and Culture

Karahan (2007) conducted a study to find language learning attitudes of Turkish students towards the English language and the use of the same in Turkish culture. Abidin, Muhammadi and Alzwari (2012) studied the Libyan students` attitude towards the English language learning. Their findings show that most of the students showed negative behavior towards learning English language. Some studies have been made in Iranian EFL context. Kafi, Hamid and Motallebzadeh (2013) conducted a research to study the cultural attitudes of students towards the Top-Notch series textbooks. Their findings show that English textbooks, Top-Notch have put a significant impact on the cultural attitudes of the learners. As there is nominal work done on the issue in Pakistan and it causes the dearth of literature on this issue. This study would fill the gap to know about the learners` attitudes towards English culture presented in the English Textbooks approved and implemented by Curriculum Wing of Punjab Textbook Board at Intermediate level.

The present research focuses on sociolinguistics in general and language and culture in particular. It is comparatively new area of research as it deals with intercultural impacts of second language and the target culture on the EFL/ELS learners. Few researches have been made with these variables.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) reveals the ideology embedded within discourses and is greatly influenced by the broader social structures. Sometimes it is labeled that CDA is a subjective approach which always stands with the suppressed groups of people and resists against the powerful groups but the critics like Van Dijk (2006), Wodak (2000) and Fairclough (1995) claim that CDA is an explanatory approach and is not a pre-defined or a subjective approach. Jank (2006) believes that CDA has stemmed from the critical theory of language that considers language as a social practice. He (2006) further states that CDA tells whether the text is positioning or positioned ant how this positioning puts a critical impact on the power relations found in a society. CDA possesses an emancipatory objective which carries a dynamic analysis and agenda of interpretation (Fairclough & Wodak 1997; Wodak & Meyer, 2001).

Van Dijk (1998) introduced the Socio-cognitive model of CDA and its initial focus is on finding the role of context in interpretation and construction of discourse in different social, cultural and political setting. He (1998) is of the opinion that CSA in its elaborative scholarship can be called an analysis which focuses on social aspects of a given discourse. Van Dijk (1991, 1993, 1995 &

1998c) offered a socio-cognitive model that takes text into cultural, historical, philosophical, socio-economic, neurological and logical perspective while giving it a particular reference to the context in which that text is produced.

Ruth Wodak (2000) considers CDA as an interdisciplinary approaches that studies language critically with a view to find out particular speech behaviors in a social setting. She (2000) invites multiple theoretical and methodological approaches to analyze text with reference to social relevance. She (2000) believes that discourse is not separated from context and the underlying mechanism of the given text with reference to the functions and structures that pose an impact on the communication. The Discourse Historical Approach of Wodak (2000) invites a multiple approach that considers text while looking into the background information through a systematic way. She (2000) claims that language jointly represents the social interactions and social processes underlying a communication.

Kress (1990) maintains a different view about language and linguistics. He (1999) considers language a social phenomenon and takes text as an important element in social interaction he asserts that social groups and institutions have special meaning and the language has to convey those meanings and the social beliefs in a systematic and organized way.

Fairclough`s Approach of CDA

Fairclough (1995) considers CDA as an interpretative approach which investigates the relationship between social structures and discursive practices. Therefore, CDA analyses these social structures and practices while critically considering the underlying ideology. Fairclough (1989) opines that language is a form of social practice it plays a vital role in unfolding the bondage between social practices, social structures and the social events by investigating the system of social life. It is asserted that language is a conditioned social process and cannot be broken off the society rather it assumes an integral link in the social process and communication. Fairclough (1989) believes that contextual basis or the social conditions of a text are associated with three levels: the primary level deals with the social context in which language is developed, the second level to interpret a text is, in fact, a social institution and the tertiary one is the society at a larger scale. These three levels are very important for the production and the interpretation of the text that is semiotically embedded in a society at a larger scale (Fairclough N.,2002&2003).

Fairclough`s linguistic theory originates from the Hallidayan Systematic Functional Linguistics that proceeds on the functional grounds to analyze the text while looking into the sentences with reference to particular contexts and the intended meanings underlying a text. Although Halliday proposed that the textual meanings of a discourse also express the social interactions and processes yet Fairlough(1992) asserts a different view and emphasizes on interpretative nature of analysis instead of the descriptive approach to understand a particular discourse.

Research Methodology

The researcher has selected the text lines, embedded with cultural ideology of the native speakers of English language, from different lessons of English Textbook-1 taught at intermediate level in the public and private colleges of the Punjab. The randomly selected data has been analyzed critically by applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a research model. The words carry layers of meanings in the social cultural and ideological perspectives. In the present paper the researcher has tried to unmask the cultural meanings hidden in the content of the English Textbooks being taught at the college level in Pakistan. The analysis has been done on the lexical level, phrase level and sentence level. The Oxford Advanced Learners` Dictionary (2008 Edition) has been consulted to find the literal meanings and then the words have been deconstructed by applying CDA to find out the cultural meanings embedded in them.

Data Analysis

Data for the present study is the “text” which has been selected randomly from the English textbook-1 of Punjab Textbook Board being taught at Govt. Colleges of the Punjab (Pakistan) at Intermediate level. Here is the Critical Discourse Analysis of the selected chunks:

“It is trying period for me, your Christmas time.”(The Angel and the Author__and Others, P.94)

In this chunk of the text, the writer inquires the angel the reason of his weary look. At this the angel replies the author about the Christmas celebrations on the earth by the Christians. In “It is trying period for me”, “It “is an indefinite pronoun used for “Christmas”, “trying “means struggling and tiresome, some activity that takes time and energy of the “doer”. The angel tells the Author that the Christmas eve is a busy time for him as he is engaged in writing the good deeds of the people. In “Your Christmas time” “your “is possessive personal pronoun here the Angel is specifying the celebrations and the process of donations, arranging food and clothes for the poor, and trying to perform religious rites with zeal and zest only as a human being. It is a cultural aspect of the Christian world that they try to perform more and more religious deeds especially from a little before Christmas up to the end of January. So literally it is a conversation between the angel and the author about good deeds but it is clearly conveying the important information about the culture of the Christians who are the native speakers of this language.

“I brought my gun to the field and took home a mess of fox squirrels every evening.”(Clearing in the Sky, P.14)

This text occurs in the lesson when a father is relating a story of his past life to his son out of nostalgia. Its surface meanings show that the father, when he was young, brought his gun to the fields and hunted squirrels in a great quantity and they cooked them for their meal. In Pakistani culture squirrels are not supposed to be eaten but the learners of these lines essentially get the idea of something which is relevant to the foreign culture only.

“Now I’ve reached the years the Good Book allows to man in his life time upon the earth! Three score years and ten!”. (Clearing in the Sky, P.13)

This chunk conveys the meaning to the learners that the maximum age of a man according to the Good Book is seventy years. While going through these lines the Pakistani learners come to know about the Good Book which is the name used for the Bible that is the religious book of the Christian community. So according to the religious culture of the Christians, the learners in Pakistan come to know of the religious beliefs of the Christian community and easily perceive that the one who can live beyond seventy years is considered quite fortunate in Christian Community especially living in Europe and America.

“This is the Lenox Hill Hospital.”(Button, Button P.6)

This text literally means that there is a hospital. “Lenox Hill Hospital” is the proper noun denoting the name of the hospital situated in New York. In fact the statement shows that there is some person behind this noun and it has been used for the place to show the spacial and physical situation of the speaker. In Pakistani culture one would have said, “This is Bashir Ahmad” just to introduce the speaker whereas in Europe even the proper nouns of place can convey the identity of the speaker. On the other hand the statement introduces a prominent hospital of U.S.A.

“My Five Shillings subscription to the Daily Telegraph’s, Six Penny Fund for the Unemployed ___ got that down all right...?”(The Angel and the Author_ and Others, P.95)

In the selected text “Five Shillings” and “Six Penny” convey the information of the European currency units to the Pakistani learners. In the same way, “Daily Telegraph” is the name of a well known newspaper of U.K. The statement of the selected text also shows that the prominent newspapers in U.K. arrange different programs of fund raising to help and support the poor and the unemployed people in that native English community. Through these lines the Pakistani learner receives information of the English culture and the Socio-Economic conditions of the native English speakers.

“But I did remember the rummage sale to which I sent all my old clothes, including a coat that had got mixed up with them by accident...”(The Angel and the Author_ and Others, P.96)

This chunk is also the example of socio-cultural characteristics underlying this text selected from the English Textbook -1 of Punjab Textbook Board. Here the “Author” describes his good deeds to the “Angel” and relates that he sent his old clothes to the rummage sale for the help and support of the poor people. It shows that it is customary for the Christian people living in U.K. that they help the poor people not only through monetary support; rather they give them the clothes and other things of their need. This activity is conducted especially around Christmas, so it relates it to their culture or to their religious approach. There is also a touch of snobbish approach behind this activity. So the Pakistani learners can also learn this aspect of the culture of the native speakers of U.K.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the EFL/ESL classes to see the impact of the target culture on the Pakistani learners through the content of the English Textbooks. The selected chunks of the text taken from English Textbook-1 are just the sample of the content available in English Textbooks which are being taught at different levels of learning in all the public and private schools and colleges of the Punjab. After the Data Analysis through the CDA Model, it comes out that the students of English language not only learn English language but they also get an insight into the English culture because the English Textbooks being taught at intermediate level possess many elements of the English culture as well. With the result of it, the Pakistani learners are acquainted with the foreign culture and the foreign language at the same time. It helps them in developing Intercultural Communicative Competence as well. Having such content in the textbooks of Pakistan, the learners can easily meet the requirements of the intercultural communication.

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