



Extra Linguistic Issues with an Impact in Managing EFL Teaching

Slobodanka Đolić, PhD

Serbian Royal Academy of Innovative Sciences (SKAIN), Beograd, Serbia

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to discuss the relations between intercultural and environmental approaches to teaching English from a global perspective. Our interest is directed towards creating an educational model that will enable the teaching of English for International Communication objectives. In this paper, we will pay particular attention to the influences coming from the external environment. These influences are, however, manifested in the behavior of students, both at the psychological and the cognitive level. The terms of the living environment greatly affect the speed and accuracy of acquiring knowledge in general and language learning in particular. This is based on the fact that it requires commitment and concentration to be performed in adequate environmental conditions. The proposed teaching model is expected to conform to the learners' care-taking environment that provides conditions for healthy physical, humane, and affective social context.

Keywords: care-taking environment, teaching model, social context, EFL.

Introduction

English spoken as a foreign language has built its role as an effective tool for spreading globalization (Đolić, 2013). The largest number of world citizens use the medium of English for the purposes of international communications and global trade market (Crystal, 1997; Aloysius Ngefac, 2011; Salikoko S. Mufwene, 2010; Quirk R., 1985; Walraff, 2000; Abbott & Wingard, 1992; Gnutzmann, 1999; McKay, 2002). Subsequently, it is also used for meeting the requirements for developing scientific and technological achievements worldwide. English has become a tool for globalization, but it is also used as a tool that can help learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) to develop self-consciousness. Furthermore, it also helps them to come to firm intention to unite with other world people in search for better quality of life on Earth. The present determination underlines the necessity for the respectful environment in order to manifest working skills and provide values for healthier living and working atmosphere. Due to this reason, particular concern for the quality of life is essential in education. As a result, the role of environmental education within the scope of foreign language/second language (FL/SL)



teaching has become indispensable. Environmental Education that consists of a process which enables an individual to become aware of and concerned with environment, reflects its goals through the impact on the related teaching and learning problems. Therefore, its manifestations are present during the process of language acquisition. This recognition of individuals' and learners' own well-being makes the basis for teaching environment to become harmonious towards respectful learning conditions in the classroom atmosphere. We hereby stress the impact of environment on teaching and mental processes involved in learning activities which, in our opinion, should become one of major institutional issues to be solved with the help of school educational program and particular course curriculum.

Globalization of English, in its widest context understanding, assumes appreciation and the development of the intercultural skills. Through sharing one language, English, as an international one, we will be able to expand our communicative skills and develop the ability to deal with foreigners from a distance. Thus, this will make it possible to do business or interchange experience and various kinds of information through video conferencing, emails or phone, and by using world-wide network like Facebook or, more professionally specific, LinkedIn.

People we meet and interact with come from various parts of this world and belong to different cultural and civilizational milieu. In that respect, English learned in the countries belonging to the Outer Circle (Kachru Braj, 1985) is based on multicultural diversity of multilingual societies. The teaching of English is approached and held inter-culturally, based on the elements of the culture of native speakers of English. At the same time, it takes into account the cultural patterns of the nation learning English as a foreign language in their social environment.

Culture as an integral part of every language, including English, is assumed to be an indispensable part of the language teaching and is being developed under the conditions of an inviting and healthy environment.

Foreign language pedagogy is concerned in cognition of the relationship between language and culture. Therefore, this significantly affects the level of comprehension and interpretation of a particular language discourse, both spoken and written. It is a matter of social and psychological problems that may occur during the process of English language teaching.



This takes place when we try to facilitate the learning process through the cognition of cultural elements from the target language. The foreign-language teachers have to be determined by the type of schematic input (Gries & Divjak, 2012) to the learners of English Language.

Foreign language teaching involves two types of meanings in a target language: (1) systemic knowledge and (2) schematic knowledge. *Systemic* knowledge refers to the formal properties of language, comprising of its syntactic and semantic aspects (Alptekin, 1993). On the other hand, *schematic* knowledge is socially acquired. Thus, for this reason, we will be primarily interested in discussing the matter of foreign language acquisition followed by culture cognition of English as the language of lingua franca.

Our aim in this article is to discuss the relations between intercultural and environmental approaches in teaching English from a global perspective in non-English speaking countries. Also, this study aims to point out the pedagogic dilemma on which teaching model is best suited to be implemented for international communication.

Intercultural Approach to Teaching EFL

Before English has changed its position as a medium of international communication (Brumfit, 1982), its traditional ethnocentric view of the language and culture was in harmony. Speaking of EFL teaching, the cultural content was based on the cultural context of Britain or the USA. Thus, the notion was caused by political, economic, technological, and other reasons which established the leadership position of these two countries among other Anglophone-speaking communities like Canada, Australia, or New Zealand. "English is widely used for intercultural communication at the global level today" (Sharifi, 2009). Consequently, the environmental macro level which relies on global trade and communications create pressure towards "cultural life-style uniformity and brings with it fear of a standardization of values and increased anonymity" (Moser, 2003). This attitude of globalization and the fact that people around the world have to operate internationally have put forward the necessity to use a lingua franca. Hence, its role is overtaken by English language. Broadly speaking, English is in possession of all citizens of the world, and the question is who is in possession of English cultural context?



“Cultural instruction does not usually build bridges between home and target culture... students were asked to state the role played and to imitate the target behavior rather than synthesize it with their own experience” (Robinson, 1985). Robinson proposes intercultural approach in teaching English as a foreign language. It is important to understand the pattern of thinking of the people with whom we share English language with. Therefore, the challenge is to develop cultural sensitivity and to build the cultural awareness of the people from other cultures and different native languages.

The importance of English language teaching as education is understood, in Cook's words, to be an “interesting” language content. “Current views of language teaching are highly instrumental and have led to the creation of speech oriented syllabuses ... much more thought is needed on what the aims and content of school EFL syllabuses should be” (Cook, 2008). To meet the described learners' requirements, intercultural differences and similarities and the quality of the relationship with the environment are to be identified and formulated in order to help improve more inviting model for EFL teaching and learning. Therefore, this model is expected to conform with the learners' care-taking environment that provides conditions for healthy, physical, humane, and affective social context.

The Impact of Teaching Environment on Language Acquisition

The impact that teaching and learning environment have on the quality of learning skills and its development through time is manifested in the leading goal of language teaching. Thus, this goal is focused on the production of speech for real situations in the native speakers' manner. The production of new language is considered as the major issue of the teaching practice. To reach such a goal of teaching depends on various factors among which we want to underline the exposition to inner and outer environmental conditions in which the teaching process evolved. As educators, we recommend humane environment that is sensitive to inter- and intra-personal needs, the environment that would provide good conditions to develop student autonomy, and the environment that will turn the classroom into an inviting teaching and learning ambient. This is what we call healthy ambient which will reflect flexibility, availability, and readiness to develop learning skills according to the educator's objectives and learners' aims.



Cornell University environmental and developmental psychologist, Gary Evans (Evans, 2006; Evans & Hygge, 2007), developed the effects of the physical environment through a great number of research studies conducted in schools, both primary and secondary. The studies were based on the influences of noise level outside and inside the classroom, overcrowding, and the neighborhood quality of the school location. The investigation was aimed to reveal learners' "cognitive development, physiological indicators, and motivational tasks" (Kopko, 2013) which are affected by the above mentioned factors. Noise has proven to be a very influential factor in developing learning abilities which is particularly significant for improving reading abilities with young learners. Therefore, we would add other ages of those who learn a foreign language, English, which prevails in Serbia as a result of neighboring European Union and good political relationships with the United States of America. Noise comes from different sources which are from exposition to means of transportation, and noise that is provided by undisciplined and ill-educated learners and school interiors. Professor Evans's findings justify the hypothesis that exposure to noise is in positive correlation with learners' cognitive development affecting reading abilities and particularly long-term memory as well as "abilities at tasks that require speech perception" (Kopko, 2013; Shield & Dockrell, 2003; Creel, 2002). Learners are less patient. Also, teachers who are in noisy schools are easily fatigued and they become more annoyed than usual. Noise distraction result in high blood pressure and stress hormones are experienced.

The effects of crowding are found in "interpersonal behaviors, mental health, motivation, cognitive development, and biological measures" (Kopko, 2013). Crowding can be seriously manifested as a very negative factor in the organization of teaching foreign languages in Serbian schools. Overcrowding can result in adapting the curricula to suit the needs of such classroom teaching which can further develop into cutting and shortening the program of language teaching issues. Thus, learners go through psychological distress, suffer from behavior difficulties, and lose motivation to perform tasks.

Neighborhood quality of the school location is the third major factor in Evans's research studies that influence the quality of "both educational and health facilities" (Kopko, 2013). This factor is recognized as the physical environment of an educational institution. The school environment could be exposed to toxic effects if the quality of municipal services is poor; toilets are not kept under good care; school interiors are cleaned with toxic solutions that learners



inhale while spending time in the school, etc. “Exposure to these poor-quality physical conditions is linked to other psychological and social aspects of the environment, especially poverty” (Kopko, 2013). Furthermore, Creel (2002) underlines “children vulnerability” to be higher than adults who are exposed to environmental hazards.

To sum up, children and adults are under risk as long as environmental health is problematic and effective remedies are not applied in proportions as they should be according to secure and healthy requirements.

With respect to previous comments, English is seen as a useful aid, a tool, in search for help to save mankind from the polluted environment. This is because English, as a global language of this universe, has developed another dimension. However, this dimension is the language dimension that has strength to unite the people of the Earth in order to make a better place for progressive living and a more profitable working environment. This has become one of today’s fundamental requirements for productive and effective teaching of English as a world language. This fact forms the starting point in search for educated professionals who can get involved in finding and providing best solutions against further decline. Thus, this decline is regarding other environmental factors such as air, soil, and water pollution.

Eroding values and advancing materialistic tendencies are leading characteristics of living environment today. We are witnesses and, at the same time, victims of environmental degrading processes that relate to the quality of life. Hence, it brings about the possibility of the extinction of life on this planet. Such environmental conditions affect the learning atmosphere and it enables learners to get involved more sensitively in acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitudes to cope with and solve the environmental problems in their surroundings.

Our concern for learners of English as a foreign language accounts for their physical and social context of the learning environment. The physical conditions of the environment make an impact on effective and active learning in the negative connotation when accompanied by various disturbances from the outer world such as, above mentioned noise, air pollution, the layout of the interior of a teaching space, the furnishing, etc. For example, the space plan and arrangement of furniture in the classroom can influence the interaction and relations between learners, and learners and their instructors. Also, it slows down motivation and interest for the subject matter. Learners easily lack concentration, motivation, and interest if the physical



conditions of the environment are in misbalance. Therefore, the social context of the environment is a matter of crowding, population, heterogeneity, etc.

The interrelations between learners, their behaviors, and the environment are factors that determine success in teaching, particularly, a foreign language in non-English speaking country like Serbia.

Climatic conditions of the environment make great influence on learners' temperament and this refers to successful and pleased individuals with their education. Depending on environmental conditions such as cold climate with freezing days, hostile environment, or hot weather, the impact on learners is manifested through insecurity, aggressiveness, lack of moral control, laziness, inertia, etc. "Applied environmental psychology aims at better management of the environment for better life and psychological growth" (Baum, Singer, & Valins, 1978).

The Teaching Triangle Affected by Environmental Health and Intercultural Approach

Effective learning space is attained through good relationship between environment and individuals, professional relation between teacher and learner, and interesting language source implemented in the teaching curriculum. Consequently, these three major and general requirements for making professional intellectuals should be deeply and widely spread through all spheres of social life. Also, it should accompany environmental conditions at both micro and macro level.

The intercultural model of FL teaching represents teaching procedures through which learners' ability to negotiate meanings across languages and cultures is developed in order to prepare learners for living in a multicultural world. This is about encountering linguistic and cultural barriers in cross-cultural communication. Teaching from an intercultural perspective involves developing learners' critical cultural awareness of their own culturally-shaped world view and behaviors as well as the skills and attitudes to understand and successfully interact with people from other cultures, that is, to become interculturally as well as linguistically competent (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1998; Risager, 1998). This discussion is based on two theoretical concepts: intercultural communicative competence (Byram) and the intercultural speaker (Kramsch). Risager (1998) describes four different ideal-typical approaches to FLT,



which are used as analytical concepts: 1. The foreign-culture approach, which has been losing ground since the 1980s; 2. The intercultural approach, which has replaced the foreign-culture approach, that is the dominant one today; 3. The multicultural approach, which has made its appearance since the 1980s, but still is in its marginal position; 4. The transcultural approach, which is just beginning to appear as a result of internationalisation.

Subsequently, the fundamental principle of teaching a foreign language environment should be made “to encourage students not only to recall facts and to think critically or creatively about the content of the subjects they learn, but to think wisely about it too” (Halpern, 2001). This is the principle of the Wisdom Approach within the model of EFL teaching in any non-English speaking country. Sternberg develops this approach by pointing out the factor of motivating learners to develop their ability to “balance competing intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extra personal interests” (Sternberg, 2001). The main concern of instructors is the shift from a knowledge-based teaching to a wisdom-based education. The interest is on learner-centered curriculum designed for developing communication skills in proficiency oriented approach which makes a focus on fostering a high level of intellectual functions, in flexible way of presenting both teaching and learning contents (Kim, 1997). More recently, this model-based teaching has been defined as an “implementation that brings together information, resources, learning activities, and instructional strategies intended to facilitate” desired teaching-learning goals.

In the teaching environment of EFL, learners are encouraged to deal with cultural differences. Thus, this intercultural approach is represented by initiating and developing empathy towards other nations and the feeling of ethno relativity as described in Bennett’s model of teaching. This intercultural sensitivity is assessed through the learners’ response to teaching materials and language sources that serve as the background to base teaching activities.

Teaching EFL for Professional Competence

In this brief theoretical analysis about interrelated principles in organizing goal-oriented teaching of English as an international and world language, the idea of teaching English for professional reasons emerges.



In non-English speaking environments and countries, EFL teaching goals have drastically changed from knowledge-based to wisdom-based approach for linguistic, intercultural, and environmental purposes. Thus, I would like to add another perspective and issues that concerns the requirement for building a professional intellectual. This is referred to a person capable of applying the knowledge and skills through his professional career and education. This is to state that the learners of a foreign language, English, are expected to become “professionals” in the sense of developing abilities and skills to actively use the foreign language for specific purposes according to the business field they are involved in. As a result, the new teaching dimension that we are trying to recommend is environmental education which is regarded as a part of the language curriculum in schools. Therefore, this means the implementation of the acquisition of knowledge regarding a clean, safe, healthy, and rewarding learning environment. In conclusion, we would like to point out that we advocate in this paper for the introduction of environmental education in a foreign language teaching program. The choice of language materials should contain themes that will enable instructors to make an impact on cognitive development of students. As a result, this would make them to start to pay more attention to the cleanliness of common spaces, both inside and outside the classroom. It also aimed at influencing the students to develop the habit of taking care of the school facilities and its neighborhood. Through this way, by teaching activities, the positive attitude towards the physical environment will be reinforced. Similarly to culture as an integral part of the language learning educational program, ambient as a part of an environment where you realize the educational program of learning a foreign language, should become an indispensable and an inseparable part of language teaching curriculum.

English is learned as a tool to develop cognition about working conditions; to enhance environment in order to provide better life-style and increase production of values that can help the humankind to explore, restore and protect the environment, globally and locally; and to increase behaviors that lead to the well-being of individuals.

We consider the role of professional individuals in English language as multifunctional. Students acquire knowledge of the foreign language through well-organized intercultural approach and environmental education in schools. “Support for the Environmental Education Policy: English” issued by New South Wales Department of Education and Training in 2001 cites the above mentioned. Also, they commented on the curriculum objectives for English and



Environmental education: It is pointed out that learners acquire and develop knowledge of English to understand the nature and functions of the ecosystems and how they are interrelated; then, it studies about the impact of people on environments, the role of the community, politics and market forces in environmental decision-making, the principles of ecologically sustainable development, and the career opportunities associated with the environment. However, the same objectives can be applied in EFL teaching, but only through the implementation of this specific approach to the curriculum design depending on the language materials that will deal with the mentioned topics. Teaching materials designed in the manner to promote an increase in certain behaviors in the learners of EFL will help teach English in non-English speaking countries for a professional world individual.

Conclusion

Our proposed theoretical concept of EFL teaching in non-English countries is based on the principles of interrelations between Wisdom approach, intercultural teaching for communication in a foreign language, and environmental education specified through the selection of texts and activities in teaching materials for the purpose of better living and working conditions for the world generation. Therefore, these concepts depend on humane environment which is sensitive to intra and inter personal needs and allows the development of learners' autonomy and independency. This English teaching through the environment is the approach that claims the following requirements: learners' engagement in creating, designing, modification, and management of environments that are care-taking, clean, and with reduced pollution and regular waste removal. In addition, learners and their instructors share good personal relations. The teaching model is basically intercultural with elements of environmental education as an indispensable and as an integral part of English learning curriculum design.



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