Cultural Barrier in Learning a Foreign or Second Language: An Outline and Clarification in Context of Bangladesh

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Abstract: Language is used as a medium of expression. We use language to express our ideas, emotions, feelings or to communicate with others. It is easy to do in our mother tongue or the first language. But if we want to express our ideas, emotions, feelings in second language or a foreign language the difficulty occurs. It is not that it is a different language but because among the different barrier the cultural barrier is one that is creating obstacles in learning a foreign language or second language. The issue of language barrier is particularly critical during an intercultural service encounters for ESL customers. This article presents the cultural barrier of learning a foreign language or second language and it also provide information how we can overcome the cultural barrier successfully in learning a language. This article provide a survey report which was conducted on 100 students of a university in Bangladesh which provide information what type of cultural barrier they face in learning a foreign language.

Keywords: Culture; Second language; Learners; Environment; Barrier; Learning.

1. Introduction

In today's world we need to learn foreign or second language to communicate with non-native speakers. But learning a second language or foreign language needs environment. Environment that will support learning. It does not just magically appear. It takes time, commitment and belief in oneself and one's students. All students can learn, given the appropriate supports and models, once the barriers to responsive education are eliminated. There are different kinds of barriers. These barriers include:

i. Climate barriers.
ii. Cultural barriers
iii. Language barriers.
iv. Content barriers.
v. Resource barrier.
vi. Delivery barrier.

This article will focus on the cultural barrier in learning a foreign or second language and its clarification. Among the different common barriers cultural load is one of them. 'Cultural load' means the way language and cultures are related and the amount of cultural knowledge required for understanding and participating in the activity.

2. Difference between EFL and ESL

Macmillian Dictionary defines English as a Foreign language as a situation in which English is 'taught to people who need to learn it for their studies or their career and who do not live in an English-Speaking country. On the other hand, according to Collins Online Dictionary (2013) EFL is 'the practice and theory of learning and teaching English for use in countries where it is not an official medium.

English as a second language is a term used when English is 'taught to people whose first language is not English, but who live in an English-speaking country and need English to communicate in daily life.'(Macmillion Dictionary).

One common example can be given in context of sylhet which is a district of Bangladesh. Many people in that district goes to the UK, the USA and other English speaking countries every year getting spouse visa. They plan to settle down in those countries. If they start learning English in those countries, it's a case of ESL. However, in case of us, we are learning English as an academic subject. And that's why the situation represents EFL. In a recent Bollowood film title English Vinglish (2002) shows the complex situation of India where English took the place of second language because of the cultural diversity of the country.

3. Culture Definitions

Culture' is a word that can be defined in various ways by different people. In the anthropological sense, culture is described 'as the way people live. Chastain (1988) Culture defines as 'an all-inclusive system which incorporates the biological and technical behaviour of human beings with their verbal and non-verbal systems of expressive behaviour is ranging from birth and this 'all-inclusive system' is acquired as the native culture. Trinovitch (1980) This process, which can be referred to as socialization.' prepares the individual for the linguistically and non-linguistically accepted pattern of the society in which we lives. Culture is language and language is culture. Culture is a context within which we have a tendency to exist, think, feel and relate others. It is the 'glue' that binds a group of people together. Thus, culture helps us to know how far we can go as individuals and what our responsibility is to the group.

4. Importance of Culture in Learning Language

It is acknowledged that language is a part of culture and that it plays a very important role in it. Some social scientists even believe that without language culture will be consider strange. Language concurrently reflects culture and is influenced and formed by it. Brown believes that language is the mirror of culture in the sense that, people can see culture through its language. Brown (1994) Language and culture are not separate, but are acquired together with each providing support for the development of the other. (Mitchell and Myles, 2004).

As global business and transactions of multinational companies are increasing , we need knowledge of foreign languages to ensure our place in today's competitive world. The globalisation of cultures demand teaching of foreign languages more than ever before.

Lack of knowledge about foreign cultures and foreign languages challenges our student's ability to compete in the global marketplace. Moreover, Bangladesh education system placed little value on foreign languages other than English or understanding cultures other than our own. Hence, language are urgently needed to address economic challenges and the strength of Bangladesh businesses in global marketplace.

Foreign or second language learning can be enhaced through the interaction with the target language and cultural context. Direct communication with the target culture and language will keep the students motivated and give those better language skills and critical literacy. This authentic interaction will ultimately increase their reading, writing and sociocultural knowledge.

From Kern (2000) perspective, sociocultural discussion is very much important in understanding how languages work. In the context of academic second and foreign language learning:

'Literacy is the use of socially, historically and culturally situated practices of creating and interpreting meaning through texts. It entails at least a tacit awareness of the relationship between textual conventions and their context of use and ideally, the ability to reflect critically on those relationships. Because it is purpose-sensitive, literacy is dynamic –not static and variable across and within discourse communities and cultures. It draws on wide range of cognitive abilities, on knowledge of written and spoken language on knowledge of genres and on cultural knowledge.' (P.16)

This clearly shows the need of cultural and social apprenticeship in learning a foreign or second language.

5. Cultural Barrier

The limits of our language' means the limits of the world.' As suggested language barriers is chiefly critical during intercultural service. Such intercultural service encounters may be inclined by cultural differences. Language is not only a medium of communication, but also linked to an individual's personality. (Lauring, 2008). Culture is a vital part of every human life. Each individual is born in a particular cultural context which consequences in acquiring its different aspects in life. In broad terms, culture can be outlined as a set of social beliefs, values, religious, credence and ideologies accepted by most members in a social community. During the process of language learning some decisive cultural factors may be notified, seriously hindering the effectual learning process and generally referred to as cultural barriers. Effective language learning among different cultures is chiefly difficult and demanding as a result of the various ways of philosophy, seeing, hearing and interpreting the world provided by cultures. Cultural barriers are considered as those traditions which becomes hurdles in path of understanding or teaching/learning completely different languages among which body languages, religious beliefs, etiquette and social habits are noteworthy. (Mirdehghan *et al.*, 2011).

6. Cultural Factors

ESL students come across great barriers as they learn the English language. These barriers are either with respect to linguistic factors or cultural factors. ESL learners have their culture which is so different from that of any native English speaking country as well as certain linguistic aspects based on their primary language.

One of the important cultural barriers affecting ESL education draws from the fact that most ESL Programs instructors are in most cases native English speakers. These native teachers occupy socioeconomically and culturally different styles of teaching ESL learners are used to, from their culture. This presents a lack of correlation of the two cultures especially if the teacher fails to employ effective instructional approaches mean such as group effort. This is made worse by the lack of fervor among the native teachers to learn these different cultures.

The wealth of linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic aspects that are characteristics to the community in which the ESL learners learn are also presents a barrier to an extent. This is because these impact on the planning and ultimately the outcome of the learning efforts for the minority groups. For instances, poor social, cultural and attitudinal attributes that exists in the immediate neighborhood of the ESL school's community contradict the expected principles of ESL learners who are supposed to learn from the very community.

This is especially a problem because there lacks knowledge with respect to important aspects of community life, which dictate the culture around during the planning, implementation and evaluation of ESL programmes. Lack of an understanding of the cultural factors that determine the actual process of the ESL classroom instruction leads to poor learning of the English Language.

Recent studies show that the nature of relationship between two cultures and an individual's attitude towards a given culture impacts greatly on second language acquisition. An increase in social distance between two cultures results into an increased difficulty with which a second language learner develops proficiency in comprehending target language.

On the other hand, when the social distance between two cultures is comparatively small, the language learning state becomes better. The social distance is determined fairly by the nature of rapport between two cultures.

There generally are expectations regarding the educational duty each participant brings into the ESL classroom and which impact on their viewpoint about the class as well as their keenness to work together in the various learning activities. One of the most important aspects that participants bring is cultural knowledge and more exclusively learners bring their anticipations for relationships with the teacher and also behaviour that was rampant in their home country like extensive schooling for instance. As such, these cultural factors become a barrier in case the students basing on the culture, each has been accustomed to expect certain behaviour from the teacher yet he/she fail to convey the same. For instance, those who had previously been under the traditional ESL culture may expect the teacher to be more formal and authoritarian in his/her approach. Thus if the teacher employs a normal style, the students become upset and this might affect two-way working and ESL learning at large.

Moreover, these cultural factors present a fence when the learners led by these cultural factors, prefer that ESL instructors maintain a clearly classroom activity pattern such as extensive corrections of pronunciation or grammatical form throughout all learning activities and not at specific points during the lesson or even not performing any corrections at all. This could be a barrier if the student is not flexible enough.

7. Literature Review

Researchers have published works about the ways in which culture influences thought and behavior (Gudykunst, 1994; Hofstede, 1986; Samover and Porter, 1995). They have made available a wide range of perspectives for conceptualizing the influences of different cultures on thinking and behaving. Three perspectives are of special potential relevance to L2/FL teaching, namely, the distinction between individualism and collectivism; different perception of power and authority; and different types of achievement motivation. (Littlewood, 2001).

Language is the key to a person's self-identity. It enables the person to express emotions, share feelings, tell stories and convey complex messages and knowledge. Language is our greatest mediator that allows us to relate and understand each other (Imberti, 2007).

Cultural environment differences provide the second language learner a sort of social psychological distance. (Hofstede, 1986).

On the basis of the significance of English as an International language spoken and taught worldwide, the present research focuses on the cultural impacts and barriers on ELT and effective communication in Bangladesh. The research question is to find out the common cultural barriers in Bangladesh which mainly hinder English language learning.

8. Methodology

In this study, the qualitative methods involving a questionnaire, interviews and classroom observations were used. The questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations are mainly conducted to find out the cultural elements that hinder the learning process or learning a second or foreign language. The data used in this study is primary data.

9. Participants

A questionnaire was distributed among 100 students of Z.H Sikder University of Science and technology. It included 9 questions asking the participants to express their own ideas through those questions by means of the impact of culture in English language learning and the cultural elements which might hinder their learning process.

10. Results and Discussion

The questionnaires were distributed among 100 students using a Likert scale ranging from 5 (totally disagree) to 1 (totally agree) which include 9 questions to the students to assess their responses in regard to the effect of culture in English language learning and the cultural elements which might hinder their learning process and there are information about a number of items which are existed in the tables. The questionnaire are divided into four parts, first usage of both Bangladesh and English cultural based factors , Second one faithfulness to Bangladeshi culture,

third one Religious and political belief and last one taboo words as cultural barrier. Based on the opinion of the students, the usage of both Bangladesh and English culture can be given as the top priority needs in the community being studied (70% totally agree). It also analyzed that barriers like taboo words (50% - partially agree), political relations (80% - Totally agree) are partially effective on ELT. According to the information from tables, students partially agreed with the first category (70%) and believed using both Bangladesh and English culture in discussion and text books could facilitate the learning. In the second category, learner's faithfulness to Bangladesh culture shows that students are totally disagreeing with the question of this category (45%). The result of the third category, religious and political belief indicates that, students are totally disagreeing with the question of this category (50%). In the last category which was about taboo words 47.5% partially agree.

In short, we can explicate that based on the result Bangladesh students could have a better learning when both Bangladesh and English culture were used in English text teachings.

Table-1. Usage of both Bangladesh and English cultural based factors

Questions	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
1. Using Bangladeshi culturally related topics in discussions would lead to a better understanding of ELT texts.	70%	20%	_	_	10%
2. Knowing the culture of English speaking country would facilitate the learning process.	58%	12%	_	_	30%
3. Bangladeshi learners would select subjects for discussions based on their culture.	30%	50%	10%	8%	2%

Table-2. Faithfulness to Bangladeshi culture

Questions	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
4. Learners' fear of losing Bangladeshi traditions and values has negative effect on ELT	10%	7%	7%	16%	60%
5. Learners faithfulness to the Bangladeshi and Islamic believes would limit learners not to choose, subjects that is not suitable to the culture.	15%	20%	15%	20%	30%

Table-3. Religious and Political beliefs

Questions	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
6. Using Islamic related topics rather than other religious topic would lead to a better understanding of the texts.	_	20%	_	_	80%
7. Bangladesh's political relation to English speaking countries has positive effect on ELT	60%	20%	_	_	20%

Table-4. Taboo words as cultural Barriers

Questions	Totally agree	Partially agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
8. Taboo words cause perception gape for Bangladesh learners.	15%	50%	15%	10%	10%
9. Bangladesh learners refuse using English words which are homophones to taboo words in their language.	10%	45%	10%	7%	28%

11. Suggestions

Teachers need to free themselves from methodological dogmatism and cultural stereotypes and look for alternatives that blend the best practices from their own culture and the culture that their students are bringing with them into the classroom. Apart from the above –mentioned concepts, some bridging strategies are suggested here:

1. Teachers need to adapt classroom materials to make them user-friendly for Bangladeshi students. Instructors should used materials that culturally suitable for the students.

2. Teachers should give time to the students to adapt to a new culture related context.

3. Teachers often use video and film to enrich learners target cultural knowledge. This video and film must be related to the Bangladeshi culture. So that the students are not embarrassed to learn.

4. A good rapport also needs to be built between learners and teachers.

12. Conclusion

To sum up, teaching second languages is not sufficient to educate a student for being functional in that language without the cultural components interviewed. However, there is a need for the teacher to be educated in the cultural differences of the target language as well in order to be totally effective in the second language classroom.

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