



## Cross cultural aspect of teaching of English as an international language

Shehzad Ahmed<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Kashif Jalil<sup>2</sup>

The University of Lahore<sup>1</sup>

University of Limerick, Ireland<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*This project aims at exploring the cross-cultural aspect of teaching of English as an international language. Cross-cultural awareness is considered crucial in modern language studies, as it aids in preparing students for effective and proficient intercultural communication. Cross-cultural awareness has always been important in modern language studies, as preparing students for effective and competent intercultural communication requires not only mere teaching of linguistic skills but also the vital component of cultural knowledge and awareness. Communication that lacks appropriate cultural knowledge and content often results in an unusual or humorous situation leading to misunderstanding and miscommunication. Culture awareness has become an important focus of modern language education, a shift that reflects a greater awareness of the inseparability of language and culture, and the need to prepare students for intercultural communication. It is a responsibility of language teachers to make students' aware of the cultures in order to provide them with the opportunity to act as a member of the target culture. So far as the emphasis is laid on cultural understanding, linguistic skills and communicative competence, the goals of language teaching will be satisfactorily achieved. Language teachers must instruct their students on the cultural background of language usage and choose culturally appropriate teaching styles and explore culturally based linguistic differences to promote understanding instead of misconceptions or prejudices.*

**Key Words:** Cross Cultural awareness, Globalization, Lingua franca

**To cite this article:** Ahmed, S. & Jalil, M. K. (2020). Cross cultural aspect of teaching of English as an international language. *Competitive Linguistic Research Journal (CLRJ)*, 2 (2), 71-84.

## **Introduction**

It is believed that language and culture are interconnected. Values and norms of a certain society are reflected by language. Therefore, culture is an important aspect of language teaching. During the process of learning a second language, learners learn culture of target language as well. McKay (2003) opines language learning process is influenced by culture linguistically (semantic, pragmatic and discourse) and pedagogically (learning material containing cultural content). The purpose of teaching and learning a foreign language is not only a process of developing learners ability of linguistic skills but it is also something beyond learning linguistic information. Cultural knowledge is also transmitted during the process of teaching and learning of a second language (Englebert, 2004). There is no doubt that a complex relationship exists between language and culture. Ager (1994) discusses that language and culture are found in each other. According to Brooks (1964), a language is the most important component of a culture.

There is a dire need to enhance cultural understanding and awareness inside the classrooms for worldwide progress. Strasheim (1981) discusses that it is beyond doubt that successful amalgamation of culture and language teaching can contribute considerably to common knowledge. Language competence and cultural awareness can play an integral role in the various fields of a country for its progress and that worldwide cultural awareness must be an essential component of basic education (Stratiem 1981, cited in Hadley, 1993). Hadley (1993) hold that cultural understanding and awareness must be developed in multiple ways so that learners are conscious to different cultures and should be prepared to pass their lives more harmoniously in the target language community. As Stern (1992) asserts that, “One of the most important aims of culture teaching is to help the learner gain an understanding of the native speaker’s perspective” (p. 216).

## **English as a as International Language**

The world is shrinking to a global village in this age of progress and modernity. The people of different communities are coming closer with diverse cultural backgrounds to interact for various purposes. A lingua franca is required to fulfill the needs of communication in order to interact and communicate across the globe. The purpose of lingua franca is being fulfilled by English language Jenking (2007). English language is being used worldwide. English has been labeled as

a global language. The speakers of multiple languages are able to speak English language throughout the world. The world is growing in the every sphere of life. Various organizations have their offices in different countries. The people are using English language as a lingua franca to establish good relationship among them worldwide. It is the only language which can help people to communicate and maintain a good relationship across the globe.

English has become a global language. It has acquired a status of lingua franca. A large number of the native and non-native speakers of English language are using it as a medium of communication in their respective fields to fulfill their purposes. English is also used as a commercial language. It is playing a role of a bridge for the whole world in various aspects of life. Undoubtedly, English has attained a distinctive place. It is recognized as a leading global language Crystal (1997).

### **Relation between Language and Culture**

According to Edward Sapir in his researches with Benjamin Lee Whorf documented the close association and relationship between language and culture. He claimed that it is difficult to comprehend and realize the importance of one without other. Both are closely associated and linked as integral components (taken from Wardhaugh, 2002, p. 220). Conversely, Wardhaugh (2002, pp. 219- 220) stated that:

*“The structure of a language determines the way in which speakers of that language view the world or, as a weaker view, the structure does not determine the world-view but is still extremely influential in predisposing speakers of a language toward adopting their world-view”.*

### **Teaching of English and Cross-cultural aspect**

Businessmen, government officials, teachers, learners, traders, etc. come across each other in the rapidly growing age of globalization across the globe. They need to communicate with one another and various communities. Various communities utilize negotiation as a powerful instrument to communicate in cross-cultural communication. It shows that negotiation is the only way to enable speakers of different discourse communities to engage themselves in cross-cultural

communication globally. An intercultural approach for English language teaching is required to fulfill the learner's language requirements with general and specific linguistics information and knowledge. In this way, an intercultural approach to TESL proves very helpful for the teachers and learners to increase intercultural knowledge and competency by assessing and drawing discourses and texts comparisons with their own cultures.

Linguistic accuracy and sociolinguistic appropriateness both are equally required for effective and proficient cross-cultural communication. Even an inappropriate performance cannot be effective as communication despite of its linguistic appropriateness, not only because it does not provide the required effect, but also because it often creates the opposite effect. Linguistic and cultural diversities are considered the specificities in language teaching worldwide. Intercultural awareness supports learners to be succeeded in cross-cultural communication in their daily activities of life Kienle and Loyd (2005, p. 580).

In the context of cross-culture communication, linguistic competency and the information of a culture of a desired community both are required to make an effective cross-cultural communication. Learners require cultural knowledge and linguistic competency for effective communication. In addition, a learner with great cultural knowledge must have grammatical, sociolinguistic, pragmatic competency and socio-cultural knowledge and intercultural awareness. As Rod Ellis (1997) argued that:

*“Individuals who are motivated to integrate both linguistic and nonlinguistic outcomes of the learning experience will attain a higher degree of second or target language proficiency and more desirable attitudes”*(p. 89).

Tomlinson (2001) opines that cultural awareness is a process which develops learners' insight towards the sameness of cultures. It helps learners how to compare their culture with the culture of other people which differentiates the values and norms of both cultures (cited in Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2004, p. 3). Tolinson and Masuhara, (2004) hold that a growing cultural awareness supports learners to broaden their mind, develop tolerance and gain cultural empathy and sensitivity.

According to Tomalin and Stempleski (1993), cultural awareness has three qualities:

1. Understanding of individuals own culturally-induced behavior.
2. Understanding of the culturally-induced behavior of others.
3. Capability to explain one's own cultural perspective (p.5).

Knutson (2006) discusses that the growth of learners' cultural awareness begins by motivating them to be familiar with their cultural individuality with respect to other cultures. According to Knuston (2006) language instructors should evaluate learners' actual world and educational requirements regarding cultural knowledge, capability to act in appropriate ways (Kuuston, 2006, cited in Beaudrie, et al (2009), p. 167-169).

According to Kirvalidze (2017), cultural assimilation and intercultural awareness are important components for effective communication. They are required for the learners of different cultural communities to succeed them in global environment. Therefore, this project aims to focus on intercultural awareness in teaching and learning English. It connects culture with language for borderless effective communication. English language has acquired the status of lingua franca globally. It is a need of the hour to encompass various aspects of cross-cultural awareness in the syllabus to involve learners in successful intercultural communicative competence. To learn basic linguistics structures of a language is not adequate to fulfill the needs of learners and they cannot be considered competent in the second language Krasner (1999, p. 79). ESL/EFL learners require learning cross cultural aspects and dimensions in language learning through an intercultural approach, as Alred and Byram claimed:

*"In any society which expects its education system to prepare people for living in an internationalized culture and globalized economy, and also for the interaction between people of different cultures within and across national boundaries, the process of tertiary socialization and the acquisition of intercultural competence are clearly desirable".*  
(Alred & Byram, 2002, p. 351)

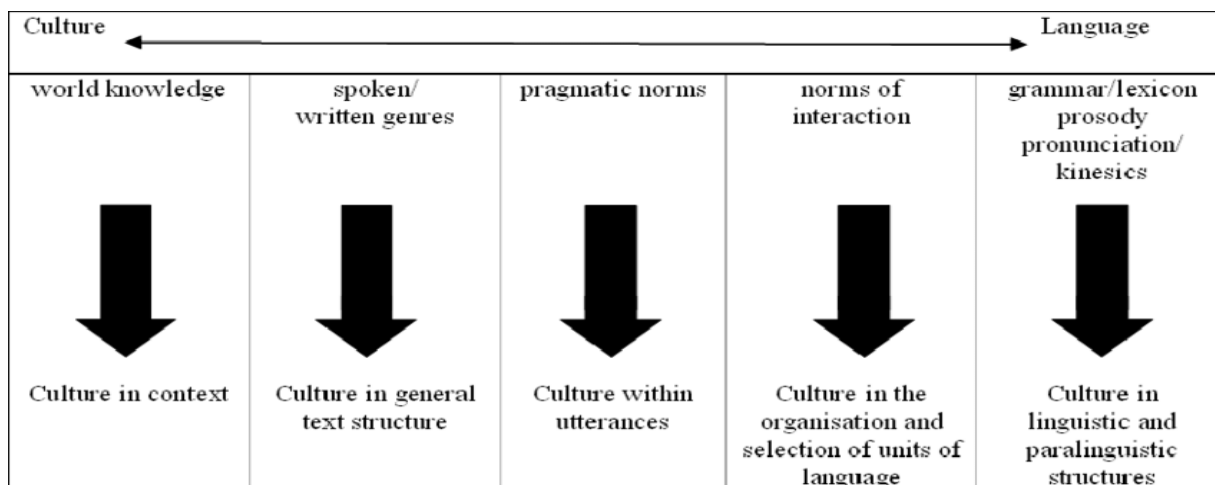
Thus, linguistics ability along with cultural information is a noteworthy factor which helps to communicate with the people of diverse race, creed, tradition, rituals, customs and ethnicity. Cross-cultural awareness is considered helpful for learners to communicate successfully. Linguistic knowledge is not merely sufficient for effective communication in the global context. It is an essential component for the learners to learn cultural knowledge and awareness along

with linguistics knowledge to be fluent in communication. Lack of sufficient cultural knowledge and awareness create confusion mostly which causes misunderstanding and miscommunication (Kirvalidze, 2008, p. 85). In TESL classrooms, students of various cultural backgrounds learn English language (Norton, 1985).

There is a need of language experts and teachers who have sufficient knowledge; expertise and disposition to assess and comprehend the world critically. They are required to encourage and support cultural differences among learners'. They also must have competence to establish multicultural global learning and work environment. In a survey conducted by Timmis, a large number of learners, English language teachers and experts from different countries desire to become fluent as native speakers worldwide. This survey also reveals that they want to preserve and maintain their own cultural values and norms (Timmis, 2002, p. 242). Promotion of cross-cultural awareness and adaptation to cross-cultural problems are encouraging factors in learning of second language. It is a very positive aspect to learn the cultural norms and values of the second language for effective intercultural communication.

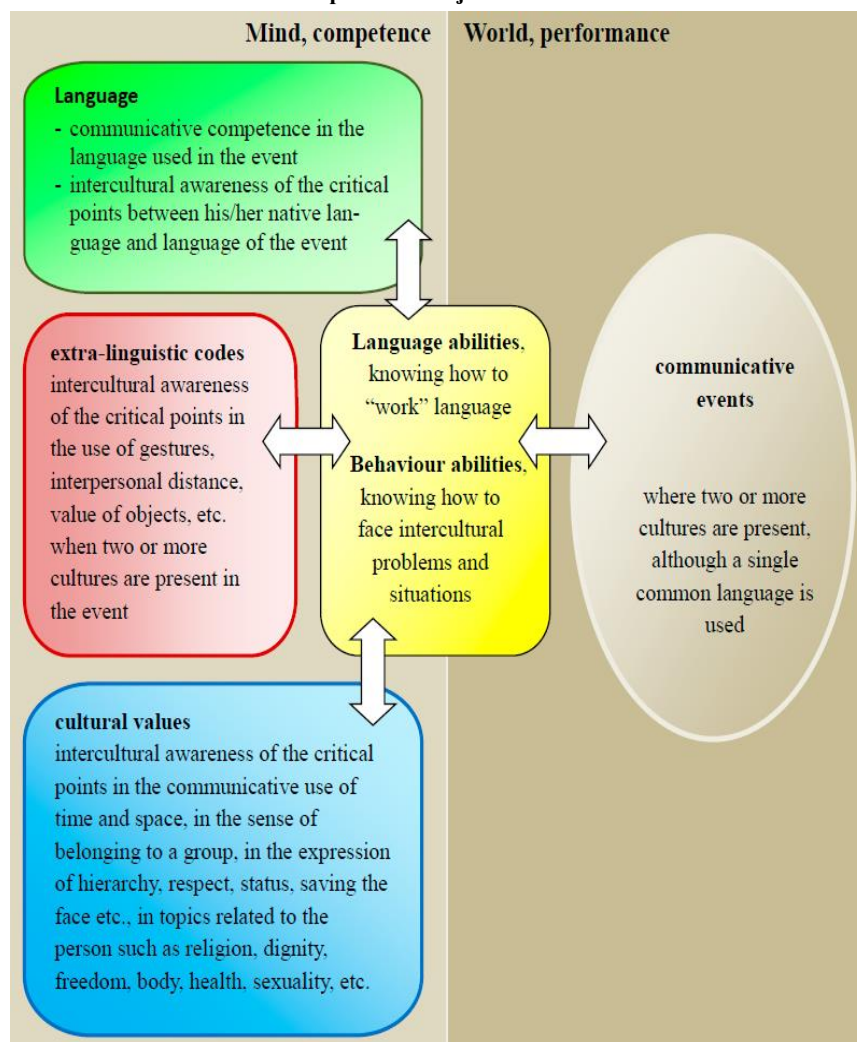
According to (Bennett, Bennett & Allen, 2003):

“The relationship between language and culture is made meaningful in language learning as “the person who learns language without learning culture risks becoming a fluent fool” (p. 237).



Liton and Qaid (2016) argue that lack of cross-cultural awareness possibly will result misconception and lead to failure in communication. Peterson and Coltrane (2003) argue that language learners require to learn that how to act and say aptly according to the situations. Hence, TESL ought to be practiced which includes cross-cultural awareness along with teaching linguistic skills (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003). Cultural study and awareness have become an integral part of ELT because language learning is attached with culture in various ways. Language fluency and proficiency cannot be achieved without cross-cultural awareness. It can be concluded that both culture and language are interlinked and inseparable (Jiang, 1994, p. 138). Furthermore, as Claire Kramersch (1993) stated;

*“Culture in language teaching is an expendable fifth skill, so to speak to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing” (p. 26).*



Gao (2006) suggests that the domain of teaching and learning, the interdependence of language learning and cultural learning is so apparent that it can be said that language learning is culture learning and therefore, language teaching is cultural teaching. Gao further elaborates that foreign language teachers must be aware of the place of cultural studies in foreign language classroom and endeavor to increase students' cultural awareness and improve their communication competence. Similarly, Wang (2008) holds that “foreign language teaching is foreign culture teaching, and foreign language teachers are foreign culture teachers.”

Gillian Lazar presented few teaching techniques and strategies to reduce cultural issues and problems in the substance of the text (Lazar, 1993):



- (1) **Personalizing:** It suggests learner's hints about the main theme or the central idea of the topic by relating it to their own experience;
- (2) **Proving Explanations:** It implies learner's cultural knowledge in form of a note and then requires them to deduce the cultural information provided in the text by making it clear;
- (3) **Drawing Cultural Comparisons:** In this way, learners are motivated to come up with ideas about culture and traditions of their society and then to compare them with those given in the text.
- (4) **Making affiliations and Associations:** it implies helping learners' free associations around a word or phrase which may have particular connotations or even figurative meanings for a native speaker of the language.

Apart from the aforementioned strategies, English language teachers must adopt these ways for the learners to enhance their cross-cultural awareness:

- (1) English language must be used to a great extent. English must be used as medium of instructions instead of mother tongue.
- (2) Maximum available equipment should be utilized to facilitate learners.
- (3) The use of maximum audio-visual elements of teaching like films, multimedia, slides, and images is very effective as they facilitate students' cognitive capabilities.
- (4) All the language skills along with grammar structures and vocabulary must be focused equally.
- (5) Maximum practice and drill must be done by the language teachers inside and outside the class.
- (6) Effective teaching process needs significant linguistic support. Language teachers must include and use linguistic supports in the process of teaching.
- (7) Learners face problems and hurdles with native speaking teachers. Thus, linguistic aids slow down fluency of teacher's language while teaching lessons.
- (8) Native English language teachers must not use figurative language, unfamiliar phrases, language slangs, jargons, and idiomatic expressions whereas they must use simple, easy and known vocabulary for the convenience of learners.

Some literary texts have much cultural information which arouses readers' reactions to a great extent. Some of the stories are universal in nature and replete with human values therefore learners of different cultures from all over the world can understand such type of stories easily; these stories do not require specific cultural background to go through them. On the other hand, the stories of specific cultural nature need learner's typical cultural knowledge and background to understand. Carefully selected goal oriented texts for a specific group of learners prove to be very supportive to understand a target culture.

## **Conclusion**

In the context of cross-culture communication, linguistic competency and the information of a culture of a desired community both are required to make an effective cross-cultural communication. Learners require cultural knowledge and linguistic competency for effective communication. In addition, a learner with great cultural knowledge must have grammatical, sociolinguistic, pragmatic competency and socio-cultural knowledge and intercultural awareness. The cross-cultural communication of English as a second or foreign language may connect with diverse communities with different cultural backgrounds that facilitate them to come into contact with others and language learners should be guided and encouraged to become competent intercultural speakers. A shift from a traditional to intercultural stance in EFL enhances students' awareness of the inextricable and interdependent relationship between language and culture and teaching culture as an integral component of language teaching. It also helps to develop teachers' intercultural perspectives that may have an impact on their language teaching methodology and syllabus design. This shift is a challenge that EFL teachers and learners have to deal with to meet the goals of foreign language education in our modern world.

Following are the recommendations for the teachers and learners of English language:

- TESL curriculum and syllabus must incorporate linguistic and cross-cultural components to make intercultural situation in classrooms and to deal with the challenges which learners may encounter.
- Cross-cultural contents, cultural background information, values and norms of learners' culture should be incorporated in current curricula for learners' awareness of cultural

differences in multicultural situations to avoid cultural issues may arise as a result of misinterpretations, ethnocentrism, and stereotypes.

- Teachers of TESL need to move from a conventional and traditional teaching practice to an intercultural one.
- TESL curriculum must be reinforced and expanded with supplementary material that would increase the progress of the learners cross-cultural understanding and communicative competence.

## REFERENCE LIST

- Alred, G., & Byram, M. (2002). Becoming an intercultural mediator. *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development*, 23(5), 339-352.
- Agar, M. (1994). *Language shock: Understanding the culture of conversation*. New York: William Morrow and Company.
- Barnett, G. A., & Lee, M. (2002). *Issues in intercultural communication*. W. Gudykunst and B. Mody (Ed.). Thousand Oaks: CA: Sage.
- Brooks, N. (1964). *Language and Language Learning* (2nd ed.). Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.
- Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a Global Language*. (1st Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Englebert (2004). Character or Culture? *An EFL Journal*, 24(2), 37-41.
- F. Gao, Language is culture: On intercultural communication, *Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 5(1), 2006, 58-67.
- Ho, Si Thang Kiet. 2009. *Addressing Culture in EFL Classrooms: The Challenge of Shifting from a Traditional to an Intercultural Stance*. National University of Singapore.
- Hall, E. T. (1959). *The silent language*. New York, Anchor Books: Doubleday.
- Hadley, A. O. (1993). *Teaching language in context*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publishers.

- Kirvalidze, N. (2017). Linguo-cultural and pragmatic peculiarities of the phenomenon of anglicisation in Georgia. *Journal of Teaching and Education*, 6(2), 269-280. USA: University Publications Net.
- Jiang, W. (1994). The relationship between culture and language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28(3), 138-146.
- Jenkins, J. (2000). *The phonology of English as an International Language*. Oxford:Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- J. Bennett, M. Bennett, and W. Allen, *Developing intercultural competence in the language classroom*, in *Culture as the core: Perspectives in second language learning (USA: Information Age Publishing, 2003)*.
- Kirvalidze, N. (2008). *A university course in text linguistics*. Tbilisi: Ilia Chavchavadze State University Press.
- Kaikkonen, P. (2001). Intercultural learning through foreign language education. In V. Kohonen, R. Jaatinen, P. Kaikkonen& J. Lehtovaara (Eds), *Experiential learning in foreign language education (pp.61-105)*. Harlow, Essex: Longman.
- Krasner, I. (1999). The role of culture in language teaching. *Dialogue on Language Instruction*, 13(1-2), 79-88.
- Kienle, A. W., & Loyd, N. L. (2005). Globalization and the emergence of supranational organizations: Implications for graduate programs in higher education administration. *College Student Journal*, 39(3), 580-587.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Lazar, G. (1993). Reading literature cross-culturally (pp. 62-67). *Literature and Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Liton, H. A., & Qaid, A. S. A. (2016). Addresssing intercultural communication issue in teaching English. *International Journal of Humanities and Applied Sciences (IJHAS)*, 5(1), 40-44.
- McKay, (2003). *Teaching English as an International Language: Rethinking goals and approaches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Norton, D. E. (1985). Language and cognitive development through multicultural literature. *Childhood Education*, 62(2), 103-108.
- Peterson, E., & Coltrane, B. (2003). *Culture in second language teaching (Digest)*. US: US Department of Education.
- Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (2001-2005). Retrieved October 8, 2005 from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia Web site: [http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/Sapir-Whorf\\_hypothesis](http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/Sapir-Whorf_hypothesis).
- Stern, H. H. (1992). *Issues and options in language teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Wardhaugh, R. (2002). *An introduction to sociolinguistics* (Fourth Ed.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Tavares, R.; Cavalcanti, I. (1996). Developing cultural awareness in EFL classrooms. *English Forum*, 34(3), 1-18
- Timmis, I. (2002). Native speaker norms and international English: A classroom view. *ELT Journal*, 56(3), 240-249.
- Tomalin, B., & Stempleski, S. (1993). *Cultural awareness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tomlinson, B., & Musuhara, H. (2004). Developing cultural awareness. *MET*, 13(1), 1-7