

A brief critical discussion of the five *savoirs* that Byram and his associates use to define intercultural communicative competence.

In previous years the cultural aspect of English language learning had been omitted, and syllabus design based mainly on needs analysis. Recently, however, there have been fresh attempts to integrate culture into the communicative curriculum. Dell Hymes first coined the idea of communicative competence as a response to the idea that “rules of use, without which rules of grammar would be useless” (Hymes, 1972: 278). This prompted curriculum design to look beyond grammatical accuracy as the most important function of foreign language teaching and learning. Language was made more meaningful by placing it in real world situations and with the changes made to curriculum design language development and improvement became equally weighted with intercultural understanding. One reason, along with others, for the dramatic change in the way second language learning is taught is because of the work done by Mike Byram on the five *Savoirs*.

Morrow and Johnson *Communication in the Classroom* (1981) was a guide for teachers in the new approach to language learning and addressed the issue of learners being grammatically capable but unaware of the communicative side of language learning. Johnson saw the solution in using needs analysis and a notional functional syllabus to correct the imbalance, while Morrow aligned with information gap activities as the main type of classroom task. Both components largely assumed that language was concerned mostly with doing things, i.e. the transactional function of language. This approach gave rise to the procedural or task based approach to learning. The notional functional syllabus enjoyed a strong institutional backing in Europe.

Wilkins (1972, 1976) put forward a syllabus that was organised according to the range of notions that language can express, frequency, duration, quantity and the communicative functions performed through language, offering, declining etc.. Wilkins' work was influential in changing EFL course books, they often asked students to express abstract notions verbally, to express quantities, and describe clinical processes. On the other hand, Loveday (1981) Argues against focusing solely on the transactional functions of language, communicative competence courses are leaving out valuable information about the target culture. It is impossible to teach a

student everything they are likely to need to know about the target culture therefore the EFL teacher needs to make learners aware of possibility of difference in other cultures (Corbett, 2003: 20-24)

Since the late 1980's there has been renewed interest in the integration of culture into the language learning classroom in Europe, Asia and the U.S. Language learning as acculturation is the process by which learners are encouraged to function within the new culture while at the same time maintaining their own identity. Stern (1992) assumes that the ultimate goal of language education is to create a bicultural learner. This is primarily a North American approach to language teaching. Some textbooks are beginning to emerge that directly address the challenges of learning languages in multicultural context. On the other hand language learning as enculturation involves integrating learners into the target culture so that they can become as close to it as possible. In this approach learners are made aware of the common culture, consisting of facts and myths which act as a binding agent for the nation. This is quite an extreme approach, whereby learners are asked to negate their home culture in favour of the target culture. This approach is not favoured by the intercultural approach.

The intercultural approach assumes that cultural topics are interesting and motivating and that acculturation is important. The intercultural approach differs from other approaches to second language teaching; it puts intercultural knowledge and skills to centre stage making them part of the curriculum. Moreover it acknowledges ICC rather than native speaker proficiency as the ultimate goal.

Intercultural Communicative Competence holds the main aim that language learners will gain valuable knowledge and skills about the target language. It was a concept considered by Mike Byram in 1997 when he was originally devising the Five Savoirs, which offer the most fully worked out specification of Intercultural Communicative Competence. The Five Savoirs can be roughly described as five formulations of the kinds of knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to mediate between cultures (Corbett, 2003: 31). They are as follows (Byram, 1997b: 34):

1. Savoirs: Knowledge of self and other; of how interaction occurs of the relationship of the individual to society.
2. 'Savoir etre': Knowing how to interpret and relate information. Refers to the ability to approach intercultural learning with curiosity, openness and reflexivity.
3. 'Savoir comprendre': Knowing how to engage with the political consequences of education; being critically aware of cultural behaviours. Involves learning how to interpret and explain cultural practices or documents and to compare them with aspects of one's own culture
4. 'Savoir apprendre': Knowing how to discover cultural information. Indicates the ability to make discoveries through personal involvement in social interaction.
5. 'Savoir s'engager': Knowing how to be: how to relativise oneself and value the attitudes and beliefs of others. Refers to the ability to make informed critical evaluations of aspects of one's own and other cultures.

This set of aims or goals for gaining Intercultural Communicative Competence transformed the eventual goals of the communicative curriculum. Learners are expected to accumulate facts about the target culture, and know something about how people from the target culture might be expected to behave. It is important that the five savoirs are not considered as isolated components but rather as component pieces that are integrated with the various dimensions of communicative competence (Sercu, 2002: 63)

## Bibliography

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