IMPORTATION OF CROSS-CULTURAL ELEMENTS TO NEGOTIATE ALIENATED TARGET CULTURE IN AN ENGLISH LITERATURE CLASSROOM

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INTRODUCTION

In the English Language classroom, while the language teachers were trying to teach multiple alienated literary texts, the students from upper schools, who are from multi-sociocultural settings, expressed lack of familiarity and resistance in perceiving the target language cultures. Fascinatingly, in such language situations, I observed that the teachers from differentiating settings, imported other estranged language and cultural elements to convey the target language effectively and tried to co-construct knowledge via meta-talk and constructive discussions and criticisms. Keeping this view in mind, I chose the above research topic to gain in-depth insights into the challenges teachers come across in relation to intercultural teaching and the added advantage of using diverse cultural features to teach an alienated cultural element that is a part of multiple cultures discussed in the English language resources. In this light, I chose this research topic to shed light on the following questionable phenomena.

Thus, this study is based on the following research questions:

1) What are the challenges faced by the teachers in dealing with diversified culture representations in both spoken and written discourse in the English Literature classroom?
2) How does the importation of new cultural information mediate the tensions created by the alienated target culture found in the English Literature textbooks?

The first objective is to find the limitations teachers have to deal with; as a daily reality in conveying diversified literary texts, both in spoken and written discourse, in a multicultural classroom within the Sri Lankan context. Secondly, to notice the effectiveness of applying alienating cultural content to discuss another- alienated target culture to the students belonging to the multicultural social settings. This also helps us analyze the insider's (teachers) perspective in dealing with these limitations and resolve the problems that occur in intercultural language teaching effectively.

METHODOLOGY

This descriptive study will focus on how target culture is represented in both spoken and written discourse while engaging in intercultural language teaching encountered by the upper school English Literature teachers in their day-to-day teaching experiences. The study will make use of a qualitative approach, as it will be the most viable and suitable strategy to be applied in this context of the study. This study focuses on teacher's perceptions, which are subjective and immeasurable. An ethnographic research design has been adopted because this approach facilitates the identification of English teachers' perspectives and insights individually to detect the many limitations faced by them while teaching the diversified written discourse in the English Literature classroom. Before pioneering the final semi-structured interview, the researcher made use of a pilot interview and a pre-prepared interview schedule to find the authenticity and comprehensibility of the interview schedule. Subsequently, the researcher had an interview with two ESL teachers from upper school and had a final in-depth interview for about 40-60 minutes. Furthermore,

I observed twenty- four classroom observations and jotted down fifteen analytical memos, which aided me in finding the ground reality of the limitations. As a result, I was able to observe how diverse teachers from different backgrounds were able to negotiate diversified target culture-embedded literary texts effectively across diversified students using varying cultural references. Furthermore, the textbook discussions were applied to detect the diverse

alienated target cultures and cross- cultural elements in the local ordinary level syllabus, to compare and contrast the relevancy of the classroom observations and interviews in relation to the textbook. This has also helped me triangulate the findings of these ethnographic tools and examine to ensure the authenticity and validity of the research outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Acquisition of Language does not restrict itself to structuralism, but it goes beyond, and the emerging results of new research showcase that language and culture are inseparable phenomenon. This view is reiterated by Davitishvili (2017) as she says that English as a second language does not limit itself merely to the attainment of phonology, morphology, lexicology, and syntax but embeds target- culture accumulation and caters to cultural consciousness within the students. Davitishvili (2017) also elaborates that by familiarizing students with multiple languages, cultures, lifestyles, and points of views, language acquisition becomes an easier and a more meaningful process. Tran and Dang (2014) express the view that both culture and language are inseparable phenomena, and attempting to detach into separate elements creates artificial nature to the language learning process. Furthermore, culture-infused teaching constructs more openness and tolerance in learning the target language and promotes cross-cultural understanding. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (as   cited in Turuk, 2008) also supports a similar claim, as his theory focuses on internalizing culture and language to promote academic success in the long run. Vygotsky's theory is seconded by Oranje (2012). He suggests that cultural mediators must shed light on detailing even the 'small cultures' which are invisible and not easily noticeable by the students alone to promote culture-embedded learning in the ESL classroom. Here, the teachers play a prominent role in producing opportunities and in transmitting culture-embedded language knowledge to the students. As a result, the stereotypical views against particular language and cultural groups and demeaning certain groups of people as 'little cultures' can be eradicated. It must be noted that cultural tensions are formed due to the diverse nature of both in-school and out – school cultures. Hafner (2012) recommends that when such culture tensions occur the classroom practitioners apply numerous brainstorming techniques and scaffolding methods to negotiate these cultural clashes and to explore the third space which prevails within the classroom context. The conflicts which exist within the English classrooms can be resolved by both students and teachers through collaborative discussions about multiple social spaces and histories. Such discussion, which takes place in classroom spaces, makes room for multiple voices and perspectives to be articulated. Even though, the heterogeneous nature of the classroom generates conflicts, these can be resolved by the teachers by applying numerous mitigation techniques such as importing historical and other culture- related information, recalling the schematic information, and use of audio, visual aids, and digital media. Dema and Moeller (2012) point out that, according to the cultural triangle (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1999), emphasis on the significant nature of 3P's such as products, practices, and perceptions. The dependence on the teachers and textbooks alone cannot improve the diffusion of the target culture without the perceptions being taken into account. Rodriguez-Fornells et el. (2012) point out through survey results, which showed that only 46% of authentic materials and 41% of lecture methods of presenting the target culture did not convey the culture content successfully, as these methods lacked in-depth cultural understanding. But the use of co- constructive interactions of diversified cultures and the application of digital resources will add more prolific outcomes. Notably, the dynamic nature of the multilingualism approach also influences the target culture acquisitions. This reveals that language and culture are intertwined - the students can be motivated to acquire a new language alongside its cultural elements by applying co-constructive intercultural language learning   strategies.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

During the classroom observations, I noticed that the students depicted a sense of intense disagreement in perceiving culturally contrasted ideologies. For example, the students were projecting disapproval whenever Clara: the upper school English Literature teacher discussed

the western ideologies such as living together, the western lifestyle which was projected in the Indian novel 'The Vendor of Sweets'. The teacher engaged in qualitative discussions on the related topic by drawing in examples from Hollywood star couples such as Bred Pitt-Angelina Jolie, Chris Hemsworth -Elsa Pataki. Although the students gave body gestures and monotonous expressions such as 'no' and 'haram' (taboo) as expressions of disapproval, after the teacher's discussion in relation to modern lifestyle, cost of living and women's status in the present society, the students nodded their heads in approval and one of them even said "western culture - It is acceptable" "have seen in movies" as a reflection of acceptance towards the modern lifestyle and to indicate the comprehensibility in relation to the ideology of living together concept. Notably, in another instance when Clara discussed the polytheists' religious ideologies in relation to Hinduism in the Indian novel, the students contributed in the conversation by recalling their perceived experiences which they have observed among their neighbors and friends. Interestingly, in this situation even though the students are from monotheist religious background they did seem to comprehend other religious concepts with lesser degree of resistance. The teachers imported a new alienated concept of foot binding, a Chinese traditional practice to discuss another alienated concept such as the Russian society and women's emancipation and status during the times of Checkov. Interestingly, Clara based her majority of discussions from culturally distance concepts such as the Victorian time period and English cultures constantly. Even though the students had a stereotypical mindset and generalized English culture as 'haram' eventually they were able to mitigate and comprehend the target culture through constructive discussions. Additionally, meta-talk enabled both the teacher and students to reflect deeply about the target language. For instance, when Clara was discussing the novel *The vendor of sweets* she came across Jagan's food habit of consuming Margosa flowers fried in ghee once a week . She instantly used the term 'Vadagam' pertaining to Jaffna Tamil, and discussed about this word's origin and its cultural significance. Bhagya: an upper school English Literature teacher while discussing the working emancipation referred to women being allowed to drive vehicles in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan as examples. Although the male students initially disapproved of it as a cultural degrading to Islam. Subsequently, the classroom practitioner's cross cultural examples of independent women such as Malala Yousafzai and Benazir Bhutto and their achievements present Islamic women's status in Sri Lankan society. These constructive discussions made the male students to express their changed opinions by nodding their heads in approval and through positive responses such as "yes", "true miss" and "yeah".

CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative study shows to us whenever the teacher came across alienated target culture concepts they made use of cross cultural references and at times they even imported new cultural examples to illustrate and to explain the alienated target culture content. Majority of the teachers created schematic connections to cultural information they have come across in relation to food habits, life style, traditional practices, belief system and even popular media entertainment. These cross cultural examples were compared and contrasted against the alienated target culture contents. Based on these findings, it would be effective for the classroom practitioners to make use of relatable cross cultural examples and new cultural information to teach alienated target culture effectively without much effort. In a nutshell, it becomes clear to us that even though the target culture itself is an alienated culture to our native students the importation of other alienated references has become a valuable teaching resource. It even makes the target culture learning an interesting and enjoyable experience, to remember.

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