ELT and Cross-Cultural Communication

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Abstract:

Une première partie de cet article explore le domaine de l'enseignement des langues étrangères dans le contexte culturel en Algérie. Le cursus de la Licence d'anglais actuel est utilisé comme base de travail. L'attitude, la motivation et la personnalité de l'étudiant en langues étrangères sont décrites et comparées aux caractéristiques de l'environnement universitaire et social pour situer le degré de contact avec la langue cible. Certains aspects de l'identité culturelle et de la politique des langues étrangères en Algérie sont également abordés dans cet article.

La deuxième partie de cet article traite de la question sur la variété d'Anglais (British English / American English) à enseigner. Ceci relance le débat, entre autres, sur l'éloignement géographique de la langue cible, la formation des formateurs, les échanges commerciaux, les médias, et surtout la motivation et la réaction de l'apprenant vis-à-vis d'une variété ou de l'autre. Des différences aux niveaux phonétique/phonologique, lexical, morphosyntaxique et même orthographique sont illustrées tout en insistant sur leur impact dans des modules de langue et des modules de contenu.

The past thirty years or so have seen an increasing interest in English Language Teaching (or ELT). ELT has boomed and proliferated all over the world not only in universities, language centres, books and articles but also in economic spheres such as trade, commerce and industry. This increasing interest is mainly the result of the tremendous work conducted by EFL policy makers, most of whom where British in the first place, then American. English has thus become a world commodity for International communication at the expense of other major languages. It has been also eagerly adopted in the world linguistic marketplace. Symptomatic of this state of affairs is the large use of English words and expressions in other languages, known linguistically as borrowing. The borrowing does not necessarily result from social contacts with English people and customs. It is more due to the dominant position of English in among others the spheres of science, technology, transnational business, diplomacy and international organisations, as well as in educational systems. As a matter of fact, English is the most widely learnt foreign language. Sources like Gage and Ohannessian (1974) estimate to 115 million learners at school level by the early 1970s. British Council sources stress on the need for around 100.000 new teachers of English for 30 million learners in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s[1]. These figures reflect the functional load English has in world communication.

Nevertheless, this boom of English worldwide has its drawbacks for the language teacher. A wide range of technical terms and methodologies have come to be used in the teaching of this language at an alarming pace. The teacher is often exposed to a whole range of technical terms that do not always reflect his actual language teaching situation and which confuse not only the neophyte teacher but also the most experienced one. Some of the most recurrent of these terms are ESL, EFL and ELT, English as a Second Language, English as a Foreign Language, and English Language Teaching, respectively.

ESL normally applies to countries where English is used for communication among the natives of another language in various social settings. Most frequently, it is the means of communication in domains

[1]. This is according to the Annual British Council Report, 1989/90:17.

such as education and government. Such is the case of countries like India or Nigeria. ESL is also frequently used in the US to refer to programmes of English teaching to non-natives of English who are immigrants. EFL, on the other hand, applies to those countries where English is not a medium of instruction nor is it used in governmental spheres. Such is the case in France or Algeria. The language is learnt at school and university for various purposes like studies, work, or travel. Thus, these two different English language situations (ESL/EFL) require different teaching needs as the degrees of exposure to English outside school may vary completely from one extreme to another. However, it is not always easy to draw a clear-cut line between ESL and EFL settings. A case in point would be that of Bangladesh. This country is renown for ESL teaching. Yet, the amount of English that the Bangladeshi children are exposed to is so small that ESL strategies may not be required at all. The teaching would probably be better if organised for EFL than ESL syllabi. Similarly, English language learning programmes for immigrants in Britain are more of an EFL type than an ESL type. Yet, their daily exposure to English requires more an ESL than an EFL programme of the type the ELT Gazette in Britain often cites.

The term ESL is also used as a cover-term for different types of learners. Typical of these types are the immigrant learners in Britain and the US or the children in Bangladeshi schools or Kenyan schools where English is the means of education but not the mother tongue. Obviously, these two types of learners differ not only in the amount and type of English required by their respective social environments but also in the degree to which the mother tongue is used outside home. Their language learning needs should thus be reflected in pedagogical strategies adequately implemented rather than mere cover terms such as ESL.

On the other hand, ELT in Britain is mostly monolingual in its approach. The teacher is usually a native of English whose knowledge of the learner's cultural background may not be sufficient or adequate. In EFL settings, however, the teacher is bilingual. This appears in the classroom either through translation types of approach the teacher may use, or his knowledge of the learners' mother tongue. In both cases this improves rather than impedes the teaching/learning process as the teacher and the

learner can both recur to comparative strategies for better foreign language teaching and learning.

It is this sort of fuzziness in the introduction and use of both terms, ESL and EFL, together with the sometimes confusing distinction between learning situations inside and outside the school system, and particularly between learning a native language, a second language, and a foreign language that led us to opt for the somehow neutral term ELT in this paper.

Before discussing ELT at tertiary level in Algeria with the 'ILE Licence d'Anglais' as a standpoint, mention should be made of the general cultural and educational background of the BA student of English at the I.L.E.

Prior to the 1980s, the student's profile was that of a baccalaureate holder with a minimum 12 out of 20 in English and an overall average of 11 out of 20 in the exam. The « série lettres » holders (literature students) were given priority. The candidate had to take an interview and a written test, both of which were conducted in English. Socially, the father was a skilled worker who usually lived in an urban area. Some of the freshers came from mixed secondary schools. Their motives for English language studies were more integrative and cultural than vocational. They were dictated somehow by the environment in the city (American and English folksongs, films, the British Council, The Afro-American Institute, etc.). The curriculum was then based on a 'credit system' where modules had pre-requisites. The student would not register for a second year module until he/she got the corresponding first year module. The same applied for third year modules, which represented the final year in the BA in English Language Teaching. The teaching staff was partly national and partly expatriates (UK, Australia New Zealand, India), and US. Algeria was then a promising oil and gas producer heading for socio-economic prosperity.

In the 1980s, a massive program for higher studies abroad (mainly in the UK) for the national teaching staff was launched. At the same time, a drastic reduction in the foreign teaching staff took place. This period of fluctuation in terms of teaching personnel, coupled with the crash in oil prices of 1986, was also characterised by the use of new approaches and teaching methods dispatched via ministerial instructions (the communicative approach) which have taken aback most teachers who were neither prepared nor trained for this purpose. Furthermore, with the advent

of computing in Algeria, a new approach to university registration was put to work. It still holds nowadays. The student has three choices and he is selected by the computer on the basis of the scores obtained in English and in the general average in the baccalaureate. Socio-economically, the profile of the new student is characterised by a mixed urban/rural origin and different social backgrounds. This reflects somehow the democratisation of the teaching in the country. Holders of a baccalaureate « Série sciences » (Science students) could register for the BA provided they are selected by the computer. In most cases, however, they come with a relatively weak background in English. The motives have become more instrumental than cultural, and the teaching staff is fully national, most of which is trained locally and on the spot.

Within an ELT context, attitude and motivation may vary substantially. The concepts of attitude and motivation are key concepts in the ELT paraphernalia. However, they are not always clearly distinguished. Attitude here refers to the general state of apprehension in the student towards the target language and culture, although as pointed out earlier, direct contact with the native speaker is virtually nil. The attitude of the student was not always easy to determine as his/her responses to our questions fluctuated between a mixed reaction to the language structure in terms of intra-language difficulties and behaviour towards the language and its speakers. Globally, English is regarded as a necessary 'open window' to the West. Some closely link it to computing and science. Others are keen to open-heartedly absorb the culture and customs of the English people without necessarily knowing why. Others still, insist on the fact that English must not disconnect them from their culture and their language, Classical Arabic, a language of a major tradition, they maintain. This stems from the general belief that French tried to do it once by pushing Classical Arabic to be recluse to the religious spheres and the Mosque. It appears then that from an attitudinal standpoint, the student is keen to be introduced to the English world and culture. But consciously or unconsciously, the tendency is for mutual exchange. Outside university (i.e. in the bus, in a café, etc.) the student invites somehow the native speaker of English to make some effort to understand his own culture. But how can the native speaker do it, as direct contact doesn't take place. I often heard my students say, « why

don't they understand us? Is it because of our language or because of our traditions » (probably, meaning 'our Religion'). This reaction seems legitimate. As William Riley Parker, Secretary of the Modern Language Association of America rightly puts it: « .... One language makes a wall; it takes two to make a gate.... » (1954)[2].

Motivation, on the other hand, is more easily established. It appears clearly through the student's scores in English. Brown (1980:112) observes that « motivation is probably the most often used catch-all term for explaining the success or failure of virtually any complex task ». Surprisingly enough, motivation was not vocational in the first place for the pre-1980 student as a BA degree in English offered at that time a wide range of job openings (teaching of course, journalism, translation work with American oil companies established in Algeria like BECHTEL, EL PASO etc., banking to some extent, and further studies abroad). In the post 1980 era, professional vocation (teaching, if one is lucky enough to get a job) constitutes the most important motivation factor for the student. Motivation then is primarily instrumental rather than integrative. Gardner and Lambert (1972: 3) argue that «a student is said to be instrumentally motivated if the purposes of language study reflect the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement, such as getting ahead in one's occupation».

The main reason behind this tendency of the student towards instrumental motivation is dictated by two major factors:

a. A lack of summer schools abroad. In the pre-1980 era, the best students were often sent to Britain for a summer course offered by the British Council.

The scarcity of books and a vacuum in social activities such as the lack of theatre plays in English, films, etc. are also to blame.

b. Socio-economic factors. Lack of funds to travel abroad because the father is unemployed or he cannot afford to send his daughter/son abroad. Even for those who are lucky money wise, the problem still persists with the difficulty to get a visa.

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[2]. Quoted from Theo van els et al. p. 173.

In fact, motivational props at the family and university levels are scares for the student nowadays. This appears in his basic need in ELT, which is to get a degree for a teaching job. It is clearly summarised in expressions used among students and produced in the mother tongue. These may be translated as: « I want to lock the module», «I only need half a point to close my module», «I don't think I'll be able to close the module this year ».

The student's personality has also changed a lot in comparison to the 1980s. While the student of English was then more extrovert and open minded in comparison with students of other disciplines at the ILE and at University in general, he has become more introvert and reserved in recent years. This is clearly observed in conversation classes where very few students seem to be outgoing, adventuresome, talkative and sociable. The conversation class, an overcrowded class, is characterised by students who are reserved, shy and quiet. Surprisingly enough, the boys are more so than the girls. It is said that extroversion makes better language learners in the oral skills than introversion. This appears when conversation tests are conducted and where extrovert students usually score better than introvert students. The latter seem to have less oral communicative ability in English than the former. Nevertheless, this remains an observation and has to be analysed further.

These characteristics of the student are closely linked to environmental characteristics for ELT. On the whole, direct contact with the native speaker does not exist. Programs such as «Follow me» and «On we go» that used to be shown on Algerian TV have disappeared from the screen. This may be due to a shortage of supplies in the series. It may also be the result of a dictated language policy. The only contact then, remains through networks via the satellite dish and through the written literature available on the spot, i.e. in the I.L.E. library and perhaps in some bookshops in town. A type of unidirectional contact that is not always very motivating for the student.

The second aspect of environmental characteristics is the ILE teaching/learning environment. The teacher who used to be taken as a model for English language and culture doesn't hold that place of pride anymore. His teaching has become routine work with the same modules

being taught over the years without keeping on a par with new theoretical trends. This is mainly true for content modules. Even the topics in oral expression, reading comprehension and listening comprehension are the same year in year out. The lack of teaching material, documented literature, teacher training courses, adequate teaching programs etc. does not help to overcome this university vacuum where social tensions undermine the teaching itself. In fact, the whole question on the teacher's attitude to English and his motivation towards teaching and the foreign language course remains open to debate. Suffice here to say that the quality of L2 instruction needs to be discussed at length, as we believe it represents the most important factor in the student's success or failure in the BA.

The teacher's attitude towards English may be related to the question on cultural identity and foreign language policy. In this respects, Stern (1963) points out that « the learning of a second language must be regarded as a necessary part of total personality formation in the modern world, since it should enable a person to live and move freely in more than one culture and free him from the limitations imposed by belonging to, and being educated within a single cultural group or a single linguistic community». This is in fact what most ministerial instruction stress on when it comes to foreign language instruction in Algeria. In reality, it's a totally different matter. When the student reaches university, he comes with a cultural background in his own language (Arabic, Berber) and in the second language (i.e. French), with poor knowledge of English language and culture although he has already been taught English for five years. It is in this background knowledge layer made of a mixture of Arabic (including Berber) culture and French culture, that the question of cultural identity is discussed here. To limit our discussion within the scope of this paper, identity is equated to that state of distinctiveness of a society or individual also known as « forces propres ». Cultural identity here refers to a cognitive system of knowledge and beliefs which determines the way in which norms and values are expressed through language while attitudes and behaviour are performed. This knowledge encompasses not only the cultivation of the mind but also a whole pattern of life with norms, values, attitudes and the spiritual manifestations of a given social group. In the

case of Algeria, the question of the cultural heritage (Arabic as a language of a major tradition and the search for a hypothetical Panarabism) has always been an important criterion or parameter in any debate on educational policies which are set to consolidate this « common heritage of the Algerian Peoples » in the first place. The question of accommodating the demands of modernity has scarcely been taken into account. Countries like Japan are often cited in this respect where perhaps more traditional cultures such as the traditional culture of Japan have successfully though not always easily accommodated the demands of modernity. In spite of post war American tutelage, the Japanese society has kept its traditional culture with renewed confidence and has never rejected Modernity. The Japanese were successful not only in achieving technological development but also in protecting their traditional culture.

Failure to do the same in Algeria is perhaps due to the fact that most, if not all, Muslim societies are currently undergoing a profound cultural crisis which is the result of their unrealistic and sometimes hectic adoption at various levels of Western educational patterns in their search for modernity and know-how. The implementation of the fundamental school system in Algeria is but only one example. Moreover, the western system of education is secular in nature, and both critical and speculative in its approach. As such, it stands in conflict with the traditional system of beliefs and culture, which is deeply rooted in Muslim societies. Another possible reason lays in this system of beliefs in itself which is characterised by the binary polarity haram/halal (forbidden/permitted) that does not allow much of a choice for accommodating all the demands of modernity.

The process of modernisation, even if it has to rest upon an existing traditional system of identity as it is the case in Algeria, for the sake of economic development, must include educational policies with adaptations of various kinds, ranging from social structure and national consciousness, art and science to language patterns acquired formally or informally. Well-adapted diversity makes for the endurance and innovating power of cultural identity rather than hampers it.

Third world countries are considered far more advanced with respect to foreign language learning (English in particular) than more developed countries, although instruction per se does not follow suit. The native

speaker of English does not always feel the need for foreign languages as English remains a dominant language. In most third world countries, English has become a lingua franca. As Ferguson (1983) puts it « the spread of English accelerated, transforming existing patterns of international communication » (p. 9). This being so, the question remains as to how and what we should teach our students in the 'Licence'. The quality of L2 instruction is not effective enough to achieve an adequate teaching/learning that not only allows the student to cultivate himself for a better cross-cultural communication but also to preserve his own 'forces propres' and cultural identity. No adequate responsive educational or pedagogical programmes have been suggested this far. The BA curriculum dates back to the 1980s (perhaps prior to this date) and no substantial change has been brought about in spite of the drastic changes in the social-economic environment. Furthermore, the teacher lacks qualified ELT professionalism despite new ELT methodologies and approaches that proliferate in the market. The teaching is often done hastily with no suitable teaching material or adequately trained instructors. The proliferation of EFL/ESL methodologies and approaches that often reach the teacher late, left him confused if not intimidated in his task. The ILE is somehow lucky enough in the sense that it has a number of PhD holders who specialised in different disciplines in English (Linguistics, Literature, Civilisation, etc.), but we still fail to develop appropriate teaching methods and curricula that produce foreign language competence. This may be the result of the confusion often made between language as an educational end versus a means to an end. As teachers, we still use English as an educational end (i.e. leading to a BA degree). We do not always see it as a means to an end, i.e. a language that opens up ways to global communication and modernity. The question often raised is where does the problem actually lay? Some teachers and course designers see it in the dissimilarity that exists between L1 and L2 which affects language instruction, while they agree that the cultural background (Arabic/French) of the learner may help bridge this gap. Others blame what they call a 'malaise des cloisonnements universitaires' and a 'malaise social', which hinder the development of a proper English language curriculum for the BA student. A third group points at the student himself whose motivation

has become purely instrumental in the learning process. Course designers in particular; insist that linguistics is no more the only suitable source discipline for FLT. Other source disciplines such as psychology, sociology, education and pedagogy can all contribute to the development of suitable FLT programmes in Algeria. In any case, everybody agrees that the lack of internal support (governmental funds) and external material and moral support have a direct impact on the quality of instruction. This issue has to be debated at length.

The question that raises next concerns the variety or varieties of English the student must be exposed to. In the case of Algeria, the learner's needs are more personal than social as far as English is concerned, although there's a strong claim for introducing English at an earlier stage of the socialisation process at the expense of French. In the syllabus, the needs are mainly geared towards communicative needs (cf. the communicative approach in secondary schools) in order to get familiar with the culture, way of life and more specifically the literature of the target language. The choice at secondary and tertiary levels is for British English following the patterns inherited from France, the former colony, where British English is taught in schools and at universities. The geographical space is also a determining factor in the choice for British English. Britain is geographically closer to Algeria than the USA. From a practical standpoint, however, the learner is more likely to have professional contact with the Americans locally than with the British as it is the case in most oil areas in Algeria for those students who could not get a proper teaching post.

This paper encourages the idea that the student must be introduced to both British English and American English. The teacher of modules such as American literature and civilisation is bound to encounter difficulties if he himself is not aware of differences between the two varieties. Most European countries have opted in the past for British English. However, the desire to exclusively opt for this variety of English among teachers and students alike decreases more and more as General English, also called «Network English» because of its use on TV is taking over British English worldwide.

Obvious grammatical and lexical differences such as 'I've gotten' (US) and 'I've got' (Br.E.) or 'hood' (US) and 'bonnet' (Br.E.) are commonly

known and do not necessarily pose a learning problem to the student. Differences at other linguistic levels are often a source of difficulty. Some of the differences are outlined here for comparison purposes[3].

Phonetic/Phonemic Differences:

WORD	RP	Gen.Am
beta	bi:ta	beita
charade	♦★r:d	♦★reid
erase	ireiz	ireis
herb	h:b	★rb
leisure	le★	li★r
schedule	♦edju:l	sked ul
vase	v:z	veis ~ veiz

[3] . The examples given here are taken from François Chevillet (1991) : Les variété de l'Anglais, Serie Fac, Langues Etrangères, NATHAN. (chapter 4, pp. 147-188).

Lexical differences :

Lexeme	GB	US
homely	ugly	homey/ homy
mad	angry	crazy
sick	ill	queasy
vest	waistcoat	undershirt
	Bank of England	Federal Reserve
	bill	ckeck
	commercial traveller	travelling salesman
	current account	checking account
	estate agent	realtor
	Foreign Office	State Department
	phone sb.	call sb up
	reverse the charges	call collect
	bill ~ account	account
	off-licence	liquor store

Morphosyntactic Aspects:
Articles:

GB	US
to be at ∅ table	to be at the table
to be in ∅ hospital	to be in the hospital
in ∅ future	in the future
to be at ∅ university	to be at a university

Prepositions:

GB	US
He placed it behind the shed.	He placed it in back of the shed
She hasn't seen him for months.	She hasn't seen him in months.
I talked to him yesterday.	I talked with him yesterday.
He threw it out of the window.	He threw it out the window.
It's ten past eight.	It's ten after eight.
The train departed from London.	The train departed ∅ New York.
People protested against the law.	People protested ∅ the law.
He visited ∅ his old aunt.	He visited with his old aunt.
They battled against the enemy.	They battled ∅ the enemy.

Prepositional verbs:

GB	US
To fill in a form	To fill out a form
The police are checking up on him.	The police is checking him out.
He was named after his grandfather	He was named for his grandfather.
The workers came out (= strike)	The workers went out

Orthography/ Spelling

GB	US
armour	armor
behaviour	behavior
colour	color
favour	favor
centre	center
metre	meter
theatre	theater
apologise	apologize
civilise	civilize
dramatise	dramatize
enclose	inclose
enquire	inquire

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