

Implications of Intercultural Communicative Competence in English Language Teaching/Learning in the 21st Century

Dr Sujarani Mathew

ABSTRACT

English language has come a long way from being the coloniser's tongue to an international language. It is now considered the means of intercultural communication between the native speakers of English and the second (or even)/ foreign language learners of the medium. So the new concept of ICC (Intercultural Communicative Competence) in ELT classrooms has assumed significance in the globalised era. Language and culture are two sides of a coin, learning a foreign language also includes learning the target culture. This is imperative to communicate with people of various countries in real-time situations which is highly possible in the existing scenario of the global village, in the 21st century. At present ICC is applauded as the perspective in ELT which moulds the learner to become balanced mediators between their own and other cultures with cultural and Communicative Competence in the English language. The article intends to make a comprehensive view of the significance of this concept in the present language classroom and how it is different from the earlier concept of communicative competence which had informed language pedagogy. The different methods used in ELT before the 1950s and the relative merit of the later designer (humanistic) approaches are also detailed. The latest approaches of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) are considered to be best employed in acquiring Intercultural Communicative Competence. The learning methods, materials as well as the scope of such learners as skilled ethnographers are also dealt with in this paper.

Keywords: Intercultural Communicative Competence, Kachru's circles, Globalisation, Target culture/language, CLT/TBLT, Metacultural perception

English, the Global Language, used across the world for science and technology as well as the internet has expanded from being the prime official language of a small group of nations in the West to the lingua franca in the Eastern countries like India and Singapore to China, Germany and others. This is explicated in Kachru's circles (1989), where English expands from the inner circle of countries where English

is the primary language; to the outer circle where English is the second language in a multilingual country; to the expanding circle where English is studied as a foreign language. Kachru's cycle which became a potent field of interest pointed at the need to understand the culture associated with this target language for all (second and foreign language) learners of English. This can be done by encouraging interculturalism, where

learners can try to understand other cultures in relation to their own (Kramersch1993).

Over the past two decades, significant changes have taken place in ELT since the new concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence has taken the rank of a key factor. Hitherto, Communicative Competence(CC) or the ability to hold discourse in the target language in linguistically, pragmatically and socio-linguistically correct mode, was only considered of value. But now it has become apparent that linguistic competence alone does not answer the need. Now it is seen to be imperative that language should be wielded with culturally appropriate behaviour. Formal and informal occasions of casual give and take in everyday life and social manners could be enhanced with an understanding of the (target)cultural ethos and behaviour.

Intercultural communicative competence is the capacity and ability to enter other cultures and communicate effectively and appropriately, establish and maintain relationships and carry out tasks with people of these cultures. ...According to Meyer(1991), this competence refers to the “ability of a person to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures.” This definition, in fact, adds to the notion of communicative competence and enlarges it to incorporate intercultural competence. (qt in Heidari et al, 2014)

Culture and language are inextricably intertwined since language alone can express culture and culture becomes the context for language. So intercultural communication becomes productive only when the participants are attuned to the social and cultural portent of the words/symbols

used. “Language is used to convey meaning, but the meaning is determined by culture” (Heidari et al, p6). Thus meaningful language is culture bound and culture specific (Damen1987). Language is used to participate in the culture, describe the culture, interpret the culture and respond to the culture (Moran2001).

The teaching of foreign culture in the Foreign Language curriculum began in the 1960s with the impact of Lado’s *Linguistics Across Cultures* (1957), Brooks’ *Language and Language Theory* (1964), Nostrand’s *A Second Culture*(1967)etc. In the 1980s the dynamics of culture in FL/SL learning began to be studied closely with the works by Damen (1987), Robinson (1988), Seelye (1993), Valdes(1986), and Byram (1988).

In the 1990s, globalization made its impact on language teaching/learning. English as a Global / International language came to stay. Here Kachru’s circle comes into focus. Accordingly, a diverse study of cultures including non-western cultures came to be included while studying EFL/ESL across these countries:



It is in this context that, communicative competence (CC) of English came to be questioned. Non-native speakers of English also emerge in the intercultural context and this requires new techniques for language interpretation. Globalisation as well as the arrival of the internet has powered the teaching/learning of modern language and culture.

The earliest methods followed for language teaching had been discarded in favour of non-humanistic approaches by the turn of the 1950s. The Communicative Approach (CLT) held sway for a long time during which, Communicative Competence (coined so by Hymes in 1972) was considered the nodal point for the second language (SL)/ foreign language (FL) acquisition. Brown (2001) modifies Canale and Swain's (1980) model of CC as giving focus to four aspects of communication:

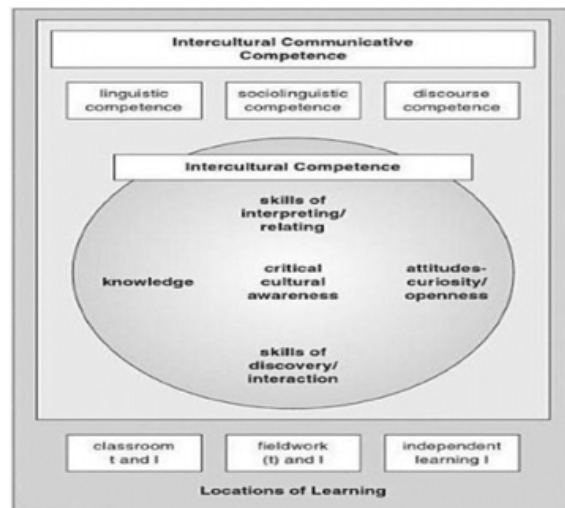
1. Organizational(grammar and discourse)
2. Pragmatic(functional and socio-linguistic)
3. Strategic(recognize and repair communication breaks)
4. Psychomotor competencies

Learning of the target culture in this manner excludes the identity of the learner and hence Byram (1997) suggested a cultural dimension to Foreign Language learning when he introduced the concept of 'language for intercultural understanding'. Herein, ICC or Intercultural Communicative Competence comes into the picture.

According to Byram(1997), ICC is the ability to interact with people of another culture/country in a foreign language, and this includes the capability to make appropriate use of the foreign language with an awareness of its cultural

nuances, values and connotations. Byram's model (1997) considered Intercultural Communicative Competence to comprise five factors:

1. Knowledge
2. Attitudes
3. Skills of interpreting and relating
4. Skills of discovery and interaction
5. Critical awareness / Political education.



Byram's model of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Knowledge relates to the understanding of social practices and process of interaction in the cultures involved; *Attitudes* relate to the curiosity about other cultures, flexibility about one's own cultural values and beliefs in an open engagement with other cultures; *skills of interpreting and relating* is the ability to decode the documents from another culture for perusal in one's own cultural context-the ability to be a mediator; *skills of discovery and interaction* is the ability to gather knowledge of the others cultural practice and utilize it in real life situation and interaction; *critical cultural awareness /or political education* is the ability to evaluate critically the practices and perspective of both one's own and other's culture.

Byram's model does not intend the foreign language learner to abandon one's own culture, but calls for ICC, as the "ability to decenter and take up the other's perspective on their own culture, anticipating and where possible, resolving dysfunctions in communicative behaviour" (Byram 1997, p42)

In the 21st century ELT, the learner practices not only language skills but also intercultural skills. The learning input should contain both these elements and their output should be evident in real life situations. Numerous learning activities can be provided as detailed in Tran and Seepho (2015), like culture capsules, a slice life technique, authentic environment creation, role-play, inviting foreigners, discussions etc. The materials used would range over the learner's culture, target culture and international culture (Alptekin, 2002). Here the teacher should be able to filter the appropriate method suitable to the context and to local cultural norms. Learning about the foreign culture would be constructive in communication since it would mould the learner's attitude to their own native contexts: exposure to many cultures would enable them to critique their own cultural exchanges positively. The very apparent case of the initial introductions made in a European and Indian context can be focused on here. Whereas Indian introductions may include personal details as to the members of the family and inquiry into their details, it is not considered acceptable in the Western culture. As Robinson says "cultural understanding involves a synthesis between the learner's home culture, the target cultural knowledge and the learner as an individual" (1988, p12).

Teaching English as an International Language

involves including not only source culture materials as well as target cultural material, but also includes international culture materials. ICC would thus create general intercultural awareness and produce critical skills by which they could compare beliefs, manners, customs and attitudes of their own and the target cultures. Thus English becomes a viable means of communication among people of multicultural contexts, in the present globalised world of the 21st century. While using English as the lingua franca, between two speakers of non-English native cultures, three different languages and cultures come to play- the culture of each interlocutor as well as the culture of the lingua franca (Willems, 1996).

At this point, specific teaching methods to be adopted need to be taken into consideration. The practical implications of cross-cultural / intercultural competencies in EFL/EIL classrooms have only begun to be explored. Contrasting L₁/L₂ in their lexical collocation can be done in the teaching materials. The concept of Whole Language has been part of language instruction in the US for the past two decades. Here these educators consider language in its broadest sense incorporating literary study, writing process as well as learner's collaboration. According to Stern (1983), language teaching is an art, the objectives of which are: a) social—language as a form of communication b) artistic—literary —language as a vehicle for artistic creation and appreciation c) philosophical—linguistic analysis.

Many countries like India include the Second Language acquisition and promotion of the comparative study of cultures. This is done by including parallel texts such as translations in the syllabus, so that cross-cultural understanding

becomes the order of the day. The ‘Seven As’ given in Ted Rodgers’s study gives a

comprehensive picture of the different aspects of language in Language Education (2003, p 9)

ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION(The Seven A’s)	
<i>Aspect</i>	<i>Instructional Focus</i>
Language as <i>abilities</i>	Tool skills: reading, writing, listening, speaking
Language as <i>art</i>	Literature, creative writing
Language as <i>artefact</i>	Structure of English History of English
Language as <i>analysis</i>	Problem Solving, critical linguistics
Language as <i>acculturation</i>	Interpersonal/Intercultural Understanding/communication
Language as <i>affect</i>	Interpersonal Understanding Humanistic self awareness
Language as <i>activation</i>	Communication competence Persuasion to action

Here the language teacher can be considered as “a professional mediator between foreign languages and culture and ...the teaching of culture as a fifth skill for language learners that enhances students overall learning experience” (qtd in Neff and Rucinski, p 12)

Rather than understanding the linguistic structures, learning a foreign language entails grasping the socio-cultural rules of communication between native speakers. Proper communication in L₂ includes both linguistic and intercultural communicative competence (ICC). English as International Language is a course for getting a comprehensive understanding of the world, nations, people and their society. Therefore in addition to language structures, additional material to introduce culture should also be accommodated in the teaching methods. The language teacher should make the learners aware of English as a Global/ International lingua franca and thus stimulate their interest in foreign cultures. Activities in the language classrooms like role-playing, interviews, poster presentations etc which can

be conducted in group/pair work or panel discussions will further the interest of students in learning. The different approaches used in language classrooms have varied down history.

Traditional Approaches like Grammar-Translation Method (1890-the 1940s), The Direct Method(1970s) and Audio-Lingual Method (1950s-1960s) have given way to more humanistic approaches (designer methods)like

Suggestopedia (1960s-2000)

The Silent Way (1970s-2000)

Total Physical Response (1970s-2000)

Communicative Language Teaching (1980s-2000)

Task Based Learning (1980s-2000)

Where the earlier methods were more or less teacher-centred, the modern humanistic approaches have centred on the learner — focusing on learner interests, learning styles and learner intelligence. Here the teacher is a

facilitator and guide giving students more autonomy in learning. In gaining Intercultural communicative competencies also, CLT and TBLT, the most recent approaches are on the whole favoured by the international teaching community.

Adeleh Heidari et al, make a comprehensive study of the role of culture in the different methods of ELT. According to them, the Grammar Translation method involves cultural assimilation mainly through translation which may not contribute to the learner being able to deal with social interaction. The Direct Method uses culturally oriented pictures to subordinate cultural learning to teach language as is the case with the Audio-Lingual Method. But in the innovative designer methods or the modern humanistic approaches, the students learn culture in the course of learner-centred activities. The culture of the Target language is integrated into the materials which teach them the social life, customs and habits of the foreign culture. Silent Way Approach, Suggestopedia, CLT, TBLT etc relies on learning through music, games, puzzles etc:

Communicative Language Teaching provides for the teaching of everyday, real world language use in a variety of socio-cultural situations in which features of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and culture are selected and graded according to their priority in actual communication. The Communicative Approach intends to place foreign language teaching in a clearly defined social and cultural context in line with the socio-linguistic viewpoint that language is generally influenced by society, economics, culture and the people who use it as well. (qtd in Heidari et al p14)

Task Based Learning involve the use of materials

like pictures, postcards, symbols, songs etc to develop speaking/writing skills following the tasks the learners are assigned in the classroom, which they do in pair/group works. The discussion and sharing involved bring on an understanding of the target culture in comparison to their own source culture. Learning culture or the intercultural site creates a ‘third place’ which “grows in the interstices between the cultures the learners grew up with and the new culture he or she is being introduced to” (Kramsch 1993)

ICC in foreign language learning also brings to fore the significance of the teacher and the learning methods/approaches taken up. Learning a foreign language becomes a process of building an intercultural site. Here, the teacher becomes a cultural mediator where the learner is encouraged to change their ethnocentric attitude to a ‘meta cultural’ perception. “[T]o support the intercultural learning process, foreign language teachers need additional knowledge, attitudes, competencies and skills. They need to be acquainted with basic insights from cultural anthropology, culture learning theory and intercultural communication” (qtd in Heidari, p11). It is only a proper ICC approach to learning English that bridges the cultural gap and creates a proper perspective of varieties of world views. Becoming an intercultural speaker gives a person the ability to interact with others with a balanced perspective of the world; also to mediate between the differences in attitudes with a critical awareness of self and others- “Culture supplies us with our worldview and therefore plays a dominant role in intercultural communication. Every cross-cultural interaction rests on assumptions each party makes about their own and the other party’s culture” (Ellis 216).

Here ICC also works on the ethnographic skills and converts the learner into a skilled ethnographer, able to mediate with foreign culture. This area is the most recent field of study in ELT. As proposed by Buttjes (1991), ethnography is the missing link between linguistics and cultural studies. Language classrooms thus should focus on teaching language based on its cultural context. This would cause learners to interpret the meanings of the target culture through the language.

Teaching Intercultural Competence through approaches like Communicative Language Teaching and Task Based Language Teaching would enable them to negotiate with people from other countries. In order to do so, students should be given a variety of materials, particularly in improving their listening and speaking skills. A wide range of English from native and non-native English speaking countries can be introduced such as those given in English Language Listening Lab Online (elllo.org). Even listening to CNN or BBC begets language styles from second language English speakers rather than native English users. This kind of exposure would improve the student's worldview and also make the learners realize that everyone's variety of English is legitimate. English language learners of the 21st century through the ICC approach would be able to understand that English does not have one single correct form and that all varieties, including their own, add colour to the world of communication.

REFERENCES

Alptekin, C. (2002). Towards Intercultural Communicative Competence. *ELT Journal* 56: 57-64.

Brown H.D. (2001). English language teaching

in the PostMethods era: Towards better diagnosis, Treatment, assessment. In J C Richards & WA Renanyda (eds.), *Methods in Language Teaching*, 9-18. N Y

Buttjes, D. (1991) Mediating languages and cultures: the social and intercultural dimension restored. In Buttjes, D. & Byram, M. (eds.) *Mediating Languages and Cultures: Toward an Intercultural Theory of Foreign Language Education*. Clevedon, Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Damen, L. (1987). *Culture Learning: The Fifth Dimension in the Classroom*. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley.

Ellis, Greg (1996). "How culturally appropriate is the communicative approach?" *ELT Journal*, Volume 50(3): 213-218. <https://academic.oup.com/eltj/article-abstract/50/3/213/2924371>

Heidari, Adeleh, Saeed Ketabi & Rezvan Zonoobi (2014). The role of culture through the eyes of different approaches to and methods of foreign language teaching. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*. 34:6-16. <https://immi.se/intercultural/nr34/heidari.html>

Kachru, B. B. (1992) Teaching world Englishes. In Kachru, B. B. (ed.) *The Other Tongue—English across Cultures*. 2nd ed. Urbana and Chicago

Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mac Kay S L (2002). *Teaching English as an International Language*. OUP

Moran, P. R. (2001) *Teaching Culture: Perspectives in Practice*. Ontario, Canada, Heinle & Heinle.

Neff, Peter and John Rucynski Jr(2013). Tasks for integrating language and culture teaching. *English Teaching Forum*, v51 (2) :12-23.

https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/neff_rucynski_-_forum.pdf

Robinson, G. L. N. (1988) *Cross-cultural Understanding*. Hertfordshire, UK Prentice Hall International

Rogers, T. (2003). Methodology in the New Millenium. *English Teaching Forum*, 41(4), 2-13

Retrieved from <https://americanenglish.state.gov/>

files/ae/resource_files/03-41-4-a.pdf

Stern, H. H. (1983). *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tran, T. Q., & Seepho, S. (2015). An instructional design model for intercultural language teaching: a proposed model. *Humanising Language Teaching*, 17(1):73-89. University of Illinois Press.

Willems, G. M. (1996) Foreign language study for intercultural communication. *Multicultural Teaching* 14.3, 36-40.

Dr. Sujarani Mathew, Associate Professor and HOD, Department of English, K.E. College, Mannanam, Kottayam, Kerala, India

“To contract or not to contract.. that’s the question”.

It is said that there are about seventy different types of contractions in the English language. One of the features differentiating speech from writing is the use of contractions; a distinctive feature of the speech of the native speaker. In the ESL and EFL classes learners are asked to contract their speech because the use of contractions makes the speech sound near natural. As a norm I have always maintained that the deployment of contractions in writing is a case of bad grammar. It is not that we do not have instances in the history of the English language where contractions were never employed in writing. Shakespeare used them, and so did Charles Dickens, Mark Twain and scores of modern writers and publications that supposedly introduce high quality writing. We avoid contractions in academic writing because of these reasons: (1). Contractions make a serious piece of writing sound weak (2). The flow of reading is disturbed as contractions call for the omitting of the internal letter or letters, and (3). The use of an apostrophe looks quite messy.

In addition to this list there is yet another compelling reason against the use of contractions in scholarly writing: *ambiguity*. Though *ambiguity* is one of the design features of language, it has to be avoided as much as possible as it propels multiple meanings. A contracted expression such as ‘*she’s gone*’ has two readings: ‘*she is gone*’ and ‘*she has gone*’. In ‘*she is gone*’, ‘*gone*’ is taken as adjective and it means that ‘*she is no more*’. The second reading, ‘*has gone*’ means that *right now she is not there* and *she could come back in future*.

David Crystal is a living legend and an indisputable authority on the English language. His work, **A Little Book of Language**, uses contractions extensively. Having read this book, if one asks, “*If Crystal could use contractions in writing, why can’t I?*” I really have no answer except to say, “*go ahead and use them if you want to make your writing totally ambiguous, difficult to read and funny*”. *What do you think?*

K. Venkat Reddy, Professor, The English & Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad – (venkatciefl@gmail.com)