

# Interculturality and Socio-Linguistic Identity in the Learning of English and Spanish in Mexico

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In the current field of action of the pedagogy of languages, efficient, inclusive and dynamic teaching methods are needed; just this work will present the intercultural method through didactic evidences (pedagogical sequences) that have proved their functionality in the teaching rooms of the English in a Spanish-speaking context, as is Mexico. Without forgetting that interculturality is defined according to Cassany (2016) as an ideological current that is that each language of the world is a representative tool at the service of a culture and that said culture in a society is a mental and attitudinal representation to the world where a certain society is based. Then interculturality seeks to develop intercultural skills in the users of languages (Anglo-Hispanic).

*Keywords:* pedagogy, interculturality, didactic sequences, culture, intercultural skills, sociolinguistic

## Introduction

In reviewing the origin and evolutionary path that the term interculturality has had in the history of societies, especially in the part of Latin America, we realize that it is impregnated with the conception of the indigenous, although it is also badly understood as “Indian”, as well as its recognition and integration to the great societies, more oriented to the western world. On the one hand, the recognition of native peoples is sought, as well as their insertion into the great transnational and global model, without losing sight of their uses and customs, and on the other hand, their gradual (and sometimes violent) disappearance of geographic zones that they inhabit and therefore to the non-insertion to the model of transnational society.

Sure all this has a great value to be investigated by some social science as it could be sociolinguistics. However, my scientific interest is focused on interculturality and its relationship with the teaching of English, that is, with the professionalization of teaching English through a degree, using interculturality, although sometimes it is understood as a method, as a policy educational or as simple pedagogical fashion.

Of course, it is not a minor issue that I raise, since looking at English as a linguistic-pedagogical instrument that aims to return to an intercultural society and insert itself in a globalized world is extremely interesting. It should be noted that all the languages in the world are equally important to be studied in a doctoral project, but also historically the idea of linguistic imperialism and linguistic prestige was conceived, and basically consists of considering a language (grammar and speech) better and more developed than others, and that in most cases of language use, extralinguistic arguments were considered to understand and accept that one language was better

than another; going through the conquests, the wars, the invasion, and currently the economic process of globalization. Although I think it is very pertinent to point out that I am not in favor of the linguistic prestige that (or not) English may have regarding other languages such as indigenous languages; but I do consider that the English language is a lingua franca and that it has been adopted and adapted (not in the best way) by several countries in the world, especially Latin America and in particular Mexico in order to have access to the development that the process allows of globalization, where the powerful countries in various aspects that lead that globalization, have English as a language and that is why a social and cultural prominence is generated in the countries that aspire to be first world, one of them Mexico.

The teaching and learning of foreign languages must always be related to the social, political, economic and cultural context in which they take place. This has a decisive influence on the approach to be adopted, the methods to be followed, etc. There is no doubt that the new scenario of the European Union and in Latin America, and even the broader globalization of economic exchanges worldwide, are having an impact on the way to approach the teaching of languages, guiding the latter towards the intercultural dimension. This implies the posing of new challenges for the teachers of the area, to which new roles and new tasks are attributed to those who will have to face in their daily work.

### **The Intercultural Dimension in the Teaching of Languages**

According to Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002), the components of intercultural competence to be developed by an intercultural speaker / mediator would be the following:

- Intercultural perspectives and perspectives (“know-how”): openness, ability to review one’s own distrust of other cultures and faith in oneself. It is a desire to relativize one’s own values, beliefs and behaviors, accepting that they are not the only possible ones, and learning to consider them from the perspective of an outside person, someone who has a set of values, beliefs and different behaviors.

- Knowledge (“knowledge”): knowledge of the different social groups, their products and their practices, both in the country itself and in that of the interlocutor; knowledge of the general interactions between societies and individuals.

- The abilities of comparison, of interpretation and of establishing relations (“to know to understand”): general capacity to interpret a document or an event linked to another culture, to explain it and to put it in relation with documents or events linked to the own culture.

- Discovery and interaction skills (“know how to learn”): ability to acquire new knowledge about a culture and given cultural practices, as well as to manage knowledge, points of view and skills by submitting to the rules of communication and the interaction in real time.

- The critical vision at the cultural level (“know how to commit”): capacity to critically evaluate the points of view, practices and products of one’s own country and of other nations and cultures.

It is evident that the process of acquiring an intercultural competence can never be concluded and that it does not have to be perfect to allow satisfactory communication, since the identities and social values of individuals are not fixed and immutable; they are modified continuously throughout life, as they come into contact with new groups.

Of the components of intercultural competence, it is worthwhile to dwell on the last, critical vision on the cultural plane. Byram (1997, pp. 63-64) insists on the importance of developing a critical cultural awareness in students. As we have seen previously, it would be a question of training the latter to evaluate critically and on the basis of precise criteria the perspectives, practices and products of the own culture and that of other countries. This exercise requires developing a capacity to: (1) identify and interpret the explicit or implicit values of the documents and events of one's own culture and others, using analytical approaches that allow placing a document or event in context and becoming aware of its dimension ideological; (2) to proceed to an evaluation of the documents and events adopting a clear perspective, based on precise criteria such as human rights, liberal democracy, religion or political ideology; and (3) act as a mediator in cultural exchanges, being aware of the conflict that can arise between one's own ideological positions and those of others and trying to find common criteria.

For Starkey (2003), the development of this awareness should start from the moment you start learning a language and continue throughout the learning process, which would have important consequences for schools. In his opinion, the frame of reference to establish comparisons between the behaviors, practices and institutions of the culture of the student body and the foreign one could be given by the knowledge and understanding of the human rights and the linguistic policies.

### **Role of the Teacher in the Development of the Dimension**

#### **Intercultural in the Teaching of English**

Among the tasks (skills in their teaching practice) that correspond to teachers in relation to students include the following:

(a) Prepare him to establish relationships with people of other cultures; b) encourage them to understand and accept these different people as individuals who have different points of view, values and behaviors; (c) help you understand the functioning of cultural interactions; (d) show him that social identities are an integral part of any relationship; (e) demonstrate the influence of the perception of others and the vision that others have of oneself in the success of communication; (f) to lead him to know more, by himself, of the people with whom he communicates; and (g) help him to grasp the enriching character of this type of experiences and relationships (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002).

I consider that to articulate the work of the classroom around the intercultural dimension implies giving priority to procedures such as comparison, identification with otherness (putting oneself in the place of the other) and observation of one's own culture. I include here, as a suggestion, some practical indications that would favor the orientation of the work to be developed in the classes at that address:

- Work with authentic materials drawn from the community or communities under study (non-repetitive audios)
- Establish links with foreign schools and institutes through the Internet and / or using email (Guided tours)

Another argument could be: The contemporary models of communicative competence show that there is much more to learning to language, and they include the vital component of cultural knowledge and awareness (Bachman, 1990, Council of Europe, 2001).

A person who encounters an unfamiliar culture will lack knowledge of such behaviors, which may lead to amusing situations, and even conflict, caused by miscommunication. This happens because these aspects of the culture are unspoken rules created by a community. Because these cultural rules are full of meaning and “allow people to anticipate events, they often acquire a moral rigidity and righteousness that engender stereotypes and even prejudices” (Kramsch, 1995, p. 2).

### **Intercultural Evidences**

Teacher: Lourdes Alejandra Sulsser Martinez.

She studied English at the IPN CENLEX, I specialized in Berlitz, I studied at the University of Texas, ESL. And I have taught English at a higher level for about 5 years. I teach linguistics at the Motolonia of the Pedregal University and now at the UNIREM (University of the Mexican Republic)

*Miss can you tell me what is your methodology, which you use to teach English today?*

Currently it is by competences through multiple intercultural intelligences. I also impart traditionally using deductive and inductive methods, that is, I combine them.

*What are the objectives of the class?*

The objectives were to know the characteristics of qualitative research and to establish the difference and relationship with quantitative research: and connect them with the speaking, that is to mediate between speaking adequately both in meaning and quantity and by situating ourselves from an intercultural approach, we can use many topics of his daily life so that the student learns English, in other words to develop in the student that his speaking fits an American pronunciation, but also what he wants to say is clear, precise and unambiguous at the level of meaning. The main thing is that I do not repeat my speeches or that I learn them by heart.

### **Intercultural Analysis**

In the intercultural analysis I find that Miss Lourdes promotes the intercultural ability of the so-called exhibition of a real intercultural contact that the student has had, to generate reflections with his classmates. In relation to this task I must recognize that Miss Lourdes Sulsser is the person who has carried out this activity and consists in the first instance (opening) in sending the student to interview and try to engage in a verbal interaction with people who are fluent in English, either native or non-native (for example in a restaurant, in a museum, in a historical square such as the zócalo, fine arts, some embassy, etc). The Miss Lourdes argues that this is an activity that puts in the foreground the real domain or “get proficiency” of the student with the English language, that is to say if he has really learned and up to where he has his real level, because he considers that he cannot stay only with what he learns in the classroom and his textbook. Now in the development of the task, the student must consider the following points, which according to the miss, are fundamental for their learning and that I place as variables of my project:

(a) Vocabulary (the known and the new) pertaining either to food, to music, to certain historical moments of the country to which the interlocutors belong, or to the lifestyle. At the end of this communicative interaction, the student must make a list of the words he or she learned in that situation of language use.

(b) The correct use of grammar to formulate questions to obtain information and thus know their interlocutors. When we talk about the correct use of grammar, we refer in particular to the use of present and past tense, to the use of did and do helpers to formulate questions and finally to the use of question words. Although it

should be noted that one of the recommendations made by Miss Lourdes is just that this communicative interaction is as natural as possible, that is, it is not a survey or questionnaire of many questions (sometimes out of context) what the student does to his or her informants; therefore they must be pertinent questions to what is happening right there, that generate a positive impact on the informant, so that the student can use English in a real context of use.

(c) Now on the other hand the “variable” skills in interculturality are highlighted, such as: mediation and tolerance with uses and customs alien to the student, identity in the target language (English), finally comparison between the two cultures and their respective languages (English Spanish).

### Conclusion

In light of this interpretive process of an example of intercultural evidence in the teaching of English in a Spanish-speaking context, I infer that it is fundamental to teach and practice with the student generations the inclusive approach, which is intercultural; mainly because we live in an increasingly diverse and linguistically diverse society, which would be unthinkable to train students from intolerance and isolation. We understand that linguistic diversity does not have to be a pretext to confront and divide societies and therefore have no openness to the neighboring culture. It is possible to train students in the medium and long term, from interculturality with a transdisciplinary and international vision.

Regarding the feasibility of interculturality in the teaching of English, I must admit that it is already applied in different levels of such a degree, with greater or lesser success and I think it is due in large part to the professional profile of the teacher and that he is so committed to update and better his chair; In my role as a passive observer in making the ethnographic record in the teaching rooms at UNIREM and later actively participating in bilingual contexts, given my participation in American universities I have been able to perceive and corroborate the real level that is acquired in the schooling of UNIREM, so that without fear of being wrong an average student dominates the grammar of the language, writes the language without major problems, but where it exhibits serious problems is in the pronunciation and fluency that must be shown in a concrete and real communicative exchange, and If we simulate a communicative context, by placing it in a natural bilingual context, then it will have serious problems to sustain a communication with an English speaker.

I perceive then that interculturality is gradually gaining ground in the teaching of English and with more work to develop talent, I suggest that the students of the degree in the teaching of English, in a few generations, may have more and better developed such skills.

Amen to the teaching profile that UNIREM continues to hire to maintain this intercultural line of work, which, as we saw in the elicitation and the theoretical framework, has already been stipulated as a language policy in the same university and if we take into account that it has been only ten years since it was implemented, I think then that over time you can achieve more extensive and ambitious objectives.

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