RETHINKING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS A COMMON GOOD IN THE Maghreb

By Djelloul NEDJAI Athina BOUKHELOUF, Khadidja-Samira ZITOUNI , and Pr. Mohamed-Salah NEDJAI.

University of Batna

Introduction:

Gathering together as teachers, students, and educationists is always a good opportunity to raise issues and questions of common interest to generate debate and discussion. This is how we learn to listen to each other, to welcome others' views and opinions, and to question and rethink our own perceptions, conceptions and beliefs.

In this paper, we would like to suggest ways to rethink the position and the status of the English language in the Maghreb. Our presentation will focus on the following main aspects:

- Rethinking English as a common good in the Maghreb,
- Intercultural awareness and English language,
- English for specific purposes and multilingualism, and
- Globalization, social mobility and English.

The implementation of English as a common good in Maghrebi countries calls for a re-thinking of the present language policy to target clear objectives and to use English to achieve them. We believe we have to move beyond the classical use of English in fields like: scientific research, industry and business, tourism and diplomacy, and to think of English as a means to prepare Maghrebi students to become global citizens.

The generalization of an open market economy in a rapidly globalizing world imposes on our students new needs and expectations. Indeed, they will have to equate with job opportunities not only in the Maghreb but elsewhere as well. A common policy for the teaching of English in the Maghreb will certainly prove successful in our educational systems, in cross world exchanges and in social mobility. Perhaps should we work together towards common curricula, common degrees, and a common educational system to meet the expectations and the requirements of the global world.

English as a global language in a common Maghrebi educational system is a challenging perspective to promote cultural and intercultural awareness in a multilingual community. Undoubtedly to remain sustainable, an efficient Maghrebi educational system will certainly need substantial financial support and political will.

INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS

Globalisation makes of the whole world one small village. It erased the conventional borders and opened the way for cultures' hybridization. Now, it is influencing all the systems, political, economic, social, and educational. Indeed, globalisation is impacting all aspects of life and hence culture. Similarly, it transforms and modifies foreign language teaching to be based on one specific ideology and perspective (Kramsch, 2014). Cultural competence has become the key component of the foreign language curricula.

Recent trends in teaching foreign languages prepare the learner for a successful international and intercultural interaction. The foreign language learner is not only supposed to acquire the ability to use the complex system of symbols and the rules that govern it, but to be aware of cultural and

intercultural differences. Byram (1997, 2012) introduced and emphasised the role of critical intercultural awareness in the participation in intercultural context. This skill helps the learner to interact appropriately and effectively in this global world.

Many questions are inevitably posed here:
- What is cultural/ intercultural awareness?
- What is critical cultural awareness?
- What are the benefits of processing this awareness? and,
- How can a foreign language learner develop his/ her intercultural awareness?

This paper is aiming at highlighting intercultural awareness and its importance in a global world where foreign language learners are more active and more competent actors.

Intercultural awareness is one of the basic cognitive components of intercultural communication competence (Chen and Starosta, 1996). It deals with how the understanding of foreign culture could influence the individual's reactions and behaviours.

According to Korzilius et .al (2007), intercultural awareness is that ability to understand and take into account the interlocutor's perspectives. Byram et.al (2002), on the other hand, maintain the view that cultural awareness is the process of being aware and developing the understanding of one's own culture and the foreign one. It increases and improves intercultural and cross cultural understanding.

Belay (1993) sates that multiple cultural identities are nourished in this multicultural environment. Hence, being aware of the differences in the identity of another is the first step towards being an interculturally aware citizen. Being interculturally aware means possessing that ability that could help the individual to manage his stereotypes, replace his preconceptions with a sound and rational knowledge. This latter enables the individual to understand the intercultural differences, tolerate them and behave effectively and appropriately towards other cultures. Differences between cultures, and within the same culture, do exist. They should not be perceived as barriers to understanding each other. Rather, they inform each other and contribute to mankind diversity.

Due to the significance of intercultural awareness, the 'Common European Frame of References' incorporates it and emphasises its role in foreign language teaching. Tremendous training programs were developed by researchers, aiming all at preparing the individual to achieve his communication goals through raising his/her awareness of intercultural differences. Cognitive training, cultural awareness training and self-awareness training are among the most efficient models of intercultural awareness training programs (Brisling, Landis and Brant, 1983). Cognitive training deals with cultures comparison for lucid understanding of the similarities and differences. Cultural awareness training objective is to understand the universal and the specific aspects of culture. Whereas, the self –awareness training tends to make the learner identify his preconceptions and prejudices that influence his interaction.

Different researchers suggested various models that deal with levels of (inter)cultural awareness. Bennett (1993), for instance, proposed a developmental model of intercultural sensitivity through which he explained how the individual moves from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. From the denial of differences to the acceptance and toleration, Bennett displayed the different levels each individual passes through during his exposure to a foreign culture.

Taking into consideration this model, Chen and Starosta (1998) suggested three levels of intercultural awareness. Awareness of superficial cultural traits (stereotypes, preconceptions), awareness of significant and subtle cultural traits (constructing awareness through conflict and through analysis) and the third level is when the person is able to see the world through the eye of the native.

Also, Byram (1997) explained how a foreign learner moves towards critical intercultural awareness through his model cultural communicative competence. At the beginning, the learner will discover and examine his stereotypes, prejudices and beliefs (Byram and Guilhelme, 2000). Later on,

the learner will be able to express and defend his beliefs with rationality and rigorous reasoning. In this phase, the learner will achieve a deeper understanding of the foreign culture (Byram 1997). Finally, the learner will be able to communicate and to negotiate his own beliefs effectively and appropriately with intercultural individuals. Unfortunately, few, if any, literature clearly demonstrated the steps the learner should follow to develop his critical intercultural awareness (Nugent & Catalano, 2015).

To conclude, (inter) cultural awareness is vital to the process of English learning and teaching. To use and understand English properly in a global world, an intercultural approach is highly required. Intercultural awareness is that skill that guarantees the success of the communication. It decreases the probability of misunderstanding by removing away all what could impede the global interaction. Individual intercultural awareness could serve in rationalising judgement, managing effectively stereotypes and tolerating the differences, whatsoever.

ESP AND MULTILINGUALISM

As teachers, we have to decide whether the English we teach our students will be general or specific. Similarly, we have to target clear objectives. In the present changes of the world, one purpose that sounds logical is to consider ESP as a major issue in globalization.

According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), a large number of students in the world study general English, that is all-purpose language with no special focus on one area of human experience (eg: business or academic study) over another. Thus, as we shall see, general English courses usually offer a judicious blend of different language skills and choose their topics from a range of sources, basing their selection of content more on student interest and engagement than on an easily identifiable student need. In schools and institutes all over the world, students are taught to communicate on a general social level and to cope with the normal range of texts which educated language users experience outside their professional lives.

In contrast to students of general English, students of English for specific purposes (ESP) may have a closely identified goal for learning. They might therefore want a form of ESP referred to as English for academic purposes (EAP) in which there is a concentration on writing academic essays, taking notes from oral lectures, perfecting reference skills in English, etc. If they are going to become scientists or engineers, on the other hand, they might be learning English for science and technology (EST) in which case their teacher might have them improving on their ability to consult or design manuals amongst other things.

The ESP policy we would like to see implemented in the Maghreb will put the focus on teaching English as a global language (EGL). There are many reasons to support this policy. First, EGL will help students not only in preparing for careers in the Maghreb, but in prospecting careers worldwide as well. Also, English as a global language will certainly prove successful in diplomatic and business matters and exchanges. Hence, including English as a global language in Maghrebi educational curricula will prepare Maghrebi students to become multilingual and to meet the requirements of globalization.

MULTILINGUALISM AND GLOBALIZATION

In his book ''Foreign language teaching'', Claire Kramsh (2009) says that Globalisation, coupled with global media and global communication technologies, has exacerbated the multiplicity of codes, media, and ways of making meaning in everyday life. If we look at the way youngsters nowadays use language on facebook, Twitter and in their messages, we notice a proliferation of semiotic activity, a healthy disrespect of academic authority (orthographic, grammatical and lexical rules and conventions), hybridities and code-switching, and multimodal bursts of creativity and innovation. But we also notice a growing anxiety about who they are, a concern of whether they are

popular or not, how they are being perceived by their peers, what the predictable forms of communication offered by print literacy, grammars, and dictionaries, opened the way for creativity, agency and innovation, but they have also increased semiotic uncertainty and ambiguity.

MULTILINGUALISM: SOCIETAL MULTILINGUALISM

Spolsky (1998) believes that Bilingualism and multilingualism are the most obvious and salient cases of variations to observe. With stylistic or dialectal variation, identifying each variety is harder and open to dispute. However, with distinctly recognized languages, there is generally agreement on the varieties and their names. We can study how two or more languages intertwine and separate without first being forced, as we are when we talk about stylistic variations within a single language, to establish the criteria for difference. It is both the difference and the commonness of multilingualism that has led to its being so well studied. In our case, bilingualism and/or multilingualism are opportunities to prepare for the global world.

Monolingual speech communities and monolingual countries are rare. Even a country as linguistically homogeneous as Japan has its linguistic minorities. Many countries have developed an explicit or implicit language policy. However, it is rare for linguistic and national borders not to overlap in various complex ways. Most countries have more than one language that is spoken by a significant portion of the population, and most languages have significant numbers of speakers in more than one country.

Historically, multilingual communities evolve in a number of ways. One is the result of migration, the voluntary or involuntary movements of people speaking one language into the territory of people speaking another.

In the years after the second world war, Northern European countries, too, enhanced their multilingualism by encouraging guest workers from the Mediterranean areas. There are significant Turkish minorities in many parts of Europe. Greek, Spanish, Algerian, Tunisian, Moroccan, and Italian immigrants moved north in the same way. These migration movements are expected to increase with the phenomenon of globalization. The successful migrant will be the one who possesses both professional and communicative qualification.

Multilingualism has also historically been created by conquest and the subsequent incorporation of speakers of different languages into a single political unit. The incorporation of Brittany, Alsace, and Province into France submerged the languages of these regions. The spread of English power over the British Isles produced multilingualism and led to the loss of some Celtic languages.

These diverse historical circumstances have produced many different kinds of multilingual mixes, sometimes stable and sometimes volatile and short-lived. The most common result of this language contact has been language conflict, producing pressure from one language on speakers of other languages to adopt it. Presently, things have changed and the pressure is still there, but for survival reasons in a global world.

MULTILINGUAL PRACTICES

'How can teachers prepare their students to operate between languages and acquire translingual and transcultural competence?' is a question asked by the American Modern language Association to know how can teachers teach both the standard forms and conventional meanings given to these forms by grammars and dictionaries, and the increasingly changing stylistic variations used by native and non-native speakers as they code-switch from one language to another, imitate foreign accents, play with hybrid forms on the Internet, thrive on interdiscursivity, and mixed genres. However, there is no question that we have to continue teaching the standard, but if we do not take the standard monolingual native speakers as our ideal, then we need to devise a pedagogy that, right from the start, sensitizes the learners to stylistic choice and translation of various kinds.

REASONS FOR LEARNING ENGLISH

All around the world, students of all ages are learning to speak English, but their reasons for wanting to speak English can differ greatly. Some students, of course, only learn English because it is on the curriculum at primary or secondary level, but for others, studying the language reflects some kind of a choice.

Many people in the Maghreb learn English because they have moved into a target-language community and they need to be able to operate successfully within that community. Some students need English for a specific purpose (ESP). Such students of ESP may need to learn legal language, or the language of tourism, banking or nursing, for example. An extremely popular strand of ESP is the teaching of English where students learn about how to operate in English in the business world. Many students need English for academic purposes (EAP) in order to study in an English-speaking university or college, or because they need to access English-language academic texts.

Many people in the Maghreb learn English because they think it will be useful in some way for international communication and travel. Such students of general English often do not have a particular reason for going to English classes, but simply wish to learn to speak, write, and read the language effectively for wherever this might be useful for them.

Students' learning purposes will have an effect on what they want and need to learn and, as a result, will influence what they are taught. Frendo (2005) notes that Business English students for example, will want to spend a lot of time concentrating on the language needed for specific business transactions and situations. Students living in a target-language community will need to use English to achieve their immediate practical and social needs. A group of nurses will want to study the kind of English they are likely to have to use while they nurse. Students of general English (including those studying the language as part of their primary and secondary education) will not have such specific needs, of course, and their lessons and the materials which the teachers use will almost certainly look different from those for students with more clearly identifiable needs.

DIFFERENT CONTEXTS FOR LEARNING

English in the Maghreb is learnt and taught in many different contexts, and in many different class arrangements. Such differences will have a considerable effect on how and what we teach.

EFL, ESL, ESOL

For many years many researchers like Hess (2001) and Graddol (2006) have made a distinction between people who study English as a foreign language and those who study it as a second language. It has been suggested that students of EFL (English as a foreign language) tend to be learning so that they can use English when travelling or to communicate with other people, from whatever country, who also speak English. ESL students, on the other hand, are usually living in the target-language community. They may need to learn the particular language variety of that community(Scottish English, Australian English, etc) rather than a more general language variety. They may need to combine their learning of English with knowledge of how to do things in the target-language community such as going to a bank, renting a flat, accessing health services, etc. The English they learn, therefore, may differ from that studied by EFL students, whose needs are not so specific to a particular time and place.

Clearly, English is no longer an international language only. It is imposing itself as the global language. Next to one's native language or mother tongue, humans will gradually feel the need to learn another language to live as humans in one common planet: The Earth.

GLOBALIZATION, SOCIAL MOBILITY AND ENGLISH

Since the twenty-first century, researchers in social sciences attempted to conceptualize the various aspects of globalization and to study them both theoretically and empirically (Beck, 2004). Globalization refers to this age of time-space compression we are living in. However, experiences and perceptions of globalization differ depending on one's social, cultural, and political viewpoint (Garrett, 2010).

Globalization is presented under five different but interrelated points (Urry, 2000):

1. as a strategy, as developed by transnational corporations;
2. as an image used, for example, in commercial advertisements;
3. as an ideology of global capitalism which argues for reducing the regulatory power of nation-states;
4. as a basis for mobilizing individuals and organizations; and
5. as flows which involve the movement of people, money, capital, information, ideas and images through complex interlocking networks (Urry, 2000).

Moreover, globalization refers to the increase of social relations among individuals around the worldwide (Giddens, 2003).It includes the "processes which sustain the exchange and flow of goods, people, information, knowledge and images which give rise to communication processes which gain some autonomy on a global level" (Featherstone, 1990).Blommaert (2010) notes that after the emergence of globalization 'the world has not become a village, but rather a tremendously complex web of villages, towns, neighborhoods, settlements connected by material and symbolic ties in often unpredictable ways'. He further notes: 'It forces sociolinguistics to unthink its classic distinctions and biases and to rethink itself as a sociolinguistics of mobile resources, framed in terms of trans-contextual networks, flows and movements' (p. 29). This is the major reason that leads to the transformations in remaking the "social", especially those diverse mobilities, i,e. the reconstruction from "social as society" into the "social as mobility" (Urry, 2000).

English as a foreign language is also considered as a major aspect of globalization (Melville, 2015). In other words, 'English is globalization, English is human capital' (Pennycook, 2010). Moreover, it is found that English, among other world languages, is spoken by about 1.5 billion people all over the world (Crystal, 1997). This spread has been facilitated by the British and American teaching organizations, educational and research agencies, such as the British Council, the Peace Corps and the United States Information Agency, which carry out extensive programs on ESL and EFL teaching all over the world.

CONCLUSION

From the above, an obvious question arises here: is the rise of English as the world language just a natural outcome of the English language being 'in the right place at the right time' or are there other reasons?

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