

Countering Culture Shock in Bangladeshi EFL/ESL Classroom

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Akhtaruzzaman Elias (1943-1997)

Courtesy: <http://boipremi.com/akhtaruzzaman-elias-books-download/>

Abstract

This article aims at presenting a connection between second language learners and their native cultures. In this regard, a text must represent history, traditions and values of the respective culture. This article also focuses on creating a historical and cultural consciousness among second language learners of English about their glorious past. To serve this purpose a text that showcases the glorious past of Bangladesh is explored, *The Raincoat* by Akhtaruzzaman Elias. In this text the historical past of the glorious liberation war of Bangladesh is explored. Making such connections is more significant in countries like Bangladesh or those which were colonized by the British. It becomes significant to make such connections in countries where two modes of education exist - one in the native language and other in English, as in many multilingual countries. Due to the difference in

the curriculum, learners not only learn texts in a different language, but at the same time, might lose touch with their own culture and history. To make learners aware of this fact a common thread is needed. This can be achieved by adding a translated text written in the native language in the curriculum. Using this type of texts is also going to reduce the effects of culture shock or alienating factor that second language learners often face, due to the huge cultural gap between their native culture and the culture of their texts. This article also offers a scope for the use any text that creates cultural and historical awareness among second language learners.

Key words: English Language, Liberation, Values, Native Culture, Second Language Learners, ESL, Native Text

1. Introduction

Culture is an amalgamation of different elements or aspects. Among these various aspects language is one. It is one of the chief bearers of a culture. Through language, customs and literature of a specific culture are expressed. So a specific culture and its respective language exist in harmony or a perfect balance. But this harmony is disrupted when a second language is learned. There are two possible reasons for this disruption; firstly, and obviously exposure to a foreign language and secondly, exposure to materials or texts which cannot be related to the learner's culture and society. This article aims at exploring ways of restoring this disrupted harmony between culture and language in the lives of second language learners. It seeks to create a connection between the second language learner and his/her respective culture.

For this purpose a short story in Bangla, *The Raincoat* by Akhtaruzzaman Elias which is translated into English by Khaliquzzaman Elias, is explored. This text is chosen as it is culturally appropriate and as such it can be used in a second language class room to aid second language acquisition and reduce culture shock.

2. Acculturation Model

In this regard Schumann's Acculturation Model is of much importance. "In SLA, the **Acculturation Model** is a theory proposed by John Schumann. The main suggestion of the theory is that the acquisition of a second language is directly linked to the acculturation process, and learners' success is determined by the extent to which they can orient themselves to the target language culture. The process of acculturation was defined by Brown as "the process of being adapted to a new culture which involves a new orientation of thinking and feeling on the part of an L2 learner. According to Brown, as culture is an integral part of a human being, the process of acculturation takes a deeper turn when the issue of language is brought on the scene". (Wikipedia)

"Schumann based his Acculturation Model on two sets of factors: social and psychological. Schumann asserts that the degree to which the second-language learners acculturate themselves towards the culture of target-language (TL) group generally depends on social and psychological factors; and these two sorts of factors will determine respectively, the level of *social distance* and *psychological distance* an L2 learner is having in the course of his learning the target-language. Social distance, as Ellis notes, concerns the extent to which individual learners can identify themselves with members of TL group and, thereby, can achieve contact with them. Psychological distance is the extent to which individual learners are at ease with their target-language learning task." (Wikipedia)

As most Second Language Learners find it difficult to orient themselves to the target language's culture, second language learners' language acquisition becomes slow. Native translated texts can play a useful role in solving and aiding the aforementioned issues. (Native here suggests a text that is not produced by native speakers of English, or in other words, texts produced by non-native speakers of English).

3. English as a Second language: The Difficulties

As mentioned above, the disruption in harmony between a culture and its respective language is visible when English is the target language. Now, a question may arise why is learning English as a second language more difficult than any other language? It is because, most countries which teach or take English as second language, were once colonies of Britain.

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This situation is more acute in countries like Bangladesh, a country with a history of fighting not only for liberation but also for language. Despite the fact that English was the language of the colonizers, the ‘oppressors’, its significance in today’s world cannot be overlooked. It has become a lingua franca of the world. English is recognized, in many countries, including the former colonies of England as an official or second language. In many third world countries knowing English is considered as a ‘status symbol’. In today’s world, English indeed has hegemony over most other languages. So for the progress of an individual, community or country and for communicating with other individuals, communities and countries learning English is a must. However, in doing so, learners of English must not get detached from their own culture and historical past. Therefore, efforts are needed to avoid disruption between learning English and the culture of the respective learner. These efforts are especially needed in today’s Bangladesh. Bangladeshi English medium schools and colleges offer little scope for native texts (native here suggests a text that is not produced by native speakers of English or in other words texts produced by non-native speakers of English) for their students to learn about the culture and history of Bangladesh, since most English medium schools and colleges of Bangladesh follow a British curriculum.

4. Exploring the Text: Why and How?

Over the centuries, much emphasis has been given to the use of literary texts to aid second language acquisition. So, in this regard this paper is not suggesting anything new. However, using a translated text from a particular learner’s own literary circle can be of much use. For example, this paper uses a translated Bangla short story. Myuskens (1983) suggested that, instructors can use literary texts for language practice, reading comprehension and possible aesthetic appreciation. Research shows many good reasons for using short stories in a language classroom. A few among them are:

- Motivating
- Cultural value
- Encouraging language acquisition
- Teaching critical thinking (Lazar, 2002)

The above mentioned points suggest why a short story should be incorporated in a language classroom. But another question that needs to be answered is, why is this article using this (*The Raincoat*) particular short story? The English translation of *The Raincoat* equates with what Achebe refers to as “New English” (1975) - English that not only reflects the culture of the native people, but also represents the history and literature of the native culture to the world. Translations of native literature are therefore the best texts to teach second language learners in the classroom. This approach would reduce the chances of Thiongo’s fear that, “Thus language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to others selves, from our worlds to other worlds”. (1993)

Generally, in the ESL classroom, the reality of the learners and the textual materials do not match. So they get distant from their own culture whilst acquiring the second language. This article aims at presenting learners with a way in which they can relate to their history and culture and learn the second language at the same time. This approach is more applicable in countries like Bangladesh, where two modes of education exist, one in the native language and another in English. The different modes of education give rise to two different problems. Firstly, students of English medium (the language of instruction is English) are getting detached from their own culture and history.

Secondly, due to the two modes of education, English is often viewed as a status symbol. Texts like *The Raincoat* will be able to bridge the gap that exists between the two modes of education.

The Raincoat is a short story which is set in 1971 during the liberation war of Bangladesh. The story is about a timid and shy lecturer named Nurul Huda. Apparently Nurul Huda seems like an ordinary person devoid of any heroism, a person who is concerned with only his and his family’s safety during the liberation war of Bangladesh. However, Nurul Huda’s brother-in-law is a freedom fighter and so he is the one who is supposed to be the ‘hero’ of the story. But, at the end of the story readers come to know about the fact that though Nurul Huda did not participate in the liberation war directly, he had been helping freedom fighters secretly. At the end of the story when Nurul Huda endures tortures from the hands of the Pakistani army and faces death, he still doesn’t disclose any information about the freedom fighters and their whereabouts to the Pakistani army. So Nurul Huda provides the readers with another definition of heroism (Elias, 2001). *The Raincoat* is thus a perfect story to be

used in a Bangladeshi ESL classroom. This article aims at exploring the text through three stages, pre-reading, while reading and post reading. A sample lesson plan for teachers and a worksheet for students are carried out in the latter part of this article. The lesson plan and worksheet support the arguments that were mentioned above in this article.

5. Literature Review

Over the years researchers have strongly recommended the use of Literature in ESL class room, especially, the use of short stories can be highly beneficial for second language acquisition. In this regard Murdoch (2002) observes, short stories can provide quality text content which will greatly enhance ELT courses for learners. He explains how instructors can design activities that include writing, or acting out a dialogue. Ostar (1989) points out that literature helps learners to write more creatively. Elliot (1990) states that literature motivates advanced students if they can genuinely engage with its thought and emotions and appreciate its aesthetic qualities. Lazar (2002) suggests that using literature in a language class room encourages language acquisition. She also suggests that literature promotes activities where students need to share their feelings and opinions, such as discussion and group work. She also says that literature is a particularly good source for developing students' abilities to infer meaning and to make interpretations

6. Obstacle that may come

In the earlier part of the paper the advantage of using a translated short story has been discussed. However, this paper does not turn a blind eye to some of the obstacles that may come along. The second language learners and their instructors may face some of the problems mentioned below:

- Appreciating the style
- Motivation
- Compression
- Making interpretations
- Inadequate reading strategies

Another danger is that, teachers and learners may get comfortable in using translated texts only. As a result, ESL learners would get deprived from the vast realm of English literature or English literature from other countries. Although, the aim of this article is to make a connection between ESL learners and their respective cultures, yet it does not suggest elimination of English literature from the ESL classroom. ESL learners need to realize the true meaning of Achebe's "New English" (1975) and learn English to represent their culture in the second language. Hence, the practice of reading native English texts and writing in English is encouraged.

6. Recommendations

A text written in the native language (Bangla) and translated in English is explored in this paper. This can be done with texts written in other native languages as well. Now, a question may arise, why is translating native texts necessary? Why cannot they be read as they are? There are two reasons for recommending translated native texts. Firstly, in this approach ESL texts will not only teach language, but also will make the learners aware of their own culture, customs, values and history. Secondly, it will showcase the literature written in the native language, about the native culture to the entire world. It would do so because of English's wide reception in today's world.

7. Sample Lesson Plan

Target Learners: Undergraduate students

Topic: A short story (selected by the instructors. While selecting the text, the instructor should keep in mind that the story should have rich historical and cultural content as well as different linguistic aspects that the instructors aim to teach in class).

Aim

Reading skill: Understanding the plot.

Listening skill: listening to other learners.

Writing skill: Answering questions (open ended and critical).

Speaking skill: Taking part in discussions.

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Total Class: Three, one hour each.

Lesson 1

Pre-reading Activities

- Brainstorming with the title.
- Giving learners paragraphs in boxes to guess or make a story.
- Identifying difficult words and discussing them.
- Giving learners reading homework.

Lesson 2

Teacher will give feedback on home reading. Students will answer reading comprehension questions.

- Correction.
- Commenting on characters and incidents that were discussed or identified in the previous lesson.
- Inviting student discussion.
- Discussing plot, theme, character and such.
- Giving reading home work.

Lesson 3

- Feedback session.
- Writing activity.
- Assignment or project work.

8. Conclusion

The aim of ESL teaching is to make the learners communicate in English fluently and teach them the four skills - Reading, Listening, Speaking and writing. In addition to language learning this paper offers the instructors a scope to teach the native culture and history to the learners. Thus incorporating texts like *The Raincoat* will enable instructors to connect history and culture with language in the ESL class room. The learners will come to know about liberation - a glorious past and learn English as a second language – the present demand, at the same time, therefore, restoring the harmony between culture and language.

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Appendix

(Students worksheet)

Topic- short story

Title- *The Raincoat* by Aktharuzzaman Elias

Task -1 (Brainstorming activity)

- a. Analyze the title : Learners will try to guess the story from the title and take part in discussion
- b.

It had been raining since
Last night.
Oh, what a continuous
rhythmic pattern!

--

All was spoiled now.
The army was right at
the door. O God, No!

Honey, The umbrella
alone won't be enough

Learners will be asked to make their own story from the lines mention in the boxes.

Task-2

Write whether the sentences a true or false. If false, write the correct answer.

- a. It had been raining for three days.
- b. The peon said to the lecturer “you have been greeted by our sir”.
- c. The lecturer’s wife asked him to take the major’s rain coat.
- d. Mintu had disappeared on 23rd June.

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- e. The children said “Abbu has become our little uncle”.

Task -3

Answer the following questions.

1. What year do you think the story is set in?
2. What do you understand by the words “Gujab and Gazab”? Replace these words with appropriate English words.
3. Which part of speech do you think the word “Razakar” is? Which English word can best replace this word?
4. Who gave up Nurul Huda’s name to the military?
5. Why do you think Nurul Huda shivered?

Task-4

Change the following sentences from active to passive voice or vice versa

1. They killed people at random.
2. But would she share the principal’s chiding?
3. His wife’s coaxing voice could be heard again.
4. Not a single Rickshaw could be seen in the street?
5. Both he and Mridha were blind folded.

Task-5

Character analysis: pick adjectives from the box to describe the characters of the story.

Brave, malicious, cowardly, patriotic, coaxing, betrayer, liar, just.

Task-6(Individual Work)

What would have you done if you were in Nurul Huda's position?

Task-7(Debate/group work)

Who do you think is more heroic- Nurul Huda or Mintu?

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