

COMMUNICATION IN THE INTERCULTURAL CLASSROOM: AN OBSERVATION

DR. RESMI C. B.

Abstract: A classroom with students from different cultural backgrounds can develop difficulty among the learners as well as create challenge for the teachers in terms of communication. As the code of conduct that governs the learner of a speech community is different from one another, their concept formation, interpretation, cultural norms and the likewise remain different from one speech community to the other. Hence, the students are likely to develop different types of communicative patterns as a coping mechanism while interacting with the learners belonging to different speech community. Such communication patterns adopted by the college level learners in the intercultural classroom reveal the response styles adopted during intercultural communicative situations at the group level and at the individual level. Also, exposes the suggestions offered by the teachers to reduce the fear-factor and build up confidence among the learners to interact in intercultural communicative situations.

Keywords: Communicative situation, Intercultural classroom, Coping mechanism

Introduction: Cultural variations play an integral role in the way a learner interacts with other learners. Usually, the interactive style of a learner is influenced by the communication patterns that they have seen or have been part of for a longer duration. The communication styles witnessed by the learner can have a remarkable impact on them. Gradually, such influences and impacts become part of their life and continue to guide the learner in the future endeavours as markers of culture.

The indifferences between the learners in the intercultural classroom is expected to develop a communication pattern understood by everyone in the group. Cultural perception of each learner is observed as different from one another. The peer group interaction among the learners in an intercultural classroom will be influenced by the culture in which they are brought up. During an interaction the learners from two different groups are expected to use the language and communicate in such a way that the message is understood by both the parties.

Intercultural Communication: Language plays a major role as marker or indicator of one's cultural identity. This identity of a person is conveyed in the form of specified use of language during interaction. Typical expressions or usages of language serve as discourse markers. Sometimes the use of language shows how a person belongs to a particular group. Also, certain expressions in language show how a person is excluded from or separated from or discriminated from a group.

Communication in an intercultural situation happens when the interacting participants represent a different communication system. Usually, the rules of speaking that govern a speech community determine what is appropriate and inappropriate in their communication system. The difference in the

communication system may lead to gap as well as barriers in communication. This difference may occur in both modes of communication – in verbal communication and in non-verbal communication.

Motivation: Difficulty of the intercultural communicators needs to be understood and given due attention. In an intercultural classroom the group of communicators include the learners and the teacher. Differences in the cultural background may create a barrier in communication in the intercultural classroom. So, interaction among the peer group and the interaction between the teacher and the learner have to be in such a manner that there is no space for misinterpretation. An attempt to understand the possible difficulties that arise due to cultural barrier would be helpful to find out options to overcome the obstacles during an intercultural communication situation.

Cultural differences of the communicators can lead to conflicts during communication. These conflicts may be at times irrevocable. During such instances, the personal harm that has occurred also would be irrevocable. Hence, it has become necessary to train the learners to deal with communicators during intercultural communication. To equip oneself to face the challenges during intercultural communication, the learner needs to get immense training in the classroom.

Method of solution: Cultural differences of the learners can be understood through close observation of their behaviour patterns. Observation of the behaviour patterns of other learner is expected to help the observant to have an idea of the cultural nuances. Such an idea can help an observant to some extent while interacting in an intercultural context. For a better understanding, it is advisable to enquire directly with the person and find out the cultural markers of the respective speech community along

with observation. This attempt is assumed to widen the understanding of cultural markers of the speech community.

Communicators participating in intercultural communication need to accept the cultural differences of the other speech community. Accommodating the perceptions of others and their culture is expected to broaden the perspectives and the thought process of the communicator. Meanwhile, the learner learns to develop certain methods to overcome the difficulties arisen as a result of cultural barrier. They learn to adjust themselves to the indifferences shown by the other learner and speak according to the requirements of the particular communication situation.

Observation: Learner's Approach: Communication patterns followed by the learners varied according to the variance in culture. This variance can be challenging or interesting for the learners in an intercultural classroom. Challenge can surface in the form of misunderstanding and miscommunication. Interesting aspect is that different communication styles can create a learning experience for other learners as to how to restructure their communication styles in order to accommodate learners from another culture in their conversation.

Conveyance of message among the peer group can become an intricate process in an intercultural classroom. Taking initiative of the task of expressing a matter and making others understand what is meant needs to be dealt carefully so as to get the desired response. Often, the learner will have to use pictorial representation or sign language or both to reach out to the respective learner. Sometimes, in a group, the learners tend to help each other during which they forget their indifferences and may support each other in improving communicative abilities.

Learning a language common to all is chosen by almost everyone in an intercultural situation. Similar is the case with learners who try to interact with students from another culture in the classroom. Usually, English language is chosen by the learners in an intercultural communicative situation. As English was taught along with other subjects as part of the curriculum, learners knew English. Being the world language, importance of English language was well known to everyone as a link language.

Learners tend to assume things and respond during discourses. They try to decipher the meaning of certain factors at an individual level by using assumptions. These assumptions are considered as linkers between the speech and the thought process of the learner. Tendency to correlate things acts as catalyst for continuing their discourse. These assumptions may or may not be correct. But, such assumptions help the learners to involve themselves in the conversation without getting disconnected.

Teacher's Approach: Difference in the conceptual framework followed in each culture necessitates the teacher to follow an interaction pattern that could be understood by every learner in the intercultural classroom. As the concepts developed by the learner from the immediate surroundings are expected to leave long lasting impact in their mind, teachers are required to use the discourse style that can accommodate the learners from different cultural backgrounds.

Responsibility of a teacher lies in supporting the students in understanding the concepts and improving their communicative abilities in an intercultural context. Scaffolding the learners as to how to accept the cultural differences and continue the conversation is of utmost importance for the teacher. Due importance needs to be given in reducing misinterpretation as much as possible and enhance error free communication between the learners.

Encourage the learners to speak in an intercultural context without hesitation and improve their communicative competence is of priority for the teacher. Fear of making mistakes and of being misunderstood during conversation often makes the learner maintain silence during conversation. Such attempts of the learner need to be avoided by constantly encouraging them to speak even though there are chances they are wrong. Confidence provided by the teacher will be sufficient for the learner to excel in communicative abilities.

Teacher needs to suggest a few methods or options that would help the learner to manage difficulties in speaking during an intercultural communicative context. Such suggestions are expected to shed off the fear factor and improve the communication skills of the learner while participating in an intercultural communication situation. Though personal cultural influences play a major role during intercultural communication, the suggestion given by the teacher is expected to rule the thought process of the learner.

Findings of the Investigation: Some of the highlights of the classroom observation are

1. Learner showed positive approach towards acquisition of communication skills in the intercultural situation.
2. Encouragement given by the teacher to overcome cultural barriers during intercultural communication has made remarkable improvement in the students.
3. Learners started accommodating the perspectives of other culture while overcoming the cultural barriers.
4. Introspection of the students at the individual level helped the students to develop their communicative competency in the intercultural communication context.

5. Peer group support during the intercultural communicative situations enhanced the intercultural communicative abilities of the learners.
6. Learner- teacher and learner-learner discourses play a major role in creating a comfortable learning atmosphere for the learners to practice communicative skills in intercultural communication contexts.

Conclusion: The intercultural communicative context in the classroom demands the collaborative effort of the teachers and the learners in improving

the communicative competency. Self-awareness and accommodating the views of other speech community can prove to be fruitful in the learning process to become a good communicator in the intercultural communicative context. In the due course, learners will get an opportunity to share knowledge, learn new things and can take ownership of their learning.

Acknowledgement: The writer got an opportunity to know and understand about the intercultural communicators of college level learners while working as teacher in College and in University.

References:

1. Hall, Bradford J. *Among Cultures: The Challenge of Communication*. California: Thomson Wadsworth. 2005. Print.
2. Dr. Gyan Singh Gautam, G.Ravi Kumar, Aims Of Teaching English And The Role Of Newspapers In A Language Class Room; English Studies International Research Journal : Volume 3 Issue 2 (2015) Issn 2347-3479, Pg 211-215
3. Holliday, Adrian. *Understanding Intercultural Communication : Negotiating a Grammar of Culture*. New York: Routledge. 2013. Print.
4. M.Kalyan Kumar, Diasporic Elements In Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter Of Maladies; English Studies International Research Journal : Volume 3 Issue 2 (2015) Issn 2347-3479, Pg 216-218
5. Jackson, Jane. *Introducing Language and Intercultural communication*. New York: Routledge. 2014. Print.
6. Jandt, Fred. E. *An Introduction to Intercultural communication: Identities in a Global Community*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. 2010. Print.
7. Dr. Gyan Singh Gautam, G.Ravi Kumar, A Study On Recent Innovations In Teacher Education; English Studies International Research Journal : Volume 3 Issue 2 (2015) Issn 2347-3479, Pg 219-223

Dr. Resmi C. B., Assistant Professor
Sri Shanmugha College of Engineering and Technology