THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL DIVERSITY THROUGH MOVIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to study multicultural awareness and to be informed of different cultures through the media of movie. In addition, the article discusses the main types of movies that can be useful and helpful for learning intercultural communication and its' basic importance in our educational spheres. At present, globalized world with various languages and cultures, learning foreign languages is a necessity and essential demand for making sure international communication, knowledge and understanding. We can consider the fact that language and culture are connected each other, they can not be separated at all, they are inseparable, learning a language also involves learning the connection of culture. The close interdependency between culture and language can be used to increase to social unity and solidity, in areas where cultural prejudice, political and religious hostility is widespread. Therefore, language teaching practices can be used to eradicate, cultural awareness, identities, stereotypes and to improve intercultural understanding, universally shared values, which will serve to the peaceful coexistence of different people in the world. In this article, movies were chosen for this goal in an appropriate way, especially focused on providing a rich appropriately source of cultural occasions and varying patterns of people behaviors, notions, attitudes seem to be a suitable means to develop the understanding of cultural diversity. This study describes reasons, beliefs, ways and activities of utilizing movies in language classrooms as a means of developing the learning, comprehending and using for cultural diversity.

Keywords: Movies, Language Classrooms, Teaching, Learning and Cultural Diversity, Language and culture.

I. INTRODUCTION

Fast progress in information, telecommunications and transportation, has changed societies, with different languages and cultures, into bilateral and multilateral relationships of a global world. Therefore, learning foreign and second languages has become a huge necessity for developing international communication and understanding. Language and culture cannot be separated, they are connected each other. In consequence, learning a language, in a way comes to mean learning the culture of people speaking that language. The close interrelation between culture and language can be utilized as a means to contribute to social unity and firmness everywhere, especially in parts of the world where cultural bias, political and religious hostility seem power and influence people's motives, ideas, identities, nations, traditions, customs, rituals, beliefs and behaviors. Language teaching practices can be utilized efficiently to destroy stereotypes completely and to improve and promote intercultural understanding, always shared values and civil rights. Classrooms of language education seem to be appropriate medium to play a major role in organizing the foundation for reciprocal comprehension and cooperation with regard to cultural pluralism. Movie films chosen properly for the aim of learning or teaching a foreign or second language are an efficient source of cultural occasions. So, the use of movies with rich content describing, expressing various aspects of culture of different people in language classrooms seems to be a very suitable and helpful tool to improve the comprehension of varieties of cultures and to get to know the meaning and notion of cultural awareness and the sense of the humanity of other people. In this study, we will describe the principles, directions, ways, and activities of utilizing movie films as a device of enhancing an understanding for cultural diversity while teaching a language (basically English) in classrooms.

A combination of designing of people's behavior that comprises thoughts, ideas, attitude, viewpoints, life style, communications, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting and, relationships and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious and social group. According to this definition language is an integral part of the culture. In the 2nd UNESCO World Report, the diversity of human cultures is described as including "the wealth of languages, ideas, beliefs, kinship systems, customs, tools, artistic works, rituals and other expressions they collectively embody" (UNESCO 2009, p.25). In both explanations above, culture seems as a broad concept that is deeply linked to language concepts.

It is indicated in Baker (2003) that Halliday's socio-semiotic view of language emphasizes the social meanings that language both represents and shapes, "The social structure is not just an ornamental background to linguistic interaction…It is an important device in the evolution of semantic systems and semantic processes." (1979, p.114) [2] According to this view every language will reflect the values, beliefs and assumptions of the culture it represents. Thus learning a language will also involve learning the culture that the language expresses. Kramsch (2006, pp.6-10) on the other hand, defines culture as "membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings". Members of that community may retain a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting, which is their „culture". Common attitudes, beliefs, and values are expressed in the way members of the group use language. This is a view of culture that focuses on the ways of thinking, behaving, valuing currently shared by members of the same discourse community. Thus culture is implied to have influence over the use and development of language. There is significant interdependency between language and culture. Language being the main medium of expression of the culture, as we use language we often represent a particular identity and give clues of our roles and memberships in social environment. Culture does not exist apart from language or from us, as language users. Therefore, no use of language and no individual language user can be considered to be culture-free rather we are always carriers and agents of culture. Hence learning a language means learning the culture of the people who speak that language. [8]

Learning culture also contributes to and enhances the learning of the language and, therefore, there are many benefits of teaching culture in language classes. It gives students a reason to study the target language. It helps learners to relate the forms of languages to real people and places. These advantages, however, are not limited to learning the target language, but they are also related to understanding cultural diversity and peaceful coexistence of different people in the same world.

Some of such benefits of teaching culture were listed in Genç and Bada (2004) as:

1. Increasing learners" curiosity, interest, and motivation in target countries,
2. Nurturing tolerance towards different ideologies, religions, and cultures,
3. Giving learners a liking for the native speakers of the target language,
4. Playing a useful role in learning the geography, history, etc of the target culture,
5. Helping learners to observe similarities and differences among various cultural groups.

In short teaching culture would lead the language learners to get a sense of the humanity of other people. Teaching culture in language classrooms seems to play a key role in forming the base for mutual understanding and collaboration in terms of cultural pluralism. Additionally, there is an indispensable link between

understanding cultural diversity and peaceful coexistence of different people in the globalizing world, which seems closely related to getting over the problems of social stability, national security, the maintenance of human rights and humanistic values. This practice will also be in line with the tasks of the UNESCO regarding the world community, and its aim of elaboration of innovation strategies of a modern cultural policy. For these reasons, intercultural understanding poses itself as an important issue in language learning and teaching. Incorporating the study of culture into the curriculum of foreign language teaching has been considered a matter of priority by language educators in the United States. Factually, it is believed that students cannot really master a language unless they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs (Peterson and Coltrane, 2003). [9]

II. METHODOLOGY

Movie films are considered as rich, fruitful and innovative sources of culture to get more information about different countries' cultures. Also basic cultural elements can be learnt successfully by students with the help of watching movies. Movie films chosen for the purpose of learning or teaching a foreign or second language may allow us to observe varying patterns of human behaviors, including thoughts, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting, etc. Thus using movies with rich content describing different aspects of culture of different people seems to be a very appropriate tool to enhance the understanding of cultural diversity and to get the sense of cultural awareness and the sense of the humanity of other people. There are many reasons for why movie films and video documents are believed to be good means to enhance the understanding of cultural diversity.

First, movie films are windows into culture. They highlight particular sectors from the general cultural life of a society. While watching a film with a topic describing presidential elections in the United States, we also come up with information about let us say, American political system, the ways of motivating American voters, the social and political circles that are influential in the presidential elections, etc. Actually, when we watch a movie film with a topic on the school life of the hero, we learn and observe many things about the educational environment, the interracial relations, and the traditions and details about the routines of the daily life in that society. In the same way we may acquire knowledge and information about particular places and times, about how people live, think and behave, about body language, styles of dress, table manners, gender roles, ways of treating children and talking to bosses, elders and peers, etc.

Second, all kinds of discourse showing the use of language in most contexts, can be found in movie films. This is something which cannot be provided in textbooks and classroom with much effect. The context in which the discourse take place display very clearly to the viewer the contextual variables of the language such as status, age, and sex of participants, the speaker's feelings and communicative intentions, the relationship the speaker has with the hearer, the content of the utterance, and the situation where the utterance occurs, etc. Consequently, the viewer can easily set up a relationship between the above contextual variables and the stylistic differences such the language's being tentative vs. direct, polite vs. impolite, formal vs. informal, strong and blunt, etc… (Arnold & Harmer; 1984). [1]

Third, as a moving picture book, video gives access to things, places, people, events, and behavior, (regardless of the language used) and is worth thousands of picture dictionaries and magazines It is difficult to fulfill this range of functions except by living in an English-speaking country. It brings the English-language world to the learner. Now let us describe some of the ways of using movie films in language classrooms as a

means for the purpose of developing in students" minds an understanding for cultural diversity. The movie films must be selected appropriately in terms of types and content of the material to be used. First of all, the video resources that can be used is not limited to popular feature films but they may show a wide range of variation such as drama programs (films, sitcoms, soaps), documentaries on interesting subjects, daily news and weather broadcasting, sports programs, talk and game shows, commercials, movie trailers and TV cartoons (animated cartoons). Secondly, when selecting material for students from different cultures, videos containing taboo language and taboo subject matter should be avoided. the language teacher must be aware of the taboo issues in the culture of the students. Finally, language teachers should not forget that feature films are not always suitable for all ages. So the rating systems must be taken into consideration. Now let us consider certain general activities that the teacher may perform or that the teacher may encourage the students to perform before, during or after viewing the video material (Sherman, 2003, pp.123-170). [11]

After watching various films, we have got more information, notion and comprehension about different countries' culture, then we can communicate with different nations without difficulties with the help of our intercultural awareness developed by using movies as basic means of learning and understanding diverse cultures. In addition, we can give some basic suggestions to get, understand and learning cultural diversity as additional instructions which are more fruitful for the development of intercultural communication.

- Use appropriate level of plain English language.

- Rephrase, say the same idea in different ways so as to ensure understanding.

- Use body language, it's a profound facilitator in cross-cultural communication.

- Feel comfortable to repeat what you have said if you sense the other person does not understand you. Also, encourage them to repeat their statements if you haven't understood them.

- Don't raise your voice when talking with people who speak limited English. This does not make the meaning any clearer.

- Adopt an attitude of mutual language sharing and mutual learning. Ask people to teach you certain words in their language. This often helps to break barriers as participants hear you struggle with their language and they feel less self-conscious attempting to speak English.

- If jokes and riddles are part of a conversation, explain concepts being used.

- Be aware of aspects of culture that you might take for granted.

For example: Names of political or local sports figures, brand names for foods or names of places.

- Don't make assumptions about the comprehension ability of the other person.

- Check out understanding.

- Be attentive to people's non-verbal communication as it could clarify meaning.
- When appropriate, correct people's language in a gentle way and encourage them to repeat the correct version.

III. RESULTS

After choosing an appropriate video material, the teacher may prepare the students by doing effective, general activities, before viewing, such as:

-Making some research in internet about the cultural topics and themes covered,

-Finding some background information about these cultural topics and themes,

-Preparing a list of key vocabulary related to cultural subjects in question,

-Generating some class discussion on the cultural elements covered in the movie.

-Passing out some worksheet about the cultural elements discussed in the class.

-Similarly the teacher may carry out some general activities during or after viewing like:

-Assigning written homework on subjects related culture,

-Analyzing behaviors, habits, customs of characters,

-Letting students talking about cultural events,

-Letting students talk about the way the theme is dealt with,

-Explaining the characteristics of the language, (i.e. the stylistic properties of the discourse),

-Discussing the traditions and beliefs of people etc,

-Letting students act out the roles in some scenes,

-Generating some class discussion on students‟ impressions about the cultural elements in the movie or video elements.

Some specific activities in using movie films could contribute towards learning different cultural elements. The teacher should watch the movie together with students, episode by episode and ask them to find out the unusual, strange or different behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and body language they were able to observe during viewing. Then the teacher may ask the students to explain why they are like that. After the students' answers are given and compared in the class, the teacher should relate his own answer and explain what they mean and what message should be understood from them. Such a specific cultural element can be, for instance, *greetings*. The teacher may give students a form or an outline to complete while they watch and listen to a dialogue in the video. After the class views the episode, the teacher can invite students to discuss the cultural norms and values of greetings in that society. Topics may be expanded to cover non-verbal behaviors like, the physical distance between speakers, gestures, mimics, eye contact, social roles, and how people in different social roles relate to each other. Students can also describe the behaviors they observe and they can discuss which of them are the same to their native culture and which are not. Then the class can talk about the ways of an effective communication with the native speakers of the target language.

Another effective way of increasing awareness in the different cultural elements is the teacher's asking students to act out certain roles based on miscommunication and cultural differences. The purpose is learning about ways of addressing various groups of people in the target culture, such as people of the same age and older people. After watching scenes where such dialogues take place, students learn their roles of speech in a situation in which an inappropriate greeting is used. Other students observe the role play and try to identify the cause for the miscommunication. Then they replay their roles in the same situation using a culturally suitable form of address.

The objective of this activity is to acknowledge and express body language. Any sequence where gestures and body language are very understandable and expose important, emotions, feelings and reactions in drama, speeches, sports, and competitions can be chosen. The teacher observes with the sound off, gets the

students to control carefully and say what the characters do with body, hands, legs, face and head. Then the teacher asks the students to use and imitate the body language and then put down in two columns what the person does and what this shows.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

Cultural awareness requires a comprehension not only of the culture of the target language but also that of the learners' own culture. According to Byram and Fleming two important communicative competences in language learning require the development of cultural awareness: While communicative competence requires an understanding of the norms of social interaction of one socio-cultural community, intercultural communicative competence necessitates an understanding of the differences of interactional norms between different speech communities and an ability to "reconcile or mediate between different modes present" (1998, p.12). [3]

Hence, the notion of 'cultural awareness' is central to intercultural communicative competence. Without considering this cultural awareness as a basic part of language learning a successful communication may be impossible. When people with different cultural sets come together, confrontation of different cultural elements and values may often end up in mutual understanding and compromise, while in other cases it may result in clash and conflict. If we look at the case of mutual understanding and compromise we may consider the development of the process most probably in the following order: After a certain period of cohabitation, members of these different cultural elements may begin to look for the reasons behind those cultural behaviors and actions. Once the process of recognition starts, it is carried to a further point of understanding each other. As soon as the mutual understanding is reached, the empathy follows and finally comes sympathy and appreciation at the end of the gradual proceeding of the natural development. But this is not always the case. Sometimes the opposite happens and the confrontation of different cultures concludes in a crisis. In other words, members of different cultures, in some cases, may misunderstand and misinterpret each other's behaviors and cultural values. The second case of learning about the other culture and of recognizing the members of the other group may turn out to be very expensive in the end. So, another less risky, but a secure method should be sought to introduce a new culture to the learners of a language without leaving them in discouraging confrontational situations. One of these methods can be the use of movie films in language classrooms for the purpose of getting acquainted the learners of that language with the cultural elements of the speakers of that language. Thus novice language learners may learn a lot about the traditions, manners, and the other cultural elements of the native speakers of the new language in the peaceful medium of the classroom, with no fear of criticism. This practice will also be in line with the tasks of the UNESCO concerning the world community, and its aim of promoting the cultural diversity through innovative strategies of a modern cultural policy.

The promotion of cultural diversity – the "common humanity heritage" according to the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001 has become one of the most important issues in maintaining dialogue and peace in the world. Intercultural dialogue was considered as the guarantee of peace and of preventing "the inevitable clash of cultures and civilizations" (UNESCO 2002, p.11). Cultural diversity is a driving force of development, not only in the growth of economic life but also in the growth intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life. In order to provide a solid basis for the promotion of cultural diversity, a number of international conventions have been promoted by UNESCO since 2001. 21st May has been celebrated as the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. The aim of this Day is to nurture the experience of the diversity with curiosity, by engaging in dialogue and listening to one another through cultural enterprises, creative industries, cultural tourism and protecting cultural heritage. The year 2008 was declared by

UNESCO as the International Year of Languages, which proves that languages and multilingualism is a vital item, having considerable effects on the making and practice of national language policies. At the same time, acceptance and recognition of cultural diversity – in particular through innovative use of media and ICTs – are conducive to dialogue among civilizations and cultures, respect and mutual understanding. It is believed that this approach will recover the sense of a joint commitment to promoting the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind. (The ideas and information mentioned in this section were taken from the portal of UNESCO http://portal.unesco.org). Using movie films in promoting cultural understanding in language classrooms can be regarded as a part of these innovative strategies.

V. CONCLUSION

In this article, first the need for learning foreign and second languages was stressed as an inevitable part of life in a globalizing world where communication has to be maintained among nations speaking different languages. Then the possibility of benefitting from the close and interdependent relationship between language and culture for the purpose of contributing to social cohesion and peace in the world, particularly in parts of the world where all sorts of cultural biases and hostilities are strong and threaten a peaceful cohabitation of different people in the same area. This possibility was explained to be realized in the language teaching practices through using various types of video materials, especially movie films to eradicate cultural stereotypes and to promote intercultural understanding, universally shared values and human rights. Video materials chosen appropriately and with rich content describing different aspects of culture of different people in language classrooms was considered to be a very appropriate tool to enhance the understanding of cultural diversity and to get the sense of cultural awareness and the sense of the humanity of other people. This practice of using movie films in promoting cultural understanding in language classrooms was claimed to be in line with the tasks of the UNESCO and its aim of promoting the cultural diversity through innovative strategies. Then the reasons for why movie films and video documents are believed to be useful in enhancing the understanding of cultural diversity were explained and an account of the ways, certain general and specific activities of using movie films as a means of developing an understanding for cultural diversity while teaching a foreign or second language was given. It is believed that the practice of using movies in learning about the other culture and of recognizing the members of the other groups by means of observing the cultural elements in video documents in the peaceful environment of a classroom is a secure and beneficial way to enhance intercultural understanding among members of different cultural groups. Without considering this cultural awareness and understanding in language learning, a successful communication cannot be achieved.

So, we need more time to improve our cultural awareness, and we should use different methods, techniques, approaches and useful means of understanding diversity of culture and also we have to practice more. Mostly, watching movies play an important role in learning and understanding cultures. And a good level of communicative competence is the final aim of culture learning. How to cultivate and improve the learners' competence of cultural awareness. By using movie films, the learner can achieve his ideal goals. To sum up, the usage of movie films in English classroom can be very useful for learning and knowing about variety of culture with their own elements such as: traditions, customs, rituals, mentality, stereotypes, behavior, symbols and so on. we deliberate on possible ways of facilitating improvement of intercultural communication through movie films. From our experiences, the most challenging way, but probably the most promising one in terms of learning culture, is the one that we illustrated in the English lessons. We

conclude this paper with the hope that readers will join us in pursuing some basic information on learning diversity of culture through movies.

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