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Pedagogical Implications of Linguistic Acculturation in the Process of Acquisition of the 2nd Language. From Theory to Practice

ABSTRACT. At present there are many different forms and techniques of teaching and learning a language whose aim is to aid all the teacher's activities s/he has planned while attempting to bring the language lessons as close to the authentic core of the language as possible that any teacher who really cares for the quality of his lessons can do whatever he only wants to incorporate the forces of authentic language contact to the classroom language behaviour of his/her pupils.

1. THE THEORY

All of the generally accepted models of linguistic communication (e.g. Weaver and Shannon's 1949, Newcomb's 1963, Gerbner's 1956, Jakobson's 1960 etc.) assume the existence of at least three distinct elements of the very act of communication – the addresser (A), the means of communication transport (MCT) and the receiver (R) – the only difference between them being placed in the form of the definition of linguistic communication. Some of them mostly underline the very fact of the transmission of information stating that the act of communication takes place even then when – taking no account of the real reasons of the existence of such a situation – the addresser (A), having passed a given piece of information, does not notice any reaction on it on the part of the receiver (R), as this does not seem to be the key idea of the act of communication. This concept of communication has been defined by Fiske as the *school of message* (Fiske 1990: 2). The advocates of this school of communication claim that it does take part when A has sent

a piece of information towards R with the help of any possible means of communication transport (MCT).

There is, however, at least one more definition of linguistic information. This definition largely stresses on the production and the exchange of meanings, at the same time pointing at the importance of the role and the function of verbal and non-verbal text in culture (Fiske 1990: 2). The most important research methods applied by the adherents of the point of view are rooted in the concepts of semiotics. According to the concept put forward by the researchers representing this school of communication (called by Fiske the *school of the production and exchange of meanings*), the act of communication takes place only when it has been completed i.e. the addresser of a message has obtained a signal from the message receiver that the contents of the message have been received (and decoded) by him, the result of this signal being an appropriate verbal and/or kinetic reaction demonstrated by R.

Because of the fact that it is really very difficult to decide which of the two, presented above, points of view is more appropriate and, therefore, should rather be followed when dealing with the concept of linguistic communication (both of them contain enough arguments to support their theoretical assumptions) it is therefore suggested to state that the act of [linguistic] communication as such always takes part when – not taking into account the possible reaction of R – any kind of message has been sent in his direction. It seems that even when the receiver has not presented any form of reaction on the received piece of information it is, in most cases, obvious that the message reached him and that the lack of reaction appeared because of the reasons independent on the addresser. The acceptance of such a point of view means that always when this obstacle is removed (e.g. the addresser will formulate his message in such a way that the receiver – in return – will inform him that there are no longer any more serious obstacles on the A – R communication transmission line), the message sent by A not only will always be confirmed by R as far as its contents is concerned but also, in most cases, R will formulate his return message which will ascertain A that the pieces of information he wanted R to receive were actually received and understood by him. What, in fact, happens in this moment is an *act of linguistic interaction*, i.e. apart from the confirmation that the emitted messages were received by R, there appeared a change in the communication function of each of the participants of the act of communication according to which the receiver assumed the functions of the addresser and the addresser followed the procedures usually performed by the receiver. What one can easily notice here is that the described forms of behaviour present something more than just an act of linguistic communication perceived from the physical point of view of a message transmission. The mutual interaction that takes place between A and R is one more step in mutual understanding of the ideas owned by each of them; it is something more than just an attempt

to *communicate* (that is, getting with the message at a previously assumed aim) between the two principal elements of the act of communication. Not taking into account of a number of transitional elements that are, in some way, connected with this form of mutual interaction (each of them is very interesting but even a rough description of their functions would take too much time), it seems important to state that this more advanced stage of the act of linguistic communication will be referred to as *linguistic interaction*, that is a situation in which the transmission of a message evoked the desired reaction of the message receiver.

The situation is, as we hope, pretty important for both a language teacher and his pupils. It makes him face a problem of primary importance, the problem to be answered individually by each of the teachers and which can be conveyed by a number of the following questions:

- 1) What does it really mean to teach a foreign language?
- 2) Should the process of teaching a foreign language mean the attainment of the priority of the transmission of linguistic messages over their reception or should it mean that some form of equality between the two stages of linguistic schooling has to be searched for?
- 3) Should it not be more appropriate to turn more attention to the fact of the existence of, coded in the nature of each of the participants taking part in the act of linguistic interaction, a number of culturally-rooted habits that will always appear and assist any form of linguistic transmission, what seems to be a proposition of considerable importance especially now when the distance between the members of culturally different linguistic communities has been so effectively shortened?
- 4) In case the above-presented issue is to be continued, should it not be more appropriate to assume that a very just Selinker's thesis (1972) stating that each of the language pupils forms, in the process of the language acquisition (in the way Krashen understands it), his/her own interlanguage (the thesis that, in fact, accepts the fact of application of the foreign vocabulary in the process of description of concepts clearly rooted in the pupils' native culture) is not the most comfortable way out of the situation, both for the receiver and the addresser of a message, and the acceptance of the *status quo* in this situation is very close to the – never fully approved of – compromise?
- 5) What outcome – if all the questions placed above have been answered positively – can be found, what way, that would naturally concentrate on the benefit of a pupil, – a future participant of the international linguistic communication process – is to be chosen?

All the questions placed above seem to be of particular importance to us, especially when one starts considering the facts which, although – as we see it – up till now carefully hidden and undermined, cannot be disregarded any

longer. Fully understanding the arguments presented by the severe critics of the Whorf and Sapir theory of linguistic relativity (1956), we would be willing to accept the weaker version of the hypothesis presented by Kramersch, according to which: "the language users tend to sort out and distinguish experiences differently according to the semantic categories provided by their semantic codes. (...) it also shows that the resources provided by the linguistic code are understandable only against the larger pragmatic context of people's experience. (...)" (Kramersch 1998: 14). The facts, mentioned at the beginning of this section and which very closely coincide with the concepts presented by Kramersch, can therefore be presented as follows:

- 1) A language is a tool that is mostly used for interactive rather than purely communicative procedures.
- 2) Each language is a product of its own culture – what means that it was formed by the native users of this culture to serve as well as to satisfy their own egoistic reasons (e.g. to facilitate their mutual contacts).
- 3) All non-native users of a given foreign language (e.g. the language pupils) should be familiarised, in the very process of the language schooling, with the culture-oriented point of view of the language native users, the point that does exist inside the language learned by them.
- 4) Finally, it is of importance to distinguish between the notion of culture and the one of linguistic culture. As culture generally means formal and intellectual heritage of a given nation (or a society), the idea of linguistic culture indicates the picture of mentality of a given society, that is, frozen in the language, its portrait, the points of view on the topics important to its members, as well as the – generally accepted by the native users of the language – suggestions of their verbal (and kinetic) interpretation.

When in 1981 Canale and Swain formed their theses concerning the general principles of the so-called communication competence stating, among others, that – apart from the linguistic competence – it should cover the aspects of the sociolinguistic competence, the discourse and the strategy of maintaining a conversation they had to, as we suppose, take into account the cultural aspect of the language. It does not seem possible, while talking about the sociolinguistic competence, not to include the topics of linguistic acculturation of the process of language acquisition into it.

2. THE PRACTICE

The above assumption means that the assertion stating that a participant of the process of language acquisition (meant as the process of all-over acquisition of a language) meets the problems of linguistic acculturation (that

is, a concept basically different from the process of acculturation understood diachronically) only when this process delineating the acquisition of a language takes place at the territory inhabited by the native users of the language (e.g. while learning English in Great Britain or the USA) does not find its confirmation in the reality. Such an assertion assumes *a priori* that any of the participants of the process of language acquisition organised outside the territory inhabited by the native users of the language has only got a chance of its approximate proficiency. What's more, such a point of view means that the learner's level of language efficiency largely depends on the good will of his language teacher as well as the authors of the handbook chosen to complement his/her language schooling, i. e. these elements which constitute the basis of his/her contacts with the very kernel of the acquired language. Additionally, such an assertion suggests not only the existence of inequality in language schooling that exists between the pupils who acquire the language in and out of the territory inhabited by the native users of the language, but also the acceptance of such inequality. It is then presupposed that the general level of linguistic competence of the participants taking part in a language course held at the territory inhabited by the native users of the language learned should be much higher when compared to the group of these language course participants who acquired this language outside such a territory. In case such a difference does not seem to exist (or one cannot find it) it is usually claimed such people are either extraordinarily gifted linguistically or the level of their personal traits – such as diligence or internal motivation – is unusually high. Not even trying to explain what exactly is meant by each of the opinions presented above (it is hoped we would be able to present the existence of a close correlation between the particular individual level of motivation and, mentioned by Kramersch, "*the pragmatic context connected with the individual human experience*" (Kramersch, op. cit.), or – perhaps a little bit less tense connection between this context and what has generally been described as "diligence" – we cannot fully accept this point of view finding it not only too much simplifying, but also suggesting that linguistic aptitudes play one of the most important functions in the whole process of linguistic acquisition. In this case we would rather prefer a moderated concept of Neufeld (1978) who claims that any person is able to learn the (back)grounds of any foreign language (in most cases any person is able to listen to and to speak), not including the level of human intelligence into the main body of linguistic aptitudes (what does, for example, Carroll 1981). What's more, stressing linguistic aptitudes as important in the whole process of language acquisition practically means the acceptance of the fact that there are people who, even if they are enormously diligent and very highly motivated, are not able to take the command of the language at the level performed by "linguistically gifted" people, regardless of the area of its ac-

quisition (i.e. either at, or out of the territory inhabited by the native users of the language).

As it has already been pointed out, the concept of linguistic culture mirrors the mentality of the native users of the language. What it means is that any of the native participants taking part in the process of language interaction is able to function actively in the process of reception and transmission of information of any type if only his/her subjective level of intelligence (IQ) responds to the level of the information load transmitted in the course of the process. However, even if such information load is higher, each of the native participants of the interaction process has a possibility of establishing the basic values of the information load mainly because of the fact of holding the status of a native user of the language.

Each of the currently used languages contains a large number of expressions that testify to its authenticity to the culture it represents. These expressions, found not only in the syntagmatic forms of the language, but also in the possibilities of their paradigmatic selection (grammar included), actually present the points of view of the native users of the language upon the reality that surrounds them. If a pupil that acquires a given language is mostly confined to the acquisition of its grammar rules, s/he, sooner or later, must find him/herself in a blind street, out of which no reasonable way out can be found. What is more, such activities do not, as we suppose, appropriately match his/her individual aspirations and desires. In the moment a pupil begins to take part in the process of language acquisition, s/he is not locked in a golden cage and effectively deprived of any control of his/her individual progress of the language proficiency. In the era of television, computer and the Internet the assertion that both the general and the linguistic culture do not influence on the intermediate and the final process of the language acquisition of a pupil is nothing more but deprived of facts and arguments tautology. If a pupil watches his/her favourite TV broadcast (for example, one launched by MTV or VIVA) where he finds many interviews with the idols s/he admires, who – as it usually happens with the native users of the language – present a great number of colourful, lively, spicy and very well-matched expressions that exist in any language, being its integral and authentic part – and, subsequently, takes a handbook s/he was advised to make use of so as to learn the language from, in which s/he cannot find the answers to any of the problems earlier met by him/her (it is because of the fact the handbook offers him/her a totally different version of the language, the version being but a shadow of the language he had had a chance to experience while watching the TV broadcast, reading/listening to the instructions to some computer games or establishing personal contacts via the Internet), naturally, he has a number of well-grounded, as we think, doubts

concerning both the didactic competence of his/her language teachers and the handbook authors; it is in this moment that the pupil starts presenting his/her apprehensions if s/he will ever be able to freely use and understand, and – first of all, talk – about any chosen topic using these – and exactly these – linguistic forms which s/he has just found to be used by his/her idols. The procedures aimed at suggesting the students to concentrate on the grammatical principles of the language in the process of learning it, the procedures so warmly applauded by a vast majority of the handbook writers mean, as we see it, not only the lack of due acceptance of most of the remaining ideas to be found in the theses presented by Canale and Swain, but also a kind of an emergency exit, a suggestion to learn driving a car merely by studying the traffic rules.

The cultural aspect of a language can be found in any expression that exists in it as well as any description or definition the language proposes. The exactness of the information, its brevity, pithiness, vitality and indefiniteness, all of them testify to its authenticity, its dependence upon the culture it has come out of. Therefore, it seems to us to be [at least] a form of oversight to claim that the process of linguistic acculturation of a language pupil takes place only when his/her language acquisition goes on at the territory of the native language users whereas it does not go on in case the language has been being acquired by the pupil in his/her own country (cf. Arabski 1997: 33, for example, who basically repeats – as it seems – the generally approved stance). Such a proposition could have had some grounds in the situation the contact of the pupil with the language learned by him/her was actually (and strictly) limited to the so-called language lessons (the expression “so-called” means such lessons where the stress is being put on such secondary language traits as, for example, the very structure of a language rules i.e. language lessons that bear close resemblance to the lessons in mathematics, logics etc.); now when the world has become, as it has been rightly put up, “a global village”, when a real contact with a native language user has been limited to one simple hand movement of touching a TV-set button or a computer mouse click, the proposition stating that a pupil who acquires a foreign language in his own country is practically deprived of his/her access to the cultural heritage of the native language users, does not seem to be, as we see it, fully correct.

As it was shown some time earlier, the cultural aspect of a language means an illustration of the mentality of its native users. Any language was not built up yesterday or a day before yesterday; likewise, the process of its formation was not stopped in the moment a pupil began to learn it at school. The process of a language formation is a continuous and an infinite one, it went on, goes on and will go on up to the moment the culture it represents

exists; a language is its mirror-like reflection, its representative in front of these participants of other cultures who have just happened to have started to learn it; it is the language itself that lets them notice and discover all the differences between their own culture and the culture of the language they have started to acquire. It is because of their participation in language lessons that the learners have been given a chance to perceive as well as to experience this cultural difference on themselves; it is in these moments that each of the language students is able to see the complexity of the language learned and to taste the specific taste of the culture that has become responsible for the existence of a number of mental designates that clearly differ in the semantic context from the same (or similar) expressions present in their own culture. We cannot imagine anybody to be able to understand (as well as to comprehend) a foreign language while not being able to trace the propositions connected with the reality that surrounded its native creators.

The conclusion of this form of reasoning must be a statement that *any* of the participants of the process of a language acquisition has to be subjected to the principles of a language acculturation and – what seems equally important – the principles of general acculturation (with an obvious assertion that the intensity of this second form of acculturation will differ depending on a number of extraordinary elements such as the geographic area the language is being acquired, the cultural competence of the language teachers, the closeness of the two languages to the cultural stem that influenced upon the creation of each of them and so on). If the acquisition of a language takes place among its native users, the degree of the acculturation intensity (i.e. the external acculturation) will reach much higher a level than when the language acculturation goes on outside the native users' area. In such case the level of [internal] acculturation will depend on many additional factors (some of them have already been mentioned) as, for example: the frequency of the contacts of the language learners with the language itself and the culture it represents; the level of the cultural load of the teacher (i.e. the subjective and teacher-dependent teacher's point of view on the importance of the cultural aspects confined in the language he teaches as compared to the remaining elements that contribute to a pupil's success in the language-learning process); the cultural load of a handbook selected to aid a pupil in his/her language acquisition process; a possibility of participation in individual (or teacher-supervised) process to discover the existing differences between the native culture of the language learners and the one they can find as existing in the language just acquired by them (viz.: the Acton's model of a pupil who "should not have problems with language acquisition" made by him in 1979); etc. All these problems are broadly discussed by Valette (Valette 1977) and the conclusions one can find there are so obvious that do not require any additional discussion.

3. THE THEORY AND THE PRACTICE

Instead of that – and as a form of *résumé* of all we have said so far – we would like to present our point of view on a pretty controversial opinion one can find in Sajavaar's work (1978), who concludes that the process of classroom language acquisition is static as compared to the dynamic force of authentic language communication. By all means this seems to be – up to a point – a genuine observation, but – unfortunately, as we assess it – an observation not *fully* genuine; one has to remember that any school or classroom language acquisition process is always exactly such as it has been devised by a language teacher. What it means is that a teacher who will be able to notice the importance of the cultural basis of a language as well as the culture itself and who – instead of arising constant accusations of the [so-called] idioms of being guilty of the existence of so many unnecessary and unwanted impediments in the pupils' smooth way to a success – turn his pupils' attention to the fact of appearance of many different linguistic expressions that would refer to exactly the same physical objects and/or social events inside the language acquired and between the two – the vernacular and the acquired – languages, will certainly introduce more dynamism, power and authenticity of a real language situation than a teacher who will limit his language lessons to the explanations strictly connected with the language problems the pupils may [as well] find in their handbooks. After all, it finally depends on a teacher if the whole process of language acquisition will be a static one, the one that would characterise itself by a number of semantic one-sidedness of all the verbal/social and verbal/physical designates, or a process that would resemble the dynamism of natural and authentic language communication (in case one doubts if such lessons are ever possible, one is advised to consult a very wise and very-well written paper by Acton and Walker de Felix [1986], in which they propose a new system of establishment of the levels of the students' linguistic competence, the one that such real possibility of the existence of such lessons can be concluded from).

At present there are many different forms and techniques of teaching and learning a language whose aim is to aid all the teacher's activities s/he has planned while attempting to bring the language lessons as close to the authentic core of the language as possible (it is enough to mention the holistic method according to which the language acquisition is a means and not a target of a learning process or – based on the Vygotsky's social and cultural theory of human mental processes as well as the conclusions derived from the theoretical assumptions of the Gestalt Pedagogy - the method of cultural linguistic coincidence, whose variant is, for example, the way specialist forms of languages are taught) that any teacher who really cares for the quality of his lessons can do whatever he only wants to incorporate the

forces of authentic language contact to the classroom language behaviour of his/her pupils. It is up to his/her sole decision if such procedures will result in better language fluency of the pupils. And it is up to his/her responsibility when such forms of behaviour have been assessed as faulty and fallacious.

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