Using Novels as Pedagogical Tools for Teaching Cross-Cultural Competence to English Language Students: Focus on Speech Acts

Maya Khemlani David

Asia Europe Institute, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Email: mayadavid@yahoo.com

Ameer Ali

English Department, Government Arts and Commerce College, Larkana.
Email: ameer7037@gmail com

ABSTRACT - *This study discusses the importance of developing cross-cultural competence among students of English language. It is argued that novels written in different contexts can be used as pedagogical material to teach students how the use of speech acts vary from one cultural context to another cultural context. Understanding this difference can help encourage mutual understanding and mutual respect between interlocutors coming from different cultural contexts. Data collected through purposive sampling from novels written in a range of contexts were qualitatively analysed to demonstrate how cross-cultural competence can be developed among students of English using culturally appropriate literary dialogues as pedagogical tools. It is suggested that dialogue-based language input of speech acts taken from novels can help students of English understand the importance of socio-cultural context in which speech acts are embedded.*

Keywords: competence, cross-cultural, English, pedagogical, students

I. Introduction

Learning a language typically focusses on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation to develop reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. However, one of the reasons for learning a language is to communicate with people and how to use words or structures in different contexts at different times (Byram, 2013). This means that language is learned when speakers can use the language APPROPRIATELY (my emphasis) in different contexts (Austin, 2005) and with different people and understand the underlying meaning beyond the text. Understanding the meaning is sometimes accompanied by cultural understanding and using culturally appropriate language can help maintain communication without inter-cultural differences and conflicts. According to Byram (2013), apart from linguistic competence, intercultural competence makes communication flow smoothly.

Communication is anchored by the interlocutors' physical and cultural contexts. This shows that communication can be culturally situated (Clark and Ivaniè, 1991):

"... language forms cannot be considered independently of the ways they are used to communicate in context. Further, individual acts of communication in context cannot be considered independently of the social forces which have set up the conventions of appropriacy for that context" (p. 170).

Therefore, in language teaching, teachers must integrate culture. With the emergence of more and more non-native speakers of English and the growth of more multilingual societies, with internationalization and globalization, it is vital to integrate cultural norms with language teaching. Way back in 1997 Liddicoat (1997), stated that this was far from the dominant view of language teachers.

Considering this important issue, novels are suggested as learning materials to make second language learners aware of cultural differences based on speech acts. L2 language teachers can employ such materials to enhance multilingual learners' sense of self and pride in their ethnic cultural norms when using English as a lingua franca with fellow countrymen and with "native" speakers of English.

In short, there is a strong relationship between language and culture (Conway et al., 2010). Some researchers have described language as the 'essence of culture' (Newton et al., 2010: p. 7; Thielmann, 2003). Agar (1994: 28), used the term, 'languaculture' to linguistically and symbolically demonstrate that "culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture".

More researchers in recent times have also examined the influence of culture in second language teaching and learning in different contexts (Bonvillain, 2008; Liddicoat & Crozet, 2000; Thielmann, 2003). These scholars emphasise that culture is an integrated part of teaching L2 skills and should not be seen as a separate topic to be taught. In fact, Kramsch (1993: 8), says if "language is seen as social practice, culture should be the very core of language teaching".

The significance of culture in language teaching can be gauged from the fact that excluding culture from learning or teaching L2 can result in many misunderstandings (Bonvillain, 2008) as what is deemed as culture varies from one context to another.

II. Politeness and Culture

Despite the universality of politeness, Brown and Levinson (1987, 62) state that "the content of face will differ in different cultures", implying that there is a certain cross-cultural variation. In support of Brown and Levinson, other researchers agree that the form of politeness varies from one culture or subculture to another because cultural presuppositions held by interlocutors might be fundamentally different. Therefore, culture is now recognized as important in language acquisition, both in terms of teaching target cultural norms (Crozet, 2003; Liddicoat & Crozet, 2000), and of the relevance of learner's home culture to their learning (Cummins et al., 2005; Flory & McCaughtry, 2011).

III. Speech acts

We will focus on the notion of politeness in speech acts as this varies from one culture to another, and such differences may result in communication difficulties (Gass and Neu, 2006). Speech acts are basically what we say when we speak, for example if we say, "Good Morning" that can be seen as a greeting (though there are many different ways of greetings for example religious greetings) and if we say "you are clever"! that can be seen as a speech act of performing a compliment (unless of course we are being sarcastic).

Due to differences in cultural norms of performing certain speech acts, second language speakers may fail to communicate effectively, though they may have good lexical and grammatical knowledge of the target language (Cohen & Olshtain, 1981; Thomas, 1983). In part, cross-linguistic differences in speech act realization rules may cause second language speakers' pragmatic failures.

Speech acts are generally difficult to perform in a second language because learners may not know the cultural norms in the second language, and they may transfer their L1 or first language conventions into the second language, as they might assume that such rules are universal. Because the natural tendency for language learners is to fall back on what they know to be appropriate in their first language, L2 learners must understand exactly what they do in that first language to recognize what is transferable to other languages.

The speech acts that have been focussed in this paper include among many others giving advice, compliments, and apologizing. Let us however first discuss previous research on some speech acts. These speech acts have been identified using Brown and Levinson's (1987) four types of politeness strategies, which include,

IV. Bald on record politeness strategy

Bald-on-record strategy does not minimize threats to a person's face. For instance, 'Ooh, I want to use one of those'. This example poses threat to an addressee's face because neither polite request has been made nor likes and dislikes or social status of the addressee have been considered.

A. Positive Politeness strategy

Positive politeness recognizes a person's social status or desire to be respected. For instance, 'Is it okay if I use one of those pens?'

B. Negative Politeness strategy

One assumes that one is imposing on others when making a request. For example, 'I am sorry to bother you, but I just wanted to ask if I could use one of those pens?'

C. Off-record indirect politeness strategy

'Hmmm, I sure could use a blue pen now'. (indirect request which is realized by a person belonging to the same cultural community). This appears to be a declarative sentence, but in fact it is an indirect way of requesting a pen from someone.

(These examples have been taken from The University of the West Indies, Mona Jamaica website).

V. Earlier Research

Previous research focused on how requests are enacted in different cultural contexts (Koh, 2002). Making a request is potentially a face threatening speech act and depends not only on who is making the request and to whom but also in what context. Using a comparative analysis method, researchers demonstrated how speech acts of requesting can vary from one cultural context to another. What is considered polite in one culture may not be deemed polite in another culture. According to Meyerhoff (2011) there are three factors which determine what is deemed politeness or impolite behaviour and these include power, social distance, and the cost of the imposition of say a speech act like a request.

Koh (2002) discussed that Koreans preferred using negative politeness strategies, where the speaker shows respect for the hearer's negative face wants and on the other hand, Americans use positive politeness in their requests. For instance, expressions, such as I am sorry to trouble you but I am not feeling well. Could you give me a hot drink?' shows a negative politeness strategy of making a request. Deference is shown to the listener.

The speech act of apology has also been investigated and examined in a wide range of contexts (Abbas, Anjum & Pasha, nd; Alzeebaree & Yavuz, 2017; Aydin, 2013). Much like requesting, apologising has also been conceptualised as an act of politeness (see Brown and Levinson, 1987). Building on this politeness dimension of apology, Abbas, Anjum & Pasha (nd.) found that Pakistanis prefer using positive politeness in their speech acts of apology. Positive politeness strategy is used to avoid offence by showing friendliness. This strategy is enacted through jesting, building common ground, juxtaposing criticism with compliments, tag questions, nicknames, honorifics, discourse markers (please), and ingroup register or jargon (Nordquist, 2020). For instance, "But please be loyal to somebody. I'd like to see some sense of loyalty in you, for somebody, anybody, even another woman" is a positive politeness strategy because it contains a discourse marker, 'please' (Taken from Durrani's novel, My Feudal Lord).

In contrast, negative politeness strategy is aimed not only at avoiding offence but also at showing deference. This strategy is put into practice through questioning, hedging, and disagreeing (Nordquist, 2021). According to Nordquist (2020), questions are one of the ways to express negative politeness strategies because these can reduce their harshness.

In other words, positive politeness is more about building common ground by recognizing mutual respect, while negative politeness is more about recognizing the trouble or inconvenience that one's request or other speech acts may cause, though this is also aimed at saving face.

Much like other speech acts, the speech act of greeting has also been widely investigated (Almegren, 2017; Jucker, 2017; Shleykina, 2016). According to Jibreen (2010), greeting is an expressive speech act that reflects the psychological states of speakers in different contexts. Almegren's comparative study (2017) of Arabic-speaking participants in Saudi Arabia and Native Speakers of English in America demonstrated that Arabs are more conscious of social hierarchy than American speakers of English in their speech acts of greeting.

The speech act of prohibition, another potentially face threatening act, also plays an essential role in communication. This speech act has also been researched in different contexts (Al-Saaidi et al., 2013; Ahmed, nd). Comparing speech acts of prohibition used in the Quran (Arabic) and the Bible (English), Al-Saaidi et al (2013) discuss that the former expresses prohibition through negative imperative (do not do), while the latter expresses it through declarative sentences Al-Saaidi et al (2013) give an example from the Quran, "Abundance diverts you, until you come to the graves". This is an implicit prohibition indirectly advising people not to over-indulge in worldly deeds neglecting good deeds. Implicit prohibition expressed through declarative sentences is more effective than an explicit prohibition expressed through the negative, 'do not do it' or 'let him not do it' (Al-Saaidi et al, 2013).

Another speech act focused in this research includes apologising. The speech act of apology has also been investigated and examined in a wide range of contexts (Abbas, Anjum & Pasha, nd; Alzeebaree & Yavuz, 2017; Aydin, 2013). Abbas, Anjum & Pasha (nd.) found that Pakistanis prefer using positive politeness in their speech acts of apology. For instance, 'I apologize for being late. Will you please pardon me as I have told you the reason as well?' (see Abbas, Anjum and Pasha, n.d., p. 202). This is an example of positive politeness strategy because the discourse marker, 'please' has

been used and it shows mutual respect between the interlocutors.

Differences in the patterns of making requests were also reported by Alzeebaree and Yavuz (2017) in their comparative study of Kurdish speakers of English and native speakers of English. They showed that the Kurds used more strategies of ability (can you/could you please…), while the English used more strategies of wishing (I would like…) when making polite requests (see Alzeebaree and Yavuz, 2017).

Differences in the pragmatic and sociolinguistic behaviour of native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) vis-a vis compliment giving and receiving can be used by the language teacher as a basis for raising consciousness of the culturally different ways of giving and receiving compliments (David, 1999). Compliments, like apologies are primarily aimed at maintaining, enhancing, or supporting the addressee's "face" (Goffman, 1967) and are generally regarded as positive politeness strategies.

Extracts culled from a novel Bicycle Days where a young American stays with a Japanese host family in Tokyo show several compliments by the young American to several speakers, both Japanese and Americans. The Japanese hostess on being told by the young American guest that her food was good responded by saying, "Eat" and elsewhere she deflected the compliment by saying that her husband helped her with the cooking. In contrast, a young American friend who had been complimented by the young American protagonist responded by merely saying, "Thank you" (see David, 1999).

The responses however vary, and the extracts clearly indicate that in some cultures an acceptance of the compliment is the norm, while in other cultures an acceptance would signify an infringement of cultural norms.

VI.   Literature as reading material

Literature can be used as a resource for second language teaching. Long regarded as a powerful medium for both inter and intra-cultural growth, literary works may transcend any place or time or may link students with their immediate culture and enable them to participate in its development. McKay (1982) asserts that literature selected for both thematic relevance and linguistic accessibility can motivate students to read and provide an effective vehicle for exemplifying language use and introducing cultural assumptions.

Literature provides many linguistic prospects to the language learner and allocates the teacher with the ability to design

activities that are "based on material capable of stimulating greater interest and involvement" (Carter and Long, 1991: 3). The use of literature as a teaching tool is legitimated because it provides the learners with authentic linguistic, sociolinguistic, and cultural input.

It was initially the primary source of input for teaching in language classes in the era of the Grammar Translation Method, but with the advent of structuralism and audio-lingual method, literature was downplayed (Collie & Slater, 1987, p.2). In the middle of the 1980s, some practitioners and language scholars resurrected literature as a language learning material after a long period of neglect (Duff & Maley, 1991).

Using literary works as teaching material in ESL classes can provide the learners with many advantages, including Cultural/Intercultural Awareness and Globalization; Sociolinguistic/Pragmatic Knowledge; (Maley, 1989; Van, 2009); and Emotional Intelligence (Ghosn, 2002). Daniel Goleman; Critical Thinking (Ghosn, 2002; Van, 2009).

Due to its authenticity, literature is equipped with sociolinguistic and pragmatic information. These two features are more related to 'appropriateness' in language which can be found only in a contextualized language such as literary texts, especially dramas and plays (McKay, 2001). Literary texts are authentic examples of language use.

A variety of English developing in non-native English-speaking countries is a phenomenon in the "internationalisation" of the English language, which interests researchers. Marckwardt (1978), arguing for the use of literature in ESL and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instruction, views English as fundamentally a single language evolving in various settings, the cultural product of a "worldwide linguistic and intellectual commonwealth." Acknowledging the legitimacy of literature in these "new Englishes," he writes, "acquainting the student with the current literary output of his countrymen is not only a justifiable but a praiseworthy, if not an essential educational aim" (p. 1-2).

Expanding on the idea of "contact literature" and citing its special thematic and formal characteristics, Kachru (1982) describes the special significance of writing in English to express non-native cultural experiences and meanings. He states that such literature is an attempt to give it a new African or Asian identity, and thus an extra dimension of meaning" (p. 341).

Students studying English in another culture, then, are able to observe not only how English is affecting them, but also how they and other new speakers are affecting the English language.

Novels as Literary works to be used in ESL classroom

In all theories of second language acquisition, input plays a role (though the role varies in importance in each of the different theories). One important form of input is reading. Helton, Asamani and Thomas (1998:1-5) indicate that the use of novels is a very beneficial technique in today's foreign language classes. If selected carefully, using a novel makes students' reading lesson motivating, interesting and entertaining. It is through reading that students broaden their horizons, become familiar with other cultures, and hence develop their intercultural communicative competence, learning how to view the world from different perspectives.

Authentic novels can add depth to ESL reading classes. Students will increase not only their vocabulary but while they increase their cultural understanding. Many scholars have presented compelling arguments for teaching novels in EFL/ESL classes. They argue that we should teach novels because they are enjoyable to read, they are authentic, they help students understand another culture, they are a stimulus for language acquisition, they develop students' interpretative abilities, they expand students' language awareness, they encourage students to talk about their opinions and feelings and they foster personal involvement in the language learning process (Brumfit and Carter, 1986; Lazar, 1993; Collie and Slater, 1997; McKay, 2001). Apart from novels David (2016) also recommended using movies to teach specific speech acts and language to students. Social media can also be used effectively to teach speech acts of condolences and congratulations (David, 2018).

Language and speech acts used by people can be found in literature. In fact, every piece of literature is at least a double speech act expressing the speech act of the author and the speech act of any speaker in work (Ohmann, 1971). In a novel, for example, there are many characters speaking in various contexts. Literature is therefore full of speech acts and therefore useful to those who want to learn the "appropriate conditions" for various other Speech acts, such as declaring, preaching, warning, cajoling, cheating, lying, promising, threatening, joking, bidding, consoling, pitying, pleading, seducing, and praising. (Chung-hsuan Tung, 2011). In short, what is seen as "good/bad", "honest/dishonest",

"polite/impolite" and many other moral axes may vary greatly from one culture to another and is reflected in speech acts.

The relationship between language teaching, culture, and speech acts has been discussed. Now we move on to provide examples of specific speech acts in literary works, which helps learners become aware of cultural differences when enacting or performing these speech acts.

VII.   Materials and Methods

In this research, qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were used. Relevant excerpts were taken from Jane Austen's novel Pride and Prejudice, Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, Monica Ali's Brick Lane, Sri Delima's As I Was Passing, and Lim's The Song of Silver Frond. These novels have been written in different socio-cultural contexts. Pride and Prejudice is written in the context of Great Britain, while The Great Gatsby is an American novel, whereas As I Was Passing, and The Song of Silver Frond have been written by authors having Malaysian background.

These novels were chosen because they are from a range of cultural contexts, and examples taken from these novels can be used as pedagogical tools to develop cross-cultural competence among students of English.

These novels were read and reread to take excerpts that related to the speech acts of advice, compliments, and apology. The relevant excerpts were manually written on a piece of paper and were read with care and focus on the known speech acts. The collected data were then codified based on emergent themes and patterns. The headings were developed and relevant excerpts were qualitatively analysed using the tenets of the speech act theory.

VIII. Results and Analysis

In this section, research results are analysed based on two central themes: The speech act of giving advice and the speech act of complimenting.

The speech act of giving advice

Brick Lane by Monica Ali, Doubleday 2003; Page 359

Indirect advice given by a doctor to his friend's young wife who has been having a relationship with another man. He seldom speaks about himself or directly with her but here he is open about his own relationship with his wife for a reason. He says,

"We lived on a cup of rice, a bowl of daal and the love we did not measure. We thought that the love would never run out. It was like a magic rice sack that you could keep scooping into and never get to the bottom. It was a "live" marriage you see. What I did not know- I was a young man- is that there are two kinds of love. The kind that starts off big and slowly wears away, that seems you can never use it up and then one day is finished. And the kind you don't notice at first, but which adds a little bit to itself every day, like an oyster makes a pearl, grain by grain a jewel from the sand."

The example contains many declarative sentences which indirectly give advice to another person about the types and philosophy of love. This piece of advice, taken from the voice of a Bangladeshi in London suggests that true love keeps increasing, while untrue love comes to an end. When giving this advice, the speaker appears to have excluded the listener's presence and focused on his advice. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the strategy of politeness which excludes a person's (listener's) presence is known as an off-record indirect strategy of politeness.

The same type of situation is often handled using body language in some cultural contexts. For instance, such an extramarital affair of a girl with her boyfriend is reprovingly looked at in America. "I even had a short affair with a girl who lived in Jersey City and worked in the accounting department, but her brother began throwing mean looks in my direction so when she went on her vacation in July I let it blow quietly away" (Fitzgerald's novel, The Great Gatsby, 2020, p. 62). 'Mean looks' is an indirect way of showing disapproval and prevent a suitor to stop his/her flirtations. This example shows that there are culturally different ways of responding to extra-marital affairs. In Asian context, a piece of advice was given against such a relationship, while in America's context a threatening look did the job.

Such examples of dialogues culled from novels can be used as a catalyst by the teacher to initiate research into other novels comparing differences in an expression of apology across cultures.

IX. CAVEAT

The words used to perform the speech act of giving advice and even of receiving advice depends on a number of variables and this depends inter alia on who is apologising to whom, the nature of the wrong done and the context. So these other variables have to be considered before a sweeping statement is made regarding the effect of cultural norms on the performance of speech acts.

A. The speech act of complimenting

Another important speech act is the performance of giving and receiving compliments. In many Asian contexts, it is polite to negate and reject compliments and praise. In this way the compliment receiver emphasizes humility.

Raising students' awareness of these cultural differences resulting in varying responses to compliments will help improve the communicative competence of language learners. Some examples of spoken discourse culled from a range of texts are provided as examples of teaching input which act as a catalyst to discussion on cross-cultural differences in the speech act of responses to compliments. Some of the examples of responding to compliments are shown below:

B. Compliments

1 Mother on being complimented on having a beautiful daughter.

Mother: Ah but what's the use of having a pretty daughter, if she is stubborn and wilful and talks back to her mother? (Lim's The Song of Silver Frond, 2003, p. 9).

Responses to compliments in the above and following examples have been taken from novels written in Asian contexts. All these examples show that in response to compliments, many Asians would not accept credit but would rather diffuse such appreciative remarks. In example 1, a mother has been complimented on having a beautiful daughter which she diffuses. In contrast an English mother is very happy on being complimented for having a beautiful daughter. 'Oh! My dear Mr. Bennet', as she entered the room, 'we have had a most delightful evening, a most excellent ball. I wish you had been there. Jane was so admired, nothing could be like it' (Austen's Pride and Prejudice, 1992, p. 12). In this example, the English mother is happy to have heard compliments about her daughter's beauty, whereas in example 1 of Table 1, an Asian mother when receiving compliments regarding her daughter's beauty chose to diffuse it. These examples show how speech acts and cultural norms vary in different cultural contexts.

2 Amazed by his fluency, Bahram said. 'Where did you learn to speak English so well, son?

' oh Puppa kept a tutor for me – Mr. Worcester' (Sri Delima's As I Was Passing, 1976, p. 149).

Similarly, in example 2, a Malaysian has been complimented for her improvement in speaking English fluently, the receiver diffuses the compliment by giving credit to his/her teacher. Both examples of compliments are positive politeness strategies because these are attempts at building rapport and common ground through appreciation (giving the compliment) and humility (responding to the compliment) between the interlocutors.

In Asian contexts, compliments are diffused by receivers. In this case, a Malaysian has diffused the compliment using the bald on-record direct strategy of politeness. The act of diffusing a compliment using the bald on-record direct strategy can offend a compliment giver's face in non-Asian contexts (see Brown and Levinson, 1987), but shows humility and modesty in many Asian contexts (David, 2021).

X. Discussion

In this study, it was discussed how speech acts vary in different contexts (Asian and Western), and how lack of understanding of this issue can cause misunderstanding and conflict between interlocutors belonging to different cultural groups. It was also discussed that different politeness strategies of face saving, such as positive politeness and negative politeness are used to enact speech acts in different socio-cultural contexts. Lack of understanding of culturally appropriate politeness strategies can cause conflict and misunderstanding.

It is suggested that English language teachers can prevent this conflict and misunderstanding by developing their students' cross-cultural competence. Students' cross-cultural competence can be improved by giving them dialogue-based language input taken from RECENT novels written in a wide range of contexts.

Furthermore, language teachers can make their language students realise through the enactment of specific speech acts that they can and should maintain their heritage cultural norms and values they have in the Englishes they speak with each other. They should be proud of the new ways of performing certain speech acts based on their L1 cultural norms which are being transmitted to their L2.

However, they should be aware and be vigilant of who their interlocutor is. L1 cultural norms can be transmitted to L2 with fellow members of the speech community but adaptation may have to be made when they are in L1 countries communicating with L1 speakers.

XI. Conclusion

In summary, teachers should also create feelings of pride among students regarding their culture and language encouraging them to reproduce their L1 and cultural norms in their use of English. Students should be encouraged to positively view their culture and reflect it in the English they use when they communicate with their fellow countrymen belonging to the same cultural community For instance, if a Muslim from Bangladesh greets his countryman saying, 'Assalam-o-Alaikum', the answer should be 'Wa Alaikum Salam', rather than 'good morning/afternoon/evening'.

Students should also recognize and respect other community's socio-cultural norms, and consciously consider these when speaking to the concerned community. This can be done by helping students read and understand dialogues and a range of speech acts performed in contemporary novels and short stories taken from different contexts. This study ends with a caveat. With globalisation and diaspora many of our (Asian) culturally learnt value systems change and this too can be reflected in the performance of specific speech acts.

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B. Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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