



Iraqi EFL Students between the Scylla of English Language Etiquette and the Charybdis of Arabic Language Etiquette

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"Beginning foreign language students want to feel, touch, smell, and see the foreign peoples and not just hear their language"

(Thanasoulas, 2001:15)

Abstract

The aim of this investigation is to shed light on the cultural etiquette of the foreign language that hinders the students from communicating in English. The research problem is encompassed in the following question:

Do English cultural etiquettes have an impact on students' communication?

The investigator makes a critical survey of the basic knowledge of teaching in the class . Then, she pinpoints the most important cues that help in communication. Tasks showing good and bad manners good and bad manners in etiquette teaching are designed. The results show an amazing progress in communicating in English

Key Terms

Culture, English language etiquette,

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The problem

Language is the prime means of communication among human being who share the same culture and the way of living so as to communicate. But acquiring a foreign language needs an extra understanding of the native speakers' culture. The growing need for good communication skills in English language needs to have quality teaching. To provide quality teaching needs a good reading and comprehending of the culture of foreign language. Richards (2009:119) state that "schools should prepare students to participate in several different cultures" Hence, having different cultures is a barrier in learning that language. It is thought that as EFL students have little awareness of others' etiquette and codes, it is hard for them to gain a deeper understanding of the foreign language itself. It goes without saying that learning / teaching a language should be accompanied with learning the codes that form the language etiquette of that country. As the education of EFL is enhanced by being aware of their codes and etiquette as well the foreign ones, this is an avenue that needs to re-explore and new insights are to be gained. Zhang (2019:224) states that

Generally speaking, an etiquette is an important integrated part of the whole western culture. And the etiquette teaching is not only taught to know the western social customs, but also structured to enhance self-esteem and character with emphasis on socially acceptable behavior in communicating with foreigners. At the same time, the importance of self-respect and respect for others is taught to give the confidence that is necessary for each student to become self-reliant as he or she communicates with foreigners.

1.2. Aims of the study

This study aims at:

1. Finding out whether or not Iraqi first year college Students are aware of some of good and bad manners of both English and Iraqi citizens

1.3. Methodology

To achieve the aim of the study, the following procedures are adopted:

- 1- Presenting a theoretical background that is related to the topic under discussion.
- 2- Adopting and modifying a simple questionnaire so as to see the students' awareness.
- 3- Conducting the questionnaire to first year college students at Department of English, College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad

1.4 The Limits

The study is restricted to the first year college students, Department of English, College of

Education for Women/ University of Baghdad during the academic year (2015- 2016).

1.4. Value of the study

It is hoped to throw light on language cultural etiquette that all EFL students as well as scholars and professors should take into consideration when learning /teaching English language. Theoretically, the results may be helpful to EFL teachers, and decision makers to be aware of cultural etiquette in mother tongue as well as foreign language. Besides, it would be of help to syllabus designers to include these language etiquettes in the students' textbooks

2. Literature Review

As Fiegler (1961:43) regards communication as the “key that unlocks the mind and puts it in the service of the society,” it is the language that enables us to see and sense the world that surrounds us. As language is clothed with culture, it is necessary for learners of the language to know

the culture of that language. Culture carries different definitions that are done by different scientists and linguists; hence, a definition of culture is needed. Holme (2009:65) defines culture as “the collectivization of experience, allowing some approaches to conceptualizing, explaining and manipulating to take preference over others”. Hence, it is the total transmitted behavior and concepts that are shared and practiced in the whole society. “So, while grammar and vocabulary are essential tools for communication, it is the acquisition of the ability to communicate in meaningful and appropriate ways with users of other languages that is the ultimate goal of today’s foreign language classroom.” (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1996:3). Agyekum(2005:1) defined language etiquette as “the sequential organizations beyond a sentence either as activities of one person or as the interaction of two or more people”. Hence, language etiquette is language routines that human beings communicate among themselves. So learning a foreign language is handicapped without knowing the culture and language etiquette of that country as it may be confusing. For example, raising eyebrows in one country means “yes” as in Micronesia, whereas in Bulgaria, nodding the head means “no”. Hence, culture plays an integral part in communication as well as learning the language of that country as miscommunication may almost always occur even over two simple words like “yes” and “no”. Culture teaching of the foreign language is so much neglected in Iraqi schools as well as colleges. Having a quick look at the syllabus shows that culture teaching is completely absent in the syllabus. Hence, EFL students should be aware of the culture of the target language so as to learn it. This awareness needs a language teacher to focus on the basic elements of culture. Basic elements of culture are language; symbols; norms; values; beliefs and cognitive elements. Besides language is the best means of communication, it is the best conveyer of culture. Language is the vessel in which our ideas and complex social activities are carried. The second element is symbols. Symbols are all the things that represent any event situation. Norms is the third element of culture. Norms mold our behavior and allow us to move under the boundaries that distinguish us from other society. Norms fall into two types: Folkways which are the habits and actions that people do in their daily lives. Mores are customs, beliefs and habits of a certain society. Any violation of these mores may lead to punishment. Values are the

significant things in the society's daily life as they get meaning. Beliefs are the spiritual fulfillment that any sect has within the same culture. Cognitive elements are the practical knowledge that people behave in the society (Farooq). Thanasoulas (2001) states that "culture not only dictates who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds, it also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted." In a nutshell, Iraqi EFL students face cultural conflict in understanding English. To achieve this aim, the first year college students were given an activity which is adopted from Budden.

3. Data Analysis

Brown (2001:9) defines questionnaires as "any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting them among existing answers." For Mackey and Gass (2005:90-91), a questionnaire helps researchers to collect information that is related to the beliefs of the learners and their reactions. In this respect, the present questionnaire comprises two types of questionnaire items: closed and open-ended. Eight - closed items were adopted from Budden (). The students are asked to read the statements about manners in the UK, and then they are asked to pinpoint three false statements only. Furthermore, respondents are asked to list eight - closed items /statements of do's and don'ts etiquette codes that are regarded as good manners and as bad manners in our country, Iraq (See Appendix 1). The sample of the study involves (25) chosen randomly from a population of nearly (100) first year college students during the academic year (2015-2016). The two items (2 and 6) that all the respondents agree upon and get the highest percentage is (100%). They are as follows:

- Don't spit on the street.
- Do not cover their mouth when they yawn or sneeze.

According to this result, it is clearly manifested that first year college students are completely aware of, and familiar with these two basic kinds of

etiquette, whereas the lowest percentage is (70%) for items (3) and (4) which read respectively as follows:

- do burp loudly after a meal.
- do not apologize if they bump into somebody on the street.

The low rate indicates that six of the students either are unaware of the significance of these items or they do not understand the meaning behind them. This is shown on Table (1).

Table (1) Respondents' Percentages on question (1)

Items	No .of correct Answers	Percentages
1.	24	96
2.	25	100
3.	19	76
4.	19	76
5.	24	96
6.	25	100
7.	20	80
8.	21	84

In answering question (2), respondents give additional statements regarding Iraqi good manners:

- showing respect to old people by giving their seats to them in the bus.
 - Greeting people with alsalamalikum.
 - Thanking God after each meal.
 - Do not chew while talking.
- Then, the respondents suggest some bad manners like the following:
- Using shooting guns in celebrations and wedding ceremonies
 - do not park cars in right places
 - Smoking in public places
 - Using bad words
 - Do not stand in a queue
 - Throwing rubbish in the street



4. Conclusion

Using the questionnaire has helped the researcher to build a picture of the students' understanding of their own culture as well as that of the foreign language .i.e. English. EFLfirst year college students built a picture of cultural etiquette and they were encouraged to compare theirs with others. This simple experiment enabled the students to identify the good manners and to pinpoint the bad manners in their country, too. A language teacher must know the cultural content of what he teaches.

In harmony with the conclusion, further study is needed around the effect of dissecting the culture on understanding any literary genre. Another study may focus on the effect of knowing the cultural etiquette on understanding the conversation of native speakers

Appendix1

A questionnaire given to the respondents

Read the statements about manners in the UK. Pinpoint three statements that are false.

In the UK, people

- 1.... do stand in a queue when you wait for a bus or to pay for something in a shop.
2. ... don't spit on the street.
3. ... do burp loudly after a meal.
4. ... don't apologise if they bump into somebody on the street.
5. ... do say 'please' and 'thank you' at every opportunity.
6. ... don't cover their mouth when they yawn or sneeze.
7. ... don't greet people with two kisses.
8. ... don't pick their nose in public.



List eight statements of do's and don'ts for good manners in our country, in Iraq:

1.-----

2.-----

3.-----

4.-----

5.-----

6.-----

7.-----

8.-----

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