Intertwining Language with Perception: A Case of Internalizing a Globalized Language

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Abstract

Globalization is viewed from different angles, with three universally accepted theories used to explain it. All the theories can be summed up as saying that globalization is the "form of institutionalization…involving the universalization of particularism…"(Robertson:1992:102).

English language is viewed as the vehicle that propels this institutionalization. We all live in this globalized world defined by our imaginations. No one really knows what this world is like, as its characteristics can be inferred only from how we perceive it. The way we act is shaped so powerfully by what we perceive. Teachers, therefore, walk into their classrooms influenced by their beliefs, which are closely linked to their values, their views of the world and their conception of their place within the classroom. These beliefs are nurtured by the teacher's perception which in turn is expressed through the classroom language. This paper discusses how teacher's efforts to internalize this globalized language in their classroom are affected by their perception of the learners. It further shows that: perception is expressed through language; that there is significant correlation between language and perception; perception is innate and personal, therefore, no one individual perceives the world for another; the more the teacher talks, the more he expresses his personal perception; teachers should talk less so that the learners can discover their own world and build up their personal perception of the world.

Keywords: Assess, Clients, Democratic Explorer, Deterritorialization, Evaluate, Expressivists, Globalization, Implement, Individual Explorer, Institutionalization, Interconnectedness, multi-pronged, Particularism, Partner, Perception, Plan, Raw material, Receptacle, Resisters, Spatial, Temporal, Universalization, Velocity

Introduction

> **"**The principle goal of education is to create men
> who are capable of doing new things, not simply
> of repeating what other generations have done-men
> who are creative, inventive and discoverers."
>
> Jean Piaget

Teaching is that aspect of human science in which individuals called teachers try to shape the future of other individuals called students or learners. This act of teaching and learning is conducted in a world which is daily shrinking. Events around the globe get the world compressed. This compression of the world is termed globalization. Globalization is viewed from different angles, with three universally accepted theories used to explain it. All the theories can be summed up in the words of Roland Robertson (1992:102) that says globalization is the "Form of institutionalization…involving the universalization of particularism…"

Most human interactions are made possible by the use of language. The more the world gets shriveled, the more a language gets widely accepted as the language of globalization. This language is English. It is viewed as the vehicle that propels the institutionalization of the world into oneness and sameness. Our understanding of this ever shriveling world is defined by our imaginations. No one really knows what this world is like, as its characteristics can be inferred only from how we perceive it. The way we act is shaped so powerfully by what we perceive. Teachers, therefore, walk into their classrooms influenced by their beliefs, which are closely linked to their values, their views of the world and their conception of their place within the classroom. These beliefs are nurtured by the teacher's perception which in turn is expressed through the classroom language.

Knitting all the points above, this paper looks at the place of English language in our globalized world; effects of teacher's perception in classroom activities, and their implications on teaching and learning. The paper further suggests ways teachers and the teaching process can be made more effective.

Globalization

The term globalization means different things to different people depending on the rung of the ladder where one stands to view it. To some it is the pursuit of classical liberal or "free market" policies in the world economy which is termed "economic liberalization". To some others it is the growing dominance of the West, which in a narrow sense is seen as American and its allied forms of political, economic, and cultural life referred to as "westernization" or "Americanization". For the techno savvies it is referred to as the proliferation of new information technologies seen as the "Internet Revolution"; while to others it is the believe that human race is gradually moving towards the realization of one single unified community in which major sources of social conflict are vanishing. This they term as "global integration".

Whatever meanings we give to the term, a point of convergence is that globalization is the gradual and slow human activities, over time, and across the globe, that have "allowed for changes in the spatial and temporal contours of social existence, according to which the significance of space or territory undergoes shriveling shifts in the face of an acceleration in the time structure of crucial forms of human activity."

Tracing the history of globalization, it will be noted that no time in human history would the term globalization said to have begun; but the industrial revolution of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, probably, started the move toward what one can term as global oneness. In 1848 Karl Marx formulated what might be referred to as the first insight into globalization. For him capitalist productive activities had driven the bourgeoisie to "nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, and establish connections everywhere." And industrial capitalist pursuit constituted the most basic avenue of technologies resulting in the disappearance of space, helping to pave the way for "intercourse in every direction, and the universal interdependence of nations," in contrast to a blinkered provincialism that had beleaguered humanity for untold eons (Marx 1848, 476).

Scholars have reached a consensus about the basic defining characteristics of globalization. These characteristics, for the purpose of this paper, are compressed into four.

- ➢ The first one is deterritorialization:- here globalization is seen to increase possibilities for action between and among people in situations where "latitudinal" and "longitudinal" locations seem unimportant to the social activity at hand. Geographical location remains crucial for many undertakings but deterritorialization manifests itself in many human social activities. Business people from different continents engage in electronic trades; television allows people situated anywhere to observe the impact of events happening around the world from the comfort of their living rooms; academic environment makes use of the latest video conferencing equipment to organize seminars in which participants are located in different geographical locations (Skype, Yahoo Messenger, Viber, etc); the Internet allows people to communicate instantaneously with each other notwithstanding the geographical distances separating them. Instant messaging, chatting and other forms of social activities over mobile phones and computers all lend credence to the shrinking of the globe which we live in.

- ➢ The second one is called social interconnectedness:- this is directly connected with the compression of territories because the growth of human social activities is interconnected across existing geographical, political and economic boundaries. Since the vast majority of human activities are still tied to a concrete geographical location, the more decisive facet of globalization concerns "the manner in which distant events and forces impact on local and regional endeavors." To this end globalization then refers "to processes of change which underpin a transformation in the organization of human affairs by linking together and expanding human

activity across regions and continents" (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton 1999, 15).

> The third is referred to as speed or velocity:- human social activities are measured within the speed of time taken to get them connected to people across the global. The linking together and expanding of social activities across borders is predicated on the possibility of relatively fast flows and movements of people, information, capital, and goods. Therefore, this swift technology plays an important role in the movement of human affairs. However, many other factors contribute to the overall pace and speed of this social activity, such as organizational structure of the modern capitalist, liberal and free market factories.

> The last one is termed multi-pronged process:- this means that the three mentioned earlier - deterritorialization, social interconnectedness, and speed or velocity- manifest themselves in many different facets of human social activities such as economic, political and cultural lives; each with its complex and relatively autonomous series of practical developments.

Central to all this is the fact that in globalization we identify that the compression of the spatial and temporal world we are living in allows for interconnectedness of human social activities accelerated by technological inventions. Summing up the concept of globalization therefore, one can safely borrow from the words of Roland Robertson (1992: 102) that globalization is "a form of institutionalization of the two-fold process involving the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism". Therefore, our globalized world is incorporated as one universe but it is never united; it is a single place but also not all-embracing; and an assembly of "shared consciousness" but susceptible to fragmentation.

English Language

These social activities are primarily conducted through human socializing agent known to all as language. Samuel Daniel, *Musophilus* (1599) succinctly predicated the place of English language in the universe. He said:

And who in time knowes whither we may vent
The treasure of our tongue, to what strange shores
This gaine of our best glorie shal be sent.
T'inrich vnknowing Nations with our stores?
What worlds in th'yet vnformed Occident
May come refin'd with th'accent that are ours?
                    Samuel Daniel, *Musophilus* (1599)

This was said about 412 years ago and today no one doubts the place of English language in our globalized world. According to Paul Lewis, (et al; eds.; 2013) of the 6912 living languages listed on the Ethnologue language database, English language is the second

most widely spoken language. Chinese Mandarin, which is seen as the number one spoken language does not command international acceptability.

Since we can comfortably trace the emergence of globalization to Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries, and also trace its origin to England, it is safe to conclude that social activities of economic, political and cultural stocks of globalization are primarily conducted in English language. So the more people and nations get engaged in global activities across the hemispheres, the more widely use English language becomes.

Perception/ Thinking and Language

We live in a world defined by our imaginations. No one really knows what that world is like, as its characteristics can be inferred only from how we perceive it. Therefore, the way we act is shaped so powerfully by what we perceive. Boulding (1975) observed that, " it is what we think the world is like, not what it is really like, that determines our behavior …we act according to the way the world appears to us, not necessarily according to the way it is."

What is Perception?

The Oxford Dictionary of Sports Science and Medicine defines perception as, "the mental process by which the brain interprets and gives meaning to information it receives from sense organs." This means that perception is the process by which organisms interpret and organize sensation to produce a meaningful experience of the world. This according to Sabo Bako (1999) "…is true that what we see is what we get, subconscious predispositions therefore are also central to the formation of thought. What we think about affects what we do. Hence we all are to some extent captives of our perceptual habits. And what we see in and think about the world as a consequence of our selective perception influence our views and corresponding mental images of the world." The illustrations below add weight to the argument.

Source: http://www.google.com/search?q=perception+images
The images show the power of perception. Two individuals taking a cursory look at them are likely to perceive them differently. For example, one might see a coffee table in the

first image and see an old man in the second image. Another person may see two people looking straight into each other's eyes in the first image and possibly see a young lady in the second image.

Summing up the place of perception in our daily lives, Ihar V Babitski (2009) observes that, "We obtain information from the external world from our senses: taste, hearing, smell, touch, sight. Than (sic) we somehow integrate and analyze perceived information and make our decision. Decision is an "outcome of mental processes (cognitive process) leading to the selection of a course of action among several alternatives. Every decision making process produces a final choice."

Connection between Perception/Thinking and Language

Expressivists believe that the primary function of language is to enable speakers to convey the content of their thoughts to hearers. That when language is used in the normal way, the speaker has a thought with a certain content and chooses words such that on the basis of those words the hearer will be able to recognize that the speaker has a thought with that content.

This implies that internal perception is done through language; and analogically, Mr. X's perception of the world is understood by Mr. Y through the use of language employed by Mr. X and understood by Mr. Y. The German educator, linguist, and philosopher, Wilhelm von Hamboldt gives us an agreeable conclusion of the relationship between language and perception/thinking; thus saying, "Language is the formative organ of thought. Intellectual activity, entirely mental, entirely internal, and to some extent passing without trace, becomes through sound, externalized in speech and perceptible to senses. Thought and language are therefore one and inseparable from each other."

Citing student's perception of the place of English language as a language of study, three dominant views are expressed by some students of Jubail University College, Jubail, Saudi Arabia. For them, their perception of English directly motivates them to learn or de-motivates them. To some:

English is the language of the "perceived" enemy. Here religion plays a significant role in determining their perception of English language. This class of students does not see any reason why English language should be acquired or learnt.

Another group of students sees English an enforced language, and are only learning it because it is part of their overall curriculum designed by the university which requires them to learn it.

The third group sees English as a bridge to reaching out to the rest of the world. For this group there is the need to study and if possible master the use of the language. They are highly motivated and always willing to put in their best.

The Teacher in the Classroom

Every teacher walks into his classroom influenced by his beliefs, which are closely linked to his values, his views of the world and his conception of his place within the classroom. All this influence his definition and understanding of his students. Meighan and Meighan (1990) identify seven (7) different ways in which teachers can and do construe their students and by extension such construction reflects individual teacher's view of the world; and also has profound implication on his classroom practice. The teacher sees his students as:

Resisters:- the notion of students as resisters looks at learners as people who do not want to learn but only do so because they are made to. This notion believes that force or punishment is the most appropriate way to overcome such resistance in the classroom.

Receptacle: one other conception of the learner is the one in which the learner is seen by the teacher as 'receptacle' to be filled with knowledge. Sometimes it is called "the jugs and mugs" theory. The teacher is seen as having a large jug of knowledge which is poured into the learner 'mugs' or receptacles, which in turn can only accept a certain amount of that knowledge according to the size of the learner's IQ.

Raw material: this notion metaphorically sees the learner like clay to be molded into a fine art or building material to be constructed into a solid and well-designed building. The teacher is seen as inspirational and his view shapes the learner's future.

Clients: this notion places greater emphasis upon the "identification of educational needs and begins to alter the nature of the relationship between teachers and learners." The prospective learners are likely to know what they want to learn and how much time and money they are prepared to invest in doing so, while the role of the teacher can be seen as attempting to meet those needs.

Partner: this notion assumes that the teachers and learners are equal and share relationship within which teachers recognize that they are also learners. The fundamental notions here are of mutual trust and respect leading to growth and development for teachers and all their learners.

Individual Explorer: with this view the role of the teacher becomes almost entirely one of facilitator working mainly by organizing the classroom in such a way as to enable the learners to explore for themselves and come to their own conclusion with minimum interference from the teacher.

Democratic Explorer: in here it sees teaching as "the function of any learning group to set its own agenda, decide upon its goal and proffer ways of working, and how it wishes to draw upon this particular knowledge and expertise of the teacher."

The two explorers above, it should be noted, put the teacher's role as that of provider of appropriate comprehensible input, which the learners act on in their ways. This is the

focus of this paper because it has immense positive impact on language learning, which in turn leads to language acquisition.

Implications for Teachers and Teaching

Having explored the concept of globalization; the place and role of English language in our globalized world; perception and the relationship between perception and language, the question that readily comes to mind is, what are the implications of all that have been discussed for the teacher and the teaching and learning process? As English language teachers we should note that:

We live in a globalized world whose latitudinal and longitudinal territories have been shriveled by the speed of our social interconnectedness in our economic, political and cultural lives.

This social interconnectedness is regulated by the language we teach- that is English language.

Our perception of the world around us influences our teaching and our view of the learners we teach.

The individual learner, just like the teacher, lives in an unknown world; his understanding of that world is shaped by his own perception.

No one individual perceives the world for another individual.

Our individual perception is formed by the language we use, just as our language is formed by our thoughts or perceptions.

As teachers our responsibility to the learners is to create an enabling environment that allows the individual learner's perception of the world to thrive, albeit, positively.

The Role of the Teacher

To douse the effect of all the points mentioned above, the teacher should be able to define his/her role in the classroom; and by extension in the life of the learners. Since our duty as teachers is to help the learner shape his perception of the world, the teacher's role is that of a learning guide, an educational facilitator and a broker of learning opportunities. The teacher observes, assists, suggests and when things are going well in the class, he "fades into the corners of the classroom."
There are four (4) processes that the teacher should act upon and to also undertake as a facilitator of the learning process. They are:

Assess the learners;

Plan the learning;

Implement the plan; and

Evaluate the process.

Assess the learner:- in here the teacher tries to "get to know" his learners. He develops in the learners self confidence, willingness to take risks, positive beliefs about the learning process and positive view of themselves as learners.

Plan the learning:- having assessed and followed the learner's assessment, the teacher is now in a better position to plan the learning opportunities that will strongly cater for the learner's needs and interests and therefore optimize the learner's opportunities. This is achieved by the teacher's "interplay of what is contained in the course documentation, the teacher's personal theories about teaching and learning and the teacher's assessment of learner's needs." After this, he plans the unit outline and individual lessons.

Implement the plan:- in here the teacher includes the classroom management and the teacher's strategies that will cater for the varied learning styles of the learners. The plan should also include the emotional climate of the classroom and the quality of the interactions between the learners and the teacher.

Evaluate the process:- here the teacher takes a second look at the learner's assessment. At the completion of a classroom session, the teacher should assess the learning that took place. This way he/she will be informed about the next lesson or teaching.

Conclusion

It has been shown that teachers carry different views about their learners and the teacher's performance in the classroom is entirely influenced by his perception; and that every individual learner's view of the world around him is conditioned by his own perception; we as teachers therefore, need to speak less in the classroom since our perception is expressed through what we say. Ours is to serve as facilitators of learning by attempting to provide circumstances that will enable learners to engage with the learning opportunities and construct for themselves their understanding of their world.
This role reduces the amount of talk we do in the classroom and makes us learners, colleagues and community partners of our learners, thereby encouraging independence in the learners.

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