African Research Review

Transculturalism: A Path to the Integration of the Multilingual/Multi-ethnic Learners of English as a Second Language in Nigeria

Umera-Okeke, Nneka P.
Department of English Studies
University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt
Rivers State, Nigeria
E-mail: nne.supreme@yahoo.com
Phone: +2348083299552

Abstract

Culture is language and with language communication is possible. Transculturalism is the tool to understand other cultures and languages, but also to switch between cultures and languages as part of being in a society and living peacefully and happily in that society. This paper is a descriptive study that suggested ways of promoting intercultural communication and how culture boundaries can be broken in an English as a Second language classroom more especially in Nigeria bedevilled with ethnic, cultural, language and religious diversities. This paper vied off the support for the promotion of Nigeria's three major languages –Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba at the expense of the over 450 others. As many number of cultures brought in by students to class can be blended in the class. The end product is transculturalism is creation of individuals with new identities that accommodate others. This paper believed that transculturalism can bring about integration in Nigeria. This topic was explored using the framework of Byram's Intercultural communicative competence.

Key Words: transculturalism, Intercultural communicative competence, hybridization, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism

Introduction

The linguistic/cultural landscape of Nigeria is multi-faceted. The political history does not help matters also as two incongruous nations -North and Southern Protectorate were amalgamated in 1914 by the British colonial masters. A lot of issues have remained unresolved including the issue of a national language. With the absence of a national language, English fulfils such important functions as the language of government, communication, education and language of business. Though English is serving Nigeria's communication needs, it has not removed the divide and rancor among the indigenes of the nation nation. This paper wants to vie off the support for the promotion of Nigeria's three major languages – Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba at the expense of the over 250 others.

The need for cross-cultural interaction is important to the present Nigeria. Peace eludes Nigeria today because of its multicultural, multi-ethnic and religious divide. Appreciating every culture, which transculturalism stands for, in the ESL classroom could be the answer we sort for. It opens up the society, and allows people to think "outside the box of one's motherland", "see many sides of every question without abandoning conviction, and allow for a chameleon sense of self without losing one's cultural center" (Slimbach in Orientalcollege.org, 2015, para 3).

This paper believed that integration in Nigeria can be promoted through transculturalism. What then is 'integration'? Integration, according to Bauböck's (2001) means "inclusion", "incorporation" or "settlement" (p. 43). Nigeria can be integrated; all the strands of culture can be unified into a stronger, better society. Hence the need to promote transculturalism in ESL classroom. For Kymlicka (2001), the integration is a "pluralistic" one. By this he means the integration that does not encourage preserving of distinct cultures but that which incorporates aspects of the larger culture (Kymlicka, 2001, p. 169).

Handa, (2003) used the term "cultural tolerance". She used "tolerance" to mean respect for the belief of others and allowing freedom of choice and behaviour. The cultural integration and tolerance boils down to a new development known as transcultralism.

Concept Clarification

Transculturalism

"Transculturalism" is fostering different cultural identities within the borders of multi-ethnic states such as Nigeria. It was the original word of Fernando Oritz who defined transculturalism in 1965 as a

synthesis of two phases occurring simultaneously, one being a de-culturalization of the past with a métissage with the present. This new reinventing of the new common culture is therefore based on the meeting and the intermingling of the different peoples and cultures. In other words, one's identity is not strictly one dimensional (the self) but is now defined and more importantly recognized in rapport with the other. In other words, one's identity is not singular but multiple (Ortiz qtd. in Cuccioletta, 2002, p. 8).

Slimbach cited in Cuccioletta (2002) emphasized that transculturalism is only possible when people pursue shared interests and common values across cultural and national borders. He of the opinion that transculturalism exists when one thinks "outside the box of one's motherland" and by "seeing many sides of every question without abandoning conviction, and allowing for a chameleon sense of self without losing one's cultural center". This means a non-selfish view of the world. Another word for transculturalism is "cosmopolitanism" (Appiah, 2005). According to Appiah (2005), "a cosmopolitan is someone who thinks that the world is, so to speak, our shared hometown, reproducing something very like the self-conscious oxymoron of the 'global village'" (p. 217). With transculturalism, cultural boundaries are broken down and differentcultural identities combined into a nation-state (Grosu 2012). This differs from multiculturalism where cultures are reinforced and minority cultures integrated into the mainstream cultures.

Cuccioletta, (2002) identified multiculturalism as "the first level, the first rung in the socio-cultural ladder" (p.8). He went further to state that a "cosmopolitan citizenship is a citizenship that recognizes that each person of that nation-state posseses multiple identities that not only link him or her to their own cultural heritage, but also to the culture of the host country, continent, neighbourhood, street etc." (Cuccioletta, 2002, p. 4).

The benefits of transculturalism, according to the Orientalcollege.org (2015) include:

1. Cultural Diffusionism, where all cultures become bland as a result of mixing and adaptation to accommodate each other and avoid conflict through lack of communication

2. Cultural Exclusivism, where migrants are forced to adapt to a ruling culture as a form of authority establishment, as many countries in the EU nowadays seem to adopt

3. Transculturalism, where differences of cultures are appreciated as different experiences of being in the world, as an artistic expression even maybe or as

different formations of science. It requires communication and knowledge emancipation.

This paper used the third gain and considered how Nigeria's cultural and ethnic differences can be unified within a classroom framework. The point is that culture convergence where no one will feel cheated should be thought of. Welsch (1999, p. 197) proposed using transculturality to account for a changed cultural reality. According to him, de facto cultures insinuated homogeneity and separateness but the new form is transcultural characterized by mixes and permeations. Brooks (2012, p. 27) allegorically used the mixture of vegetables in salad to refer to the mixture of cultures with none regarded as mainstream but all mainstreams and all attracting equal respect.

Dialogic Cultural Learning

Delanoy (2006) went a step further to talk about "dialogic cultural learning" (p. 241). Dialogue, for him, would emphasize the context of social interaction and the conflict-solving and process-oriented nature that is foreign of language learning. He argued that dialogue requires equal partners in communication and invites students to realize their own embeddedness into culture which would lead to peaceful interaction. He stated that

> dialogue requires continuous negotiation of meanings, and can thus create potentially infinite space for meaningful communication and student involvement. In its global dimension, such a perspective invites the development of educational networks across cultures and continents, thus linking language learning to issues of global citizenship and peace education (Delanoy 2006, p. 242).

The crux of Delanoy's dialogic cultural learning is that dialogue is essential in the ESL classroom. Through, social interaction, dialoguing and negotiations, comprises are reached with great reduction I chaos and rancor and hatred.

Statement of Problem

In most Nigerian ESL classrooms, teachers rely on pre-prepared language textbooks for teaching the target language. The child's culture is never considered and there is also no avenue for inter-cultural learning for the purpose of integration among people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds that characterize Nigeria

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study is to state the fact that integration can be achieved in Nigeria by reconsidering the method for teaching the official language – English**.** Specifically, the objectives include

1. Clarifying the concepts of interculturalism and transculturalism
2. Suggesting ways of achieving these in an ESL classroom

Theoretical Framework

Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence

A lot of literatures abound that traced the link between language and culture. The consensus is that that the two are inseparable, that one is the expression of the other. How can one explain this relationship? The origin of studies in the relationship between culture and language started with criticisms of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Corbett (2003, pp. 21-22) criticized CTL for its emphasis on information-gap activities at the negligence of cultural aspects of language teaching. Canale and Swain (1980) observed that Dell Hymes's 1972 model of communicative competence was based on the native speakers of English, making them the models for foreign language teaching (FLT) (Byram 1997, p. 8; Alptekin 2002, p. 57). The fact, according to Alptekin (2002, p. 58) is that it is expected that through language learning the learners would be able to interact with the target-language group and become 'enculturated' into the new speaking community. These criticisms brought about a shift in perspectives by the 1980s known as "culture turn" (Teske 2006, p.25; Corbett 2003, p. 26). The idea was that culture learning should be promoted through language learning and vice versa.

According to Byram (1989), "[...] language learning is culture learning and consequently […] language teaching is culture teaching" (p. 42). This connection, according to Byram, is made possible through the function of language as the main aspect of meaning making in a speech community (Byram 1989, pp. 40-43). He thus stated:

> Thus language pre-eminently embodies the values and meanings of a culture, refers to cultural artefacts and signals people's cultural identity […]. The meanings of a particular language point to the culture of a particular social grouping, and the analysis of those meanings – their comprehension by learners and other speakers – involves the analysis and comprehension of that culture (Byram 1989, p. 41)

Byram was of the notion that no one acquires any culture except through the use of language (Byram 1997, p. 22; Byram & Feng 2005, p. 918). He further regarded foreign language learning as a form of tertiary socialization. This is because, according to him, foreign languages provide the learner with the opportunity to "experience another reality" (Byram 2008, p. 111). According to Byrm (2008) tertiary socialization include

> the idea that teachers and others can help learners to understand new concepts (beliefs, values and behaviours) through the acquisition of a new language, new concepts which, being juxtaposed with those of the learners' other language(s), challenge the taken-for-granted nature of their existing concepts. (pp. 113-114)

Transculturalism entails hybridisation and mixing. The focus is on how best to equip the learners for a globalised and hybridized world with its challenges and opportunities.

Achieving Transculturalism in Nigeria's ESL Classroom

An attempt to accommodate different cultures in the multi-ethnic states should not be seen as an easy task. It means looking at how language is used to create meaning and express cultural beliefs and values. The onus here is to see how this can be achieved in an ESL classroom. According to Valdes (1988) the "the transition from monoculturalism to bi- or even multiculturalism is a marvelous experience, and observing it is almost as marvelous" (p.51). Byram's argument was that FL learners should not be expected to have native speaker's competence in the target language. He sees this as very unrealistic in the FL learning process (Byram, 1997, p. 11). What is expected is that the foreign language learner (FLL) should embrace intercultural communicative competence (ICC) which he defines as the "ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries." (1997, p. 7). Byram supported the integration of language and culture teaching which can be made possible by "equipping learners with the means of accessing and analysing any cultural practices and meanings they encounter" (Byram 2000, p.15) in their interlocutors. Byram's model did not at any point suggest interaction or contact with native speakers of English. This presupposes picking varying cultural learning/teaching items from learners' environment into the language classroom. According to Byram,

> The advantage of a FLT approach emphasising analysis of the interaction is that it allows learners to see their roles not as imitators of native speakers but as social actors engaging with other social actors in a particular kind of communication and interaction which is different from that between native speakers. (Byram 1997, p. 21).

Though English is the legacy of the colonial masters, we should bring in authentic materials into its teaching. By authentic materials we mean

> print, video, and audio materials students encounter in their daily lives, such as change-of address forms, job applications, menus, voice mail messages, radio programs, and videos. (CALPRO, 2007).

Authentic materials could be print or auditory. Some examples of authentic print materials given by Calpro (2007) include:

Utility bills	Packing slips	Order forms
ATM screens	ATM receipts	Web sites
Street signs	Coupons	Traffic tickets
Greeting cards	Calendars	Report cards
TV guides	Food labels	
Magazines	Newspapers	

Examples of authentic **auditory** materials include

Phone messages	Radio broadcasts	Podcasts
E-books	Movies	Videos and DVDs

Television programmes

For instance, Nigeria's political history should form the comprehension passages. Nigeria has too many political events cutting across cultures that could form the reading passages in the ESL classrooms. Why teach about American election while elections go on in Nigeria every day. The concept and beauty of democracy can be exemplified by several election tribunals adjudications – where elections are won and lost

The Nollywood movies for classroom teaching should be selected in such a way that they cut across cultures. We have epic films so why go always for the foreign ones? Integration can only be achieved when we learn to appreciate each other's way of life as depicted in the movies. Transculturalism makes individuals to transcend culture boundaries – no wonder Mercy Johnson and Eve Essien can act Igbo Films and Olu Jacobs, Igbo chief even when they are not Igbos. It shows appreciation and acceptance, which in turn will bring tolerance to Igbo ways of life. The lesson at the end is like negotiation towards eschewing the bad aspects of the culture.

Students can also learn recipes for favorite ethnic/regional dishes when these are discussed in class. By the time they prepare them in their homes, transculturalism has taken place.

When people are allowed to be who they are in the classroom, a rich source of teaching and learning data would be garnered such as data for pronunciation lesson, reading comprehension passages, and of course listening skills are acquired. One can only be helped when he/she is understood and people can only appreciate your culture

when they learn about that. A discussion of the Yoruba marriage rites, the 'owambe', the 'asoebe' life style can make others aspire to be a bride in Yoruba land. Is that not integration? Our individual strengths will be highlighted and our weaknesses downplayed after discussions and negotiations in the class. Ini Edo – the celebrity actress in a movie highlighted the fact that people from the south-south preferred being house helps instead of going to school. In the same movie, she became very successful after going to school – teaching all the beauty and value in being educated. People should not be condemned for living up to their culture. ESL classroom should afford the learners of the opportunity of learning one another's cultures first, then negotiating through those that can be dropped because they bring about disunity.

English textbook should not be filled with foreign name such as John, Peter, Bernard but names taken from all ethnic cultures of Nigeria such as Ngozi, Amaka, Chinedu (from Igbo); Amina, Aishatu, Mohammed (from Hausa); Tope, Segun, Adebola (Yoruba), Essien, Okon, Tega Priye, Belema from the minority languages, to mention but a few. Sumaryono and Wilma (2004) supported this view by stating that

> understanding and supporting the cultural norms of diverse learners help to create a safe and nurturing environment, which motivates students to take the necessary risks to be successful. Therefore, it is essential to find meaningful ways to incorporate the richness of students" cultural backgrounds into the curriculum (p. 17).

Umera-Okeke and Ezekwe (2014) therefore suggested that "Teachers should incorporate the richness of students' cultures in the curriculum. They can do this by using different languages to say key words, which can be written on the board and learned by all the students in the classroom" (p. 275).

The overall reason for using authentic materials in ESL classroom, according to Calpro (2007) is because

> authentic materials help students bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside world. Many students enroll in school to learn or improve a language-related task, such as helping a child with homework or speaking English at work. Others enroll because they have personal long-term goals that involve education, such as becoming an engineer or business owner. In working with new students, teachers need to identify why students have come to class. When teachers know learners' motivations, they can target instruction to meet those goals. A key way to help learners reach their goals is to use authentic, goal-directed materials.

Integration requires that the teacher gets the students involved in collecting authentic materials from their various environments. It should be noted that authentic materials vary by context, type and region. Non shall be ignored in the classroom teaching. Using all leads to the emergence of new individuals who have grown to accept others and their cultures to the extent of wanting to imitate their ways of life.

Use of authentic materials not just integrates but also solves the goals of students in language learning. Studies have it that "that students will benefit more from using local authentic materials than using ones that are a step removed from their lives" (Jacobson, Degener, & Purcell-Gates, 2003 Cited in Calpro, 2007).

In addition to everything thus said, Byram (2008) argued that "cultural learning needs to be experiential" (p. 97). His emphasis was on the notion of "interaction with people who embody a culture." (Byram 2008, p. 97). Experiential learning is learning through reflection on doing, which is often contrasted with rote or didactic learning. It can be said to be "action learning, adventure learning, free choice learning, cooperative learning, and service learning" (Goris, 2014). Byram was of the view that learners should be encouraged to be aware of and question their own values and beliefs. They should be helped to explore how meaning is created in their cultural and social environment in order to appreciate other views and beliefs. He argued that FLT taught in the framework of general education should also contribute to the individual development of each learner (Byram 1997, p. 23).

Conclusion

Though this paper has adopted intercultural communicative competence, the emergence of a new identity is expected at the end of the ESL education hence the term 'transculturalism.' Part of the new identities is that inter-tribal marriages become necessary, new recipes from other cultures are learnt and prepared by others. In addition, we all learn to appreciate others having understood their values and norms. Ezenwa-Ohaeto and Umera-Okeke (2010) collaborates the above when they stated that

> Patterns of language usage vary across cultures and reflect differences in values, norms, and beliefs about social roles and relationships in each culture. When children learn their first language, they learn the cultural values, norms, and beliefs that are characteristic of their cultures. To learn another language is to learn new norms, behaviours and beliefs that are appropriate in the new culture, and thus to extend one's socio-cultural competence in new environments (p.69).

This paper therefore advocated that the new trend in ESL pedagogy should be transculturalism as this will in no small means bring peace and integration in ethnicity battered and divided Nigeria.

References

Appiah, K. A. (2005). *The ethics of identity*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Bauböck, R. (2001). International migration and liberal democracies -The challenges of integration. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 35(4): 33-49.

Brooks, R. L. (2012). Cultural diversity: It's all about the mainstream. *Monist* 95.1: 17-32.

Byram, M. (1989). *Cultural studies in foreign language education*. Clevedon & Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M. (1991). Teaching culture and language. Towards an integrated model. In Buttjes, D. Byram, M. (eds.). *Mediating languages and cultures. Towards an intercultural theory of foreign language education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 17-30.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon: Mulitlingual Matters.

Byram, M. (2000). Learning language without a culture? The case of English as a lingua franca. In Bredella, L., Meisner, F.-J., Nunning, A. R. D. (eds.). *Wie ist Fremdverstehen lehr- und lernbar?* Tubingen: Narr, 1-17.

Byram, M. (2008). *From Foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship. Essays and reflections*. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M. (2010). Linguistic and intercultural education for building and *Citizenship. The Modern Language Journal* 94(2), 317-321.

CALPRO Online.org (2007). Professional Development Fact Sheet No 1: Authentic materials. Retrieved May 1, 2016 from *www.calpro-online.org/documents/AuthenticMaterialsFinal.pdf*

Cuccioletta, D. (2001/2002). Multiculturalism or transculturalism: Towards a Cosmopolitan Citizenship. *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, 17: 1-11.

Delanoy, W. (2006). Transculturality and (inter-)cultural learning in the EFL classroom. In Delanoy, W. Volkmann, L. (eds.). *Cultural Studies in the EFL classroom*. Heidelberg: Winter, 233-248.

Ezenwa-Ohaeto, N. & Umera-Okeke, N. (2010). Socio-cultural competence in ESL education: A focus on Nigeria. *LWATI: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 7(1), 68-78.

Grosu, L. M. (2012). Multiculturalism or transculturalism? Views on cultural diversity. *Synergy*, Vol.8, no. 2, 2012: 102-111

Guo, Y. (2010). The Concept and development of intercultural competence. In Tsai, Yau; Houghton, Stephanie (eds.). *Becoming intercultural. Inside and outside the classroom*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 23-47.

Handa, A. (2003). *Of Silk Saris and Mini Skirts: South Asian Girls Walk the Tightrope of Culture*. Toronto: Women's Press.

International Orient College (2015). Transculturalism: how culture generates learning and how personal culture sabotages growth: principles of education and self-cultivation. Introduction to the textbook on transculturalism by René Goris, 2014. Retrieved Feb 29, 2016 from http://www.orientalcollege.org/to-share/oc-publishing/transcultural-healthcare-principles

Jacobson, E., Degener, S., & Purcell-Gates, V. (2003). *Creating authentic materials and activities for the adult literacy classroom: A handbook for practitioners*. NCSALL teaching and training materials. Boston, MA: NCSALL at World Education.

Kymlicka, W. (2001). *Politics in the vernacular. Nationalism, multiculturalism and outside the classroom*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 23-47.

Umera-Okeke, N. & Ezekwe, A. (2014). Preserving the cultural identity of the english as a second language learners in Nigeria using TESOL principles for ESL education standards. *International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH), January, Vol. 3(1)*, pp. 270-282

Valdes, Joyce Merrill (ed.). (1988). *Culture bound. Bridging the cultural gap in language teaching*. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.