

Subnetwork G:
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Parallel Session 4.1: 09.00-10.30
Room 5
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An intercultural approach to foreign language teaching

Abstract

This paper focuses on an intercultural approach to the teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL) in Swedish schools and its consequences for teacher education. The approach is described in the context of international and national policy documents and introduced in an age of internationalisation and growing local responsibility for curriculum development. I relate the approach to two theoretical concepts: intercultural communicative competence (Byram) and the intercultural speaker (Kramsch). My ongoing research aims to understanding the possibilities and problems for the above approach based on studies of relevant documents and interviews with teachers and teacher educators. The forthcoming findings may be used to interpret teaching/learning processes in teacher education and in curriculum and teacher development aimed at intercultural understanding.

Background

English as a foreign language in Swedish schools.

English is a compulsory subject for all young Swedes from year 4 to year 12, in fact many children start earlier. Apart from a heavy educational impact the English language has a dominating position through an Americanized or internationalised commercial youth culture, undubbed films, television, popular culture, a wide range of imported goods, advertising, etc. Without exaggerating, English has the position next to a second language to a great part of Swedish society. In school the language has a high prestige among students and teachers and is considered as vital and unquestioned knowledge. The first language (L1) is generally not looked upon as threatened by English as a foreign language (EFL). The issue of linguistic imperialism as debated in other countries (e.g. Phillipson 1992) is not on the Swedish agenda. By tradition there is a cultural component integrated into the subject. In summary: EFL is a favourable platform for intercultural education.

An intercultural approach to the teaching of English

For the last decade international researchers have discussed the need for a new approach to teaching culture in languages. Below some models are presented. They are all cited from the original texts. Risager (1998:243) describes four different ideal-typical approaches to FLT, which are used as analytical concepts in a Danish-British study:

1. The foreign-culture approach, which has been losing ground since the 1980s;
2. The intercultural approach, which has replaced the foreign-culture approach, and is the dominant one today;
3. The multicultural approach, which has made its appearance since the 1980s, but still is in marginal position;
4. The transcultural approach, which is just beginning to appear as a result of internationalisation.

I prefer to use the word "intercultural" approach in this paper, but what I am referring to is a concept similar to Risager's fourth category. As "transcultural" is not used in educational vocabulary in Sweden, I fear that introducing a new terminology will make more harm than good.

The difference between the traditional cultural contents of language learning/teaching and a new concept of intercultural competence has been expressed in the following set of oppositions drawn on Bredella, Buttjes and Byram by Delanoy (1996):

Landeskunde (kulturkunskap, civilisation)

transmission and fact-based
moving from state to state
objective
separable from language learning
culture in essence
native speaker

New Cultural Studies

experiential
exploring the dynamics of culture formation
subjective
language-in-culture
culture as a signifying practice
intercultural mediator

Morgan(1998:226) talks about two models:

The French model

transmission of a body of knowledge
rational argument and accuracy
the teacher's authority paramount in
presenting the truth

The English model

learner-centred
experiential activities
incorporating cognitive and affective
domains
where the teacher operates as facilitator

Zarate, translated and quoted by Morgan (1998:226), describes two models in France:

Model 1

... cultural competence conceived as a sum
of knowledge with the good teacher, the
good textbook, the good pupil and the right
answer speaking the truth....
... the educational institution asks the pupil
to perform an act of faith in accepting the
authority of its sources of information

Model 2

... provides the pupil with the tools to
interpret a foreign culture and teaches
him or her to put them into action

The different perspectives also imply different views on what knowledge is, and how to develop this new competence. Apart from epistemological aspects it raises methodological questions for language teaching. An inferential affective process demands other ways of learning than transmission of cognitive skills. The right hand columns all imply comparing another culture to one's own. This requires an ability to analyse culture, to develop a cultural tool required for communication in a future society. New fields as sociology, psychology and ethnography (ethnology) are brought into a reconsidered cross disciplinary education for language teachers. Traditional borders are being threatened, or, to put in a positive way, are opened up for fresh innovative perspectives.

The aim of intercultural education in FLT to me, is to develop a general competence, using any language as lingua franca. It is used in contact with another person, from *any* language and *any* culture, different from that of the learner. In a time, when we borrow cultural traits from each other and create new "transcultures", cultural competence must be reconsidered. Language education for democratic citizenship in an international context is a new challenge to teachers and teacher educators of EFL.

The context of international and national policy documents

The Swedish National Curriculum refers to international agreements, conventions and recommendations (UNESCO, Council of Europe, European Union) of Human Rights, European Citizenship Education and International Understanding. Since 1985 there is a Swedish law stating that all education, at any level, in any subject, shall be carried out in an intercultural perspective. Seen in an international educational perspective it can be regarded as extraordinary that teachers' way of thinking can be legislated about. No doubt many teacher educators and teachers are ignorant

of this legislation. Better known is the international perspective as one of the four overriding perspectives in the National Curriculum (NC) for ages 0-19. The word "intercultural" has been replaced by "international" but NC documents assure us that the first is built into the second. The concept of internationalisation, as embodied in the present NC of 1994, is discussed and analysed by the Swedish National Agency for Education (1996). According to NC every school shall interpret the aims and objectives of the above documents and transform them into a local plan relevant to their own specific context. Considerations have to be taken as to geo-political context, learning locations and the development of the learners (Byram 1997). I regard the local plan as a crucial tool for setting the local goals and the base for educational assessment. 23 such local plans concerning EFL have been collected and analysed as we shall see below.

For more than ten years intercultural understanding has been a national aim in teacher education curricula. Teacher education has been criticized for not living up to the objectives in practice (Batelaan et al 1992, Kungälvreport 1998).

In summary: There are no (I am not clear what doubt possibilities are, maybe there is no doubt that intercultural approach to TEFL is desirable, judging by the amount of available documents.

An age of internationalisation

Today a growing number of bilingual (English-speaking) educational programmes are being offered in upper secondary education. But rapidly growing international contacts also make new demands on the *contents* of language teaching. Competing discourses of internationalisation could be discerned, each dominating a decade, but all three still existing today. The three are 1) solidarity with the developing countries during the 1970s 2) anti-racism, integration of "old" and "new" Swedes during the 1980s 3) a market oriented, competitive approach to European integration during the 1990s (Lahdenperä 1995). Different discourses lead to different social practice (Foucault). Translated into language education this means that the discourse we employ has pedagogical implications. Roberts (1988) talks about different curricular emphases, an approach developed by Swedish educational researchers (Englund, Östman, Tornberg). Applied to intercultural issues in foreign language teaching, two possible dichotomies appear: instrumental ("intercultural competence leads to a career") or integrative ("intercultural competence gives new perspectives which lead to personal development"). The two are possible to combine. However a stress on instrumental fact-based knowledge is the general approach in business communication and cherished by consultants. An alternative emphasis must be offered in schools.

Theoretical concepts

Curricula are social constructs (Goodson 1992) and so are school subjects (Thavenius 1999). Key actors in this construction are the teacher and teacher educator. Intercultural issues are cross disciplinary. My research is underpinned by theories and perspectives from a field where lines from social psychology, education and linguistics cross. I draw on three main perspectives anchored in a broad constructivist and interactionist paradigm: 1) sociocultural theories as developed by the neo-*vygotskians* (Bakhtin, Rommetveit, Wertsch and Säljö) 2) curriculum theory (Svingby, Englund, Goodson) 3) theories about intercultural communicative competence connected to foreign language teaching/learning (Byram, Kramsch, Risager).

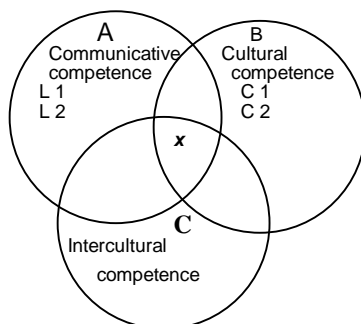
The field of a subject or discipline changes according to historical, economic, cultural and social circumstances. Language education exists in this changing context. The goals of yesterday are not the goals of today and tomorrow. In international research the norm of the native speaker is now being questioned (e.g Widdowson; Kramsch 1998) and replaced by a new ideal: the intercultural speaker. This implies a language learner, who acts as a mediator between two cultures, interprets and understands other perspectives as well as questions what is taken for granted in the own society. Communicative competence is combined with intercultural competence to intercultural communicative competence, ICC (Byram, Zarate). Their research has stimulated The Council of Europe Language programmes and *Lingua* projects within the European Union. Byram (1997) has developed a theoretical framework for teaching and assessing this competence which is a valuable contribution to a revised FLT. He presents five "savoirs" or factors of knowledge, which form

intercultural competence and defines in detail what is involved. Byram prefers the French terminology for its "elegance...in which knowledge, skills and attitudes can be described as different 'savoirs'"

After this quick glance at theoretical inspirers my theoretical position could finally be described below

A. Reading Writing Listening Speaking; Genres, Registers

B. Every day culture, popular culture, ideas, beliefs, perceptions, artefacts, behavior, institutions, history, geography, literature, art, music, age, gender, class, etc.



C. A cross curricular general proficiency including e. g. adaptability, tolerance, accepting other views, empathy, flexibility, cultural awareness. Realizing the concepts of ethnocentricity, stereotyping, social constructivism.

Figure 1. The relationship between communicative competence and intercultural competence. L1=mother tongue, L2= target language C1= learner's culture C2= one target culture X=intercultural communicative competence

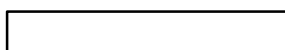
I refrain here from discussing the concept of target culture. The three components, communication, culture and interculturality can be regarded as related to each other. The overlapping sector seems a relevant area for FLT. It offers possibilities to develop communicative competence and intercultural understanding *in integration*, not as separate skills or competencies. To find and define this area seems to be a fruitful starting point for a local plan, the necessary tool for implementing a new approach.

Description of the study

An intercultural approach to FLT is not researched or officially debated in Sweden and I wonder why. What opportunities are there for this approach? By doing my research I hope to draw the attention to a neglected area, and contribute to make it better known and discussed in schools and teacher education. The aim is to find problems and possibilities for teaching English as a foreign language with an intercultural approach. The study is carried out in two stages based on the same theoretical background. Stage 1 (curricular documents and teacher interviews) is briefly described below. The next stage is planned as a study of teacher educators, who teach/train language teachers-to-be. How do teacher educators perceive the changed identity of EFL? What are the consequences of their perceptions of EFL for the teaching of English in Swedish schools? As a parallel project, some action oriented school-based work is developing, due to requests from interviewed teachers, who would like to work with an intercultural approach.

Documents

The first part of the study in stage 1 consists of an analysis of curricular documents including international agreements. 23 local plans of English have been collected from different parts of the country. They do not reflect overriding aims and objectives of international and intercultural understanding, with one exception. The local plans are merely a refashioned, national curriculum of English. The latter document is vague and not consistent with the overriding principles of the international perspective. Intercultural understanding is not expressed as an umbrella to the subject, but as one of independent six components (the other are speaking, writing, listening, reading, autonomous learning). In the collected local plans, the cultural component of English called "intercultural understanding is treated as a fact-based separate part. My findings are expressed in the figure below.



⇓

SOU 1992:94 A School for Life
Report of the Commission on the Curriculum

⇓

<p>NATIONAL LEGISLATION School Law; Government Bill 1985 (Intercultural Education)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">⇓</p> <p>⇒</p> <p>⇨</p>	<p>NATIONAL CURRICULUM (Lpo,Lpf 94) overall goals and guidelines stated as perspective goals and attainment goals</p> <p>⇓</p> <p>⇨</p> <p>⇨</p>	<p>THE INTERNATIONAL BASIS FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY Agreements with Unesco, Council of Europe, European Union</p> <p style="text-align: center;">⇓</p> <p>←</p> <p>⇨</p>
<p>REFERENCE MATERIAL FROM NATIONAL AGENCY OF EDUCATION</p> <p>⇓</p>	<p>MUNICIPAL LEVEL LOCAL SCHOOL PLAN a political document</p> <p>⇓</p>	<p>NATIONAL CURRICULUM OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">⇓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">⇓</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">⇓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">⇓⇒⇒⇒</p>	<p>LOCAL WORK PLAN Concrete goals as interpreted by the staff of the school.</p> <p>⇓</p> <p>LOCAL PLAN OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE</p> <p>⇓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">⇓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">⇓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">⇓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">⇓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">⇓</p> <p style="text-align: center;">←←←←</p>
	<p>CLASSROOM LEVEL Teacher and students agree on the learning goals of English as a foreign language</p> <p>?</p>	

Figure 2. The relationship between the various documents are marked by arrows. Double arrows (⇓) show the prescribed relation (Lpo 94) Single arrows (←) mark the relation shown by the local plans. The question mark indicates whether overriding principles reach the classroom.

According to the National Curriculum (NC) intercultural and international understanding is an educational goal. As far as I can see, when making a local plan, the national curricular plan for EFL must be supplemented by other documents and regarded in a philosophical educational perspective to expose various discourses. If not, intercultural understanding in EFL could be interpreted to mean nothing else than factual knowledge. If this holistic view is missing, intercultural understanding in a true sense gets lost. Language teachers are then left to "traditional " interpretations of culture in FLT (see models page 2, left column), unless they have a strong personal commitment to intercultural issues.

Further research development

As a second part of stage 1, ten secondary school teachers of English (year 7-9) were interviewed twice within six months. The interviews are being analysed at the moment, and so far I am only able to report very generally.

My preliminary results show that curricular documents mean little to the teachers. Regarding an intercultural approach, the crucial point seems to be the values of the individual teacher, and how strong the urge is to express one's personal position in professional life. It is not that language teachers in general *object* to the values stated in documents. As one of the teachers interviewed put it: "Language teachers are intercultural by nature". But it is vital how they *interpret* the overriding objectives, and how *important* they regard them compared to (spell-check doesn't know this word) essentialistic demands on FLT. They are easily regarded somebody else's concern. The teachers see themselves as linguists above all. National evaluations and national assessments of English signal to the teacher that intercultural understanding is of little value, by *not asking* questions concerning this dimension of FLT or not assessing it. I am looking forward to starting stage 2 of the study, to find out whether teacher education is the possibility for an intercultural approach to language teaching for a changing society.

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Questions to TNTEE delegates

(no.1, 2 and 3 are put to delegates from other countries and no. 2 to Swedes):

1) How is foreign language teaching/learning related to overriding curricular objectives like intercultural understanding, Human Rights and citizen education in schools?

2) How is foreign language teaching/learning related to overriding curricular objectives like intercultural understanding, Human Rights and citizen education in teacher education? Is thematic work done including FLT?

3) What kind of research and development work is going on in schools and teacher education?