Drama and the teaching of culture in the English class

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1. Introduction

It is rather well-known the fact that when using a language, people do not only get in touch with linguistic aspects. Every time we communicate, a different sphere of the language happens to be accessed, in which the meaning relation between sign and the referred object is intended to be the same for all users of that common tongue, so that communication flows as a natural process. According to Hall (1959, p. 27): "Culture is communication and communication is culture", so all the spheres of human action in which particular uses of language take place (Bakhtin, 1992) also rely on cultural traits inextricably intertwined to the language itself.

That being said, it is virtually impossible to set both parts aside, especially when it comes to the teaching of a foreign language (FL). Via (1976) suggests many considerable aspects related to learning a language that hold on cultural assets, for instance: "how (native speakers) hold their bodies, how far they stand apart, where they look when they talk, how men shake their hands with each other, how children talk to their parents, and so on". Moreover, we can enlist other points, such as how speakers express emotion and feelings as contentment and frustration, the intonation they use to show they are angry, the "simple" gestures applied into calling someone's attention and so forth. Such characteristics are not really tangible and capable of being learned at first sight, there are some implications to understanding them, some that may not even be overcome on "conventional and traditional" classes. Facing these prerogatives, it seems invaluable the study of culture attached to the teaching of FL, and that is exactly the main purpose of the present paper.

We then set off with our research having the following quotation of Costa (1998) as our starting point.

[...] it seems impossible to talk about a culture, from another, without causing any kind of violence, without imposing senses. Would a project that strives for the dialogue between different cultures be conceivable and feasible? Different cultures may talk among themselves? Is it possible to conceive collective projects that preserve diversity? [1] (p. 65-66, our translation).

In her comment, Costa does not bring about any common places, her questions touch the core of many concrete daily problems. Her point is visually clear when we get to thoroughly mind the implications on the fact that a culture, as a singular and living being, may not relate to another without any such case of cultural overlapping or even the emergence of stereotypes and prejudice.

We believe that the author herself answers her question, when starting her own discourse stating that it "seemed" impossible to achieve a harmless dialogue among divergent cultures. This way, there is room to believe on the possibility of involving cultures in a productive and meaningful way.

Considering such information, this paper shows its value in suggesting an appropriate and suitable model of praxis that may positively fit the needs on the effective teaching of EFL, thus satisfying both linguistic and cultural aspects that are necessary to ensure the effectiveness of teaching English in a globalized world.

In order to scaffold this paper, we see on the concept of interculturalism presented by Byram *et al*. (2002) a solid and adequate theoretical proposal to be analyzed along with the suggestion of the theatrical praxis on the EFL classroom, here represented by the theories of Via (1976), Fleming (1998), Miccoli (2003) and some others. By these means, we aim to combine all these theoretical conceptions in order to present drama as a viable way to learn English minding the (inter-) cultural aspects of the language.

2. The intercultural competence

Interculturalism, as the name suggests, refers to establishing a dialogical relation "between cultures" (*inter culture*), which is based, above all, on the word respect in its widest sense. Respect for individuals and their diverse cultural identities, respect to the cultures themselves, as representative systems of collective values from a folk. According to Byram *et al*. (2002), the interculturalism aims to

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[1] It seemed interesting and pertaining to the objective of this paper to leave the original quote as footnote: [...] parece impossível falar de uma cultura, a partir de outra, sem praticar alguma forma de violência, sem imposição de sentidos. Seria então concebível e exequível um projeto que aspire ao diálogo entre culturas diferentes? Culturas diferentes podem conversar entre si? É possível conceber projetos coletivos que preservem as diferenças? (Costa, 1998, pp. 65-66).

the formation of *intercultural speakers or mediators*, able to avoid stereotypical perceptions and see a human being in its complexity. Here the intercultural speaker is opposed to a recurring model in the study of languages, the "native" speaker, a representative of a nation from whom the common sense usually expects domain, not only over linguistic skills but also the cultural ones. On the intercultural dimension, however, it is not expected from the speaker to hold all knowledge about one or another culture, on the other hand, it is necessary to see the interlocutor as a being whose qualities and values are to be unraveled.

So that there is indeed a dialogue in which one can truly understand another, in spite of eventual divergences, there must be a degree of knowledge about the other by both sides involved. As exemplified in Byram *et al.* (2002, p. 11), to talk with a Chinese, the intercultural speaker needs to understand what being Chinese is and the values deeply linked to that identity. Nevertheless, what the speaker cannot forget is that their knowledge of that identity should not be ended there. There must be kept an open space to learn more about the other from that person's own perspective about him/her -self, such space to be filled through dialogue. By doing so, according to the dialogic theory coined by Bakhtin and his circle, one may get the opportunity to learn more about him/herself with the aid of the other and his unique sight that once shared can lead to different perceptions of self. As stated by the Russian philosopher: "I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. […] To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself." (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 287)

By seeing the other person through his/her own eyes, the intercultural speaker begins a process of exploration of his/her own values, enlisting possible similarities and differences between the culture of other and his/her own, in this bias, by perceiving another, you may end up perceiving yourself. And that happens to be the pinnacle of the interculturalism, entitling your speaker the ability to bond different cultures, so from then on it may be possible to learn more about his/her own cultural reality. Nevertheless, another big advantage is that the learner would now be able to analyze situations in a new "light", being able to access the other's cultural values, acquired during the mediation process.

In the upcoming quote, Byram *et al.* describe the elements needed for the development of the intercultural competence:

> The components of intercultural competence are knowledge, skills and attitudes, complemented by the values of an individual as a result of the social groups to which they belong. These values are part of the social identities of such individual (Byram et al. 2001, p. 12).

The previous quote argues that in order to be an intercultural speaker having knowledge of a particular culture is not the only ingredient on the pot. One

still needs to develop certain attitudes and skills, which complemented by the values brought by the speaker himself, will allow the dialogue between the referred diverse cultural contexts. These values come from the social groups to which the speaker belongs, indicating here, one of the most relevant features of the interculturalism, the emphasis on the speaker as an individual, considering its peculiarities and socio-cultural values.

2.1. OTHER APPROACHES TOWARDS CULTURE

When defining the term interculturalism, it is important to pay attention to other approaches, which also derive from the recognition of cultural diversity. In accordance to Fleuri (2001, p. 9), the *multi-* or *pluricultural* terms indicate the coexistence of different cultural groups without necessarily having constant interaction between the entities involved. To the *transcultural* concept concerns features that are similar across cultures, commonalities existing between them which do not exactly come from an interaction of these different cultural contexts. In other words, the cross-cultural affinities are meant to build "bridges" between the two cultures, allowing cultural interaction between the different involved contexts, such bridges are called by Fleuri (2001, p. 9) "universal traits."

In this sphere and taking the conceptions about intercultural competence into account, it is seen that it sets itself aside from the other mentioned cultural approaches. Especially by the intentionality factor implicit to the intercultural relations, in which, first of all, it is assumed to be the will of the participants, the dialogue between cultures.

3. HOW SHOULD CULTURE BE TAUGHT IN THE ENGLISH CLASS?

The teaching of culture in the English classes has been a practice that, over time, has been acquiring greater emphasis on the Brazilian educational scenario, even though designing an educational proposal capable of comprehending the Brazilian cultural complexity is not considered any easy task. Official documents for curricular orientation that serve as parameter to the learning and teaching of foreign languages discuss the great advantages that the study of other cultures can bring for both students and teachers.

Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais do Ensino Médio (2000), for example, declare that the study of foreign language "allows the student to approach various cultures and thus provide their integration in a globalized world". On this same direction, the OCEM, Orientações Curriculares para o Ensino Médio (2006), adds invaluable topics to this discussion, the local x global dichotomy. What should really matter? What is being brought from the "outer" world or what is being conceived in our homeland? The document itself, as evidenced in the following

quoted passage, argues that cultural study makes students realize how these so-called "other languages" and "outer" world are related to the attitudes and values interwoven in their own cultural contexts.

> [...] With the expansion of studies on culture, we may also understand that these other cultures are very close to each teacher and student, in their own living means (such as the diversity with which all live) (OCEM, 2006, p. 97, our translation).

We then see how opinions have changed or in which direction they are to change when it comes to culture teaching and learning. People drew the conclusion that it is not needed for a person to leave his/her country in order to study and get to know more about the culture of a distinct folk. Required it is that one opens his/her own eyes to see how all cultures interact to his own.

3.1. CULTURE TEACHING APPROACHES

Adelaide de Oliveira (2012) describes three different approaches when it comes to culture teaching in English classes, each of which can be applied according to the respective objectives of each course. They are: teaching *for* culture, teaching *about* culture and teaching *with* culture.

According to Oliveira (2012), teaching *for* culture has culture as its central theme, such as in a sociology or anthropology course. It is then perceived that the learning of a foreign language is decidedly not in the foreground. By using this method, the teaching of culture becomes prevalent, there is no proper room for learning language knowledge, what is also an important side of EFL.

Although cultural notions are very important to the formation of any student, the goal of English classes is not to train students specialist in culture, but rather allow the acquisition of knowledge about other cultures to happen in a simultaneous and interconnected pace alongside with the learning of other important traits of the target language.

In the case of teaching *about* culture, we then face a teaching process undertaken through the presentation of socio-historical aspects that permeate that cultural context. The purpose of this method turns out to present the culture in a limited and very general manner, leading the student to create a stereotypical view of the cultural context presented in class. This is mainly due to the choices made by the teacher in regard to the methodology. In this model, the teacher deals with cultural aspects with little depth, typically by using generalizations, bringing topics limited to geographical and socio-historical data, which we could all call "commonplace". Such as when there is the presentation of aspects of Indian culture with emphasis on only a few traces such as clothing (feather clothes), housing (hut) and customs (body painting).

There is a big misconception in the use of this method to the point it does not seek to promote the student's development of a real critical thinking about the cultural aspects studied. On the contrary, this model can foster in students, through excessive generalizations, one-sided opinions about a certain culture, possibly ending up as a cause of cultural prejudice.

In this sense, even if relevant cultural features are presented through the use of this method, dialogue is necessary between cultures so that there is true gain for the students in terms of learning. The best way to have it is when students play the role of mediator, able to ponder, reflect and respect the differences between their culture and the one of others. Both sides should be willing to interact ensuring that a relation of (self) knowledge takes place, equally beneficial to all individuals involved.

The teaching *with* culture envisions the study of culture as a way of achieving other various skills, in addition to cultural knowledge itself, making the process of researching a culture, a practice that may also enhance the linguistic gain, for example. In addition to this benefit, by perceiving the world through the eyes of another culture, the students start to analyze and judge situations from a new perspective. The student who walks the "space between cultures" has opened his/her mind to a greater amount of experience, a world of possibilities, which otherwise would be impossible. It is also shocking the development perceived in argumentative production in the one that gives him/herself the opportunity to know and understand the world from a different perspective. Therefore, students who learn culture with culture have a multilateral vision of the situations, being able to avoid limited and generalized visions of cultural aspects.

According to de Oliveira (2012), that would be the intercultural teaching method, unfortunately not widely disseminated across the Brazilian educational dimension, however, as seen earlier in this topic, greatly advocated by the requirements of national official documents that guide the implementation of the curriculum in Brazil. As it is defended by the OCEM, the learning of a foreign language may respond some short-term needs of the students, making them globally integrated. On the other hand, this shall not be expected as the only conquest of the learners in the process. Far more benefits may be ensured, such as:

> More than just reinforcing the social values of the time, values that are admittedly challenged by economic and cultural globalization movement, we understand that the goal of an inclusive project would create possibilities for citizens to dialogue with other cultures without the need to let go of your values (Maturana *apud* Brasil, 2006, p. 96)[2].

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[2] As stated by the original: "Mais do que reforçar apenas os valores sociais do momento, valores que são, reconhecidamente, interpelados pelo movimento econômico-cultural da

It would be extremely naive, though, to believe that all the guidelines laid out in the official documents are straightly fulfilled and that the teaching of culture, following such methods, is fully enacted by the schools of the country. At the same time crossing arms will not find us a game changer. According to Paulo Freire's mind, teachers in this era need to be revolutionary. In other words, he means that if the situations are not favorable, educators need to see through frustration and find alternative ways to have goals achieved.

Having such information considered, it is perceived that the intercultural experience is the most suitable approach to see a language and its respective culture as we mind the EFL learning process. By thinking of available ways to develop the interculturalism in the English classroom, we came to the point that the theatrical activity would be the perfect stage for this to take place.

4. Intercultural development and drama

This proposal may sound as a commonplace. Drama is for a fact an activity already visited by teachers all around the world, especially in the last decades. Theater, apart from the idea of it as a subject or its original definition of art, is being used as an educational method in a variety of school subjects and with a wide range of topic areas and also goals. However, the fact that something is being done does not imply it is being done the way(s) it should or could be applied. In fact, the simple act of asking students to role play a conversation dialogue from the textbook may be seen as a theatrical activity. However, no one is capable of assuring that all potencies enabled by such activity are being actually carried out. As in a timeless traditional saying, "the end justifies the means". But what is this "end"?

According to Flemming (1998), the common end for the use of drama in the language classes nowadays is the idea of "reality recreation". Educators opt to use drama as a method holding the belief it is important for the fact it may enable students to simulate varied real-life situations in which a certain aspect of the language is of request. They are not mistaken, though. However, what Flemming tries to suggest is that this thought may limit the vast range of potencies and benefits that are brought up by drama.

One of such is not related to what is real, but to what is not entirely a "reality". Drama opens doors that present you with possibilities of living what is not actually part of what you see as "real life". As an artistic expression it works on the sphere of the unreal, therefore fiction, imagination and creativity are intrinsic parts of the theatrical engagement. On top of that, in Flemming's (1997) opinion

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globalização, entendemos que o objetivo de um projeto de inclusão seria criar possibilidades de o cidadão dialogar com outras culturas sem que haja a necessidade de abrir mão de seus valores".

using drama as means of replacing or replicating the real-life experience would end up immensely limiting the learning opportunities and benefits this practice would provide students with.

Drama engages learners emotionally and at the same time, paradoxically, through the effect of fiction, keeps them distant enough to observe how things are done, feelings arisen, decisions made and so on. Henceforth, we have sufficiently committed participants with the capacity of reflecting on the actions undertaken during the theatrical process. This scenario has special advantages when dealing with a universe created by the own actors/students, in which contextualization plays a special role. In other words, this experience would amount to the perfect opportunity for learners to explore cultural values, and by so not only their own but the ones of others.

According to Heathcote and Bolton (1998), a theatrical performance requires the audience to see, listen and pay attention to the presentation as a whole. This includes what is heard (all sounds and noise) and what in a significant way is not to be heard (deep silence, perceptible calm); what is seen and what is intended not to be seen; what may move and what is there to be static. The same goes to the actors, the knowledge on every movement has to be monitored and thought in different "layers" by all participants. For a professional actor to play a specific character, for instance, he may have to learn with depth the profile of that certain character he is intended to play, that implies knowing things from the way that fictional character dresses and where he/she is from to the way he/she speaks or moves. In this sense, the actor has to research, acquire and study varied information from different sources about the kind of being he is playing, so he ends up convincing whoever is going to see his performance that what is being acted out is feasible, plausible. Not only should they need to know how to move appropriately, but also how to emit the words in a veritable way, so this way learners can see through the different aspects of language and its respective cultural background, from body language to vocabulary and accents. By having access to a whole different and fictional atmosphere (one that is not his own, so to say), learners could be able to not only be in touch with contents related to linguistic competencies but also to see and experience the underlying cultural values intrinsic to the different uses of the language(s) they might learn. Therefore, the theatrical experience would broaden students' horizons by providing them with knowledge from cultures different from theirs, yet differences that may not set aside, but on the other hand, differences that may act in order to complete or enhance one's perspective of the world.

It is no easy task to be developed, as noticed. Much can happen during the process, especially the appearance of stereotypes and prejudice. In addition, there comes the educator as a mediator of the learning process. By playing his/her part, the teacher may conduct students to avoiding eventual stereotypical ideas and cultural misinterpretations. He may use such opportunities in order to raise learner's

awareness to the importance of perceiving how distinct and peculiar each culture is, and for this reasons, how each should be equally respected.

5. CONCLUSION

All ideas considered, we realize that among the methods for the teaching of culture here analyzed, the intercultural approach would be the most suitable for the teaching of cultural knowledge in LE classes, as its focus is not limited only on the seizure of information about other cultures. The intercultural approach understands that the student should be a mediator between cultures in debate, so that from that moment on he/she can reflect the culture of another based on the relationship he/she keeps with his/her own, beginning to understand his/her culture from the perspective of another one.

Based on the previous consideration and the provisions of the quoted official documents, we understand that the development of the intercultural approach in foreign language classes is of great importance to the preparation of citizens ready to interact in a globalized world. A citizen who would be able to maintain effective communication with members of varied cultural backgrounds without giving rise to stereotypes, generalizations and overlaps between the featured cultures.

Lastly, we see that drama suits the objectives and perspectives outlined by the interculturalism, and when successfully taught and contextualized, benefits may be held as outcomes of this process. Restating a question asked in the previous section of this paper, we feel it is of fair importance to emphasize the relevance of knowing the purposes behind all means enlisted and choices made. Purposelessly doing something just for the sake of doing takes people nowhere.

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ABSTRACT: It is purpose of this paper to discuss the importance of developing the intercultural competence in the teaching of English as foreign language (EFL), suggesting theater as way to develop the intercultural activity in EFL classes. We conducted a bibliographical study sustained by the theories of Flemming (1998), Byram (1997), Bakhtin (1992, 1984) and others, with special regard to the OCEM and PCNs, documents of national curricular reference. We concluded that drama may lead students to step into the fictional atmosphere to understand underlying cultural values and, this way, to take part in favorable learning situations for research and analysis of cultural knowledge.

KEY-WORDS: Interculturalism; Foreign Language; Culture teaching; Drama.

RESUMO: O propósito deste trabalho é discutir a importância do desenvolvimento da competência intercultural no ensino do inglês como língua estrangeira (LE), sugerindo o teatro como forma de desenvolver a atividade intercultural nas aulas de LE. Realizamos um estudo bibliográfico sustentado pelas teorias de Flemming (1998), Byram (1997), Bakhtin (1992, 1984) e outros, com especial atenção às OCEM e PCNs, documentos de referência cur-

ricular nacional. Concluímos que o drama pode levar os alunos a entrar na atmosfera ficcional para entender os valores culturais subjacentes e, dessa forma, participar de situações favoráveis de aprendizagem para pesquisa e análise de conhecimento cultural.

Palavras-chave: Interculturalismo. Língua estrangeira. Ensino de cultura. Drama.