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An Intercultural Approach to English Language Teaching

Ana Maria Reyes Suarez¹

Corbett, John (2022). *An Intercultural Approach to English Language Teaching*, Series: Languages for Intercultural Communication and Education: 36. 2nd edition. Multilingual Matters.

When John Corbett, twenty years ago, published the first edition of this book, the intellectual foundations of the field of intercultural language teaching were beginning to take shape. Its fundamental premise was how language works, how we make sense in language, and how things we want to express to each other take place within specific contexts. With the second edition, the author reveals how the field has developed and changed, in no small parts under its considerable influence. It takes the bold step of reflecting on its own methods and methodologies, recognizing that the classroom itself is a cultural context with its norms, values, and forms of identity. Hence, this is an updated edition which is addressed to teachers interested in developing intercultural communicative competence in language teaching.

The book comprises 12 chapters, offering a range of theoretical data in reference to intercultural communication. It is contextualized on the notions of previous books written by Byram et al., (1994); Byram and Fleming (eds) (1998); Corbett (2003); Belz and Thorne (eds) (2006); Anderson and Corbett (2013); Dasli and Díaz (eds) (2016); Holliday (2018); O'Dowd and Dooly (2020); Byram (2021) among others. In each of the chapters, there are some open-ended questions for reflection aimed mainly at teachers or students with experience in the subject.

The purpose of the first two chapters is to offer a review summary of the disciplines, such as Linguistics, Communication Studies, Anthropology and Literary, Media and Cultural Studies, as well as some sub-disciplines within them, such as Linguistic Anthropology, Ethnography and Sociolinguistics Disciplines. A well-structured definition of culture is offered by the author focusing on individuals' and groups' multiple identity-forming resources (e.g., a style of music, a brand of clothing or the concept of nationhood or good parenthood). Language teachers interested in the intercultural communicative approach may address some long-standing questions at the end of each of the sections for shaping practices in language education.

In terms of intercultural language education, this edition is concerned with explaining and discussing the principles behind Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) as it appears in the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) guidelines and the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (NCSSFLACTFL) 'can-do' statements. These are user-friendly statements on intercultural

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communication drawn upon the CEFR; they support teachers and learners in setting goals and monitoring progress through five levels: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior and Distinguished. Thus, it remains the teachers' responsibility to decide how to put them into practice selecting the adequate intercultural approach to ELT.

Corbett provides potential reasons for implementing the enculturation and acculturation approaches in language learning, and the development of their competences as cultural explorers and mediators. "Enculturation presupposes that the learner aspires to be absorbed wholly into the new language and culture, then acculturation refers to the process whereby learners seek to adapt to and function within another culture, while maintaining aspects of their own identity." (cf. Byram et al., 1994: 7).

Suggested tasks are offered to guide learners in the acquisition of the linguistic resources and skills necessary to participate in different conversational genres, as speaker and listener. The reflective components and the setting of ethnographic tasks are designed to prompt learners to attend to the cultural functions of interactional conversation about aspects of their own identity as well as other cultural identities.

The role of ethnography in intercultural language education from several perspectives is the focus of Chapters 6, 7 and 8. A detailed explanation of ethnography (originating in the anthropological study of cultures) and its applications is provided. The readers find out how to conduct interviews as part of small- and larger-scale ethnographic research and how to analyze them from a cultural perspective. They can also be enhanced on 'virtual ethnography' by means of guidelines and suggestions clearly exposed in Chapter 8.

The visual representations of cultural information and how to 'read' them are also considered. Corbett suggests that "Such visual materials can be supplemented by other phenomena from different cultures – media texts, literary texts and certain 'ways of behaving' that are characteristic of particular groups." (p. 202) Visual literacy is considered as a rich resource for developing the intercultural skills of interpreting and relating. The application of strategies and insights from the disciplines of literary, media and cultural studies is centered on a set of related subjects in the intercultural classroom. According to Corbett, it is one of the most suitable means of developing critical cultural awareness in intercultural language education.

The last chapter focuses on a review of key points touched upon in this second edition of the book. It situates the intercultural approach to ELT in the context of language and intercultural communication and presents a promising vision for the future development of intercultural language education. It closes with an interesting reflection on how "It has become commonly accepted that the process of language teaching and learning should be allied to a broader inquiry into our understanding of ourselves and others, and of the world at large." (p. 273)

In sum, this second edition provides a range of possible models of ICC to teachers who decide to adopt an intercultural approach to English Language Teaching (ELT). It offers a checklist of questions aimed at supporting the work of teachers interested in developing visual literacy skills. John Corbett, throughout his book, demonstrates how the field of intercultural communication has developed and changed substantially, driven by its considerable influence.

References

Corbett, John (2022). *An intercultural approach to English language teaching*, Series: Languages for Intercultural Communication and Education: 36. (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters.