

## Bringing English Culture to Albanian Language: Biculturalism and its Magnetic Force of Catching Pupils' Attention



### Linguistics

**Keywords:** bilingualism, pupils' attention, management, biculturalism, outcomes.

Lenida Lekli

University "Aleksandër Xhuvani", Elbasan, Albania.

### Abstract

Foreign language classes are usually considered as the most relaxing and pleasing ones by pupils, not only in the 9th grade system but also in secondary schools. Bilingualism in our schools has always been a source of increasing pupils' attention versus new interesting facts of other countries. Observations have shown that in foreign language classes (English language in our case), due to a higher level of interest on the side of the pupils versus the new culture provided by the new language, educators have higher possibilities of achieving a better classroom management during the teaching process. How does an English language class attract pupils' attention? Why is Biculturalism more likely to reduce disruptive behaviors on the side of the pupils? Does an English language teacher have fewer troubles with classroom management? Up to what extent does Biculturalism, provided by second language acquisition, influence the well management of a classroom by the teacher? Certainly the ability of teachers to organize classrooms and manage the behavior of their pupils professionally is critical to achieve positive educational outcomes. Consequently, Biculturalism through foreign language teaching is as interesting aspect to be considered by teachers aiming to establish positive and motivating teaching environments for their pupils.

### Introduction

The spread of English globally as a Lingua franca has made second language teaching/second language acquisition more professional and elaborate not only in the Albanian educational system but even in other countries. The insertion of English language in the primary and secondary school programs dates before the 90s, but it was not as widespread as it is today. Since 1994 continuous modifications have been made to the national 9<sup>th</sup> grade and secondary school curricula, due to the necessity of the compilation of a well structured contemporary program, aiming to reach the standards of the Common European Framework. (Common European Framework, electronic version)

In the recent years there has been required the development of a new curricular model, oriented by the request and focused on the knowledge and skills of the pupils, based on the labour market needs. This implies the shift into a new innovative *curricula based on the pupils results*, replacing the existent one otherwise known as the *curricula based on the subjects*. (Strategjia Kombëtare e Arsimit 2004-2015, 2004, page 11,12) Therefore English language teaching structure has undoubtedly gone through these innovations. Nowadays English language classes occupy a considerable number of hours, as part of the compulsory classes to be attended by pupils. Albanian educational system promotes and highly encourages the acquisition of foreign languages, especially English language which has been given high priority in the recent years.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> grade system, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade - 7<sup>th</sup> grade English is taught 2 hours a week. In the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade English occupies 3 hours a week. Meanwhile in the secondary schools English language is taught 3 hours a week in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year; 4 hours a week in the last year. Besides the above mentioned innovations made to our educational system regarding English language teaching, what is to be stressed is the fact that these English language classes have often been considered as pleasing and stress free ones, not only for 9<sup>th</sup> grade pupils but even for secondary school students. Therefore *Bilingualism* and *Biculturalism* (Lazear, 1997) transmitted due to second language teaching (English language in this case) in our schools seems to have always been a source of increasing pupils' attention versus new interesting facts of other countries. Regarding the concept of biculturalism it is worth being mentioned since second language acquisition raises cultural awareness of both the native and culture society among students studying foreign languages, sometime even making comparisons between the two.

It is commonly accepted that language is part of culture, and it plays a very important role in it. Language simultaneously reflects culture, it is highly influenced and shaped by it. In the broadest sense it is also the symbolic representation of a people, since it comprises their historical and cultural backgrounds, their approach to life and their way of thinking. (Genc, Bada, 2005) Considered from a theoretical and practical point of view, these two are so intricately interwoven that one can not separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. In simpler terms language and culture are inseparable, in our case English culture and English language are closely connected together.

As educators of foreign language, sometimes we pay more attention to the morphological, syntactic and lexical aspect of language teaching leaving aside other essential cultural components. (Haloci, Delija, Tabaku, & Sula, 2008) However, the connection between the two (language and culture) has always been a matter of teachers and educators. If not consciously, cultural knowledge transmission seems to be a subconscious process which tends to encourage a *positive climate* (Marzano, 2003) in the class helping educators in achieving a well managed classroom environment.

How does Biculturalism in an English language class attract pupils' attention? Can it reduce disruptive behaviors on the side of the pupils? When discussing about classroom management, we are not likely to think of Bilingualism and Biculturalism as useful means of reducing pupils undesirable attitudes. Original English coursebooks nowadays in comparison to the previous school books contain plenty of texts and passages describing cultural elements of English or American native countries.

For example in "English 8" (Stefanllari, Hadaj, 1994) there is only one single text about the Skyscrapers of Manhattan included in unit 1 (page 13). The next 23 units include simple dialogues or stories not including any cultural elements which would grasp pupils' attention. The same thing is noticed even in the other English books which were used in the former 8<sup>th</sup> form educational system. This group of pupils 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade, characterized by its own growing age characteristics requires cultural elements to keep their attention focused.

Nowadays pupils have the chance to obtain plenty of cultural information due to the books used in schools. For example in "Access 1" (Evans, Dooley, 2007) pupils can get new information about educational system in England (page 13), holidays in UK (page 23), English speaking countries (page 25) etc. Moreover in "Blockbuster 3" (Dooley, Evans, 2005) there are cultural passages describing different cultural elements of English speaking countries as well as other nations, such as US vacations (page 16), the Royal botanic gardens (page 44), rules of behavior in UK (page 58) etc. Furthermore, all these course books consist of a separate section dedicated to culture known otherwise as *Culture Corner* and *Curricular Cuts*. When asked about their interest on cultural topics, pupils have claimed their approval of paying more attention on new cultural information rather than grammatical one. In a class of 33 pupils of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, 19 pupils claimed to show more interest in the lesson when analyzing cultural passages with their educators. Even if they did not have a high level of English language, they felt free to express their opinions on the cultural topics discussed during the lesson. Whereas the rest preferred more grammatical exercises since their language deficiency of oral communication seemed to retrieve them from paying attention to the lesson and express freely.

As Kitao (2000) mentions "studying culture gives students a reason to study the target language as well as rendering the study of the foreign language meaningful," he tries to point out and emphasize the benefits in studying foreign language culture. According to Prof. Vilma Tafani "the cultural factor" (2003) often serves as a good means of achieving high motivation on the side of the pupils. Enhancing pupils' motivation would result in a higher concentration which would subsequently be followed by a better managed classroom by the teachers.

When discussing about biculturalism in foreign language teaching as a magnetic force of catching and maintaining pupils' attention, another element to be highly considered is the inclusion of *students with developmental disabilities and learning disabilities*. (Doelling, Bryde, Brunner, Martin, 2002; Lyon, 2002)

It appears that many educators in both the elementary and secondary educational system seem to be experiencing difficulty regarding the concept of inclusion. In the teaching context, the term "inclusion" refers to the encouragement of pupils towards an active participation during the lesson. Pupils with developmental disabilities, considered from a psychological point of view are more likely to be positively included in the foreign language teaching process when taught *cultural* elements. In every class there is at least one pupil suffering developmental disability who needs to be integrated in the class equally as the other peers. In such case, biculturalism might not guarantee 100% mental inclusion of this exceptional group, but at least it will make them be good listeners during the 45 minutes.

Today's elementary school teachers and secondary school educators are facing a growing number of pupils who have a wide range of different learning disabilities. We need to be careful not to confuse developmental disabilities with learning disabilities. Developmental disabilities are severe long-term problems, physical or mental, mainly innate in people (Retrieved from: *Developmental Disabilities*, [www.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.nlm.nih.gov)).

Meanwhile learning disabilities are neurological differences in processing information that severely limit a person's ability to learn (Retrieved from: *What Are Learning Disabilities?* <http://learningdisabilities.about.com>)

These people are characterized by differences in the way the brain processes, comprehends and uses information. As educators we are well aware of the fact that 35 pupils in the class (an average number of pupils per class), not all of them do learn in the same way. Observations have shown that besides their level of perception, when introduced cultural topics for discussion of the target foreign language, cultural articles etc. all pupils seem to be actively involved during the lesson. Therefore the insertion of cultural components encourages the inclusion of these two special groups of pupils (pupils with developmental disabilities and learning disabilities). Increasing motivation of these categories of pupils, by using culture as a magnetic powerful force, implies reducing the chances of displaying disruptive behaviors on the side of the pupils. This would undoubtedly lead to the well managed process of a diverse classroom environment.

## Conclusion

The topic of this paper suggests the consideration of biculturalism in foreign language teaching (English language in our case) as a beneficial means of increasing pupils' interest during the lesson. Raising pupils' awareness of the foreign language culture changes their attitudes positively, resulting in a higher concentration on their side. Using culture as a magnetic force of

increasing their motivation implies a better managed classroom by the teachers reducing up to a considerable extend undesirable behaviors of theirs. Biculturalism in the context of foreign language teaching can also be viewed as a means of increasing positive inclusion of two exceptional groups of pupils, those with developmental disabilities and those with learning disabilities. Finally, broadened inclusion of pupils in the teaching process would help educators achieve a well managed classroom environment.

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