

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE OVERRULES AN INTERCULTURAL WORLD: TEACHERS' ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS' WRITING PERFORMANCES

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ABSTRACT

In the bygone years, learners' efficiency and mastery of languages have been solely related to the acquisition of a set of grammatical and spelling rules. As such, linguistic competency qualified learners to be better citizens who could communicate in a fluent correct way in any language they had been taught. Nevertheless, the ideal façade of linguistic competence's faultless orthodoxy had been splintered once for good, as scholars came to the point that the world has never been a set of homogenous linguistic communities. By contrast, the world has been redefined in relation to diversified perspectives and heterogeneous cultures. Consequently, talking about leaning a language with no reference to cultural learning would be a misleading issue, if not a blasphemy in relation to the sacrosanct reputation of effective education. Despite the fact that drawing the line of demarcation between linguistic efficiency on the one hand, and intercultural competency on the other is translucently identified, instruction in third-world countries, and Algeria in particular, prioritizes language mastery, as teachers though they foment learners' acquisition of intercultural skills, dodge the assessment of learners' intercultural leaning in relation their writing performances .

Keywords: Assessment, Instruments of Assessment, Cultural Shortcomings, Negative Attitudes, Value Judgments.

INTRODUCTION

Beyond the shadow of a doubt, a successful intercultural learning obligates teachers' as well as learners' cognizance of the significance of teaching and learning about other cultures in EFL¹ milieus and online platforms². This awareness is likely to reconcile asymmetrical cultural perceptions and upbringings. Unlike the bygone years where the necessity of implementing culture along language learning was a theoretical endeavour, the contemporary era is preoccupied by assessing the outcomes of the integration of culture within the debated field. But, are we really, as teachers of English versed in the business of assessing learners' intercultural competence, or do we only pretend to do so?

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

Undoubtedly, the reasons behind implementing culture within language teaching and learning milieus are multifarious and miscellaneous. Howbeit, some of them are more paramount than others. These incentives include the reciprocity that gels both language and culture together, and the aims of language education that targets learners' development of communicative competence. To begin with, the affiliation between language and culture has become a boring platitude tackled within every discussion in relation to language learning. However, what

¹ EFL stands for English as Foreign language.

² In this study the scope of learning about other cultures is not bound to language classes only, but it embodies online learning too .

needs emphasis are the implications of the mutual influence of both constructs on both teachers and learners. It is worth mentioning that language has never been an “*an autonomous construct*”, insightfully contended Fairclough (1989). Per contra, language is affiliated with social institutions, and hence constructs social order and is constructed by these forms of societies. Fairclough (ibid.) argues that “*language is not an ‘autonomous construct’ (Fairclough, ibid.) but social practice both creating and created by ‘the structures and forces of [the] social institutions within which we live and function’*”. Duranti (1997: 28-29) clarifies the reciprocity that gels both cultural knowledge and individuals’ activities as she commented:

To be part of a culture means to share the propositional knowledge and the rules of inference necessary to understand whether certain propositions are true (given certain premises). To the propositional knowledge, one might add the procedural knowledge to carry out tasks such as cooking, weaving, farming, fishing, giving a formal speech, etc (Duranti, 1997: 28-29).

Buttjes (1990:55) has identified the reciprocity between language and culture in the following connections:

- ✓ Language acquisition does not follow a universal sequence, but differs across cultures;
- ✓ the process of becoming a competent member of society is realized through exchanges of language in particular social situations;
- ✓ every society orchestrates the ways in which children participate in particular situations, and this, in turn, affects the form, the function, and the content of children's utterances;
- ✓ caregivers' primary concern is not with grammatical input, but with the transmission of socio-cultural knowledge;
- ✓ the native learner, in addition to language, acquires also the paralinguistic patterns and the kinesics³ of his or her culture.

QUANDARIES OF INTERCULTURAL INSTRUCTION

Language learning is believed to be arduous and demanding, since it requires both teachers’ competence and learners’ motivation to learn. This process may be obstructed by manifold obstacles that can be rooted in linguistic deficiencies and cultural ones. As to the former, learners who lack the linguistic necessary backgrounds are prone not do well in their linguistic activities. The latter designates the stereotypical interlude that demarcates between learners’ culture and the target one. This implies that leaning about other cultures is one of the most difficult processes that, if not given due attention and significance, would hinder the whole language learning process.

Burtona, S. (2010:98) maintains that we are over the argument whether or not we should implement culture in language classes. She adds that the eminence of culture in relation to learning milieus is recognized by everyone, yet taken for granted. Accordingly, “*there are not many objections, but there are numerous complications*”. In addition to this, other predicaments emanate from the very nature of the concept culture that, until now, challenges

³ kinesics is the study of body movements, gestures, facial expressions, etc., as a means of communication (Dictionary.com)

researchers and studies. Within this vista, the teachers are exposed to an intricate dilemma, as they have to decide which culture they should implement in their classes, and which they should sidestep. This predicament is more stressed, since language teaching and culture teaching, though interrelate, are different. Undoubtedly, in culture classes, much concern should be given to the learners' cultures. Burtona, S. (ibid.) adds that the teachers are exposed to the labyrinthine concept of culture, since they are unable to detect which aspects are representative of certain cultures and which are not. According to her, the obdurate nature of culture "*is likely to steal valuable time from more bona fide language learning*" (ibid).

Another issue of relevance in relation to teaching about other cultures is grounded on the lack of practice outside the classroom settings. Burtona, S. (ibid.) alludes to a very significant knot in relation to culture learning that most of the teachers, if not all, are unaware of. He claims that the target culture and the native one represent two opposing information processes and use. Ergo, the learners are prone to call upon the target culture while they read texts or listen to speeches delivered in the target culture. In such a case, the target culture, and the whole process of learning about it would be constrained to an "input use". Per contra, when it comes to learners' cultures, they are likely to use their background knowledge as platforms for communication outside the learning setting. In this way, their own culture is processed in relation to output activities, especially communicative processes. Within this prospect, the learning process would be a mono-cultural process that would, undeniably, be carried on at the expense of learners' readiness to become intercultural citizens.

PREDICAMENTS OF INTERCULTURAL ASSESSMENT

Dervin, F. (n.d.) believes that intercultural competence has become a doxic concept that is , oftentimes, taken for granted. However, as it comes to practical grounds, namely in education, it does not receive due interest. Inconvertibly, much has been said about it, yet few attempts had been launched to test its efficaciousness in real contexts. Dervin, F.(ibid.) argues that "*in research it remains relatively fragmented, with little crosscutting discussion about methodology*". Teachers are inclined to present some cultural information that may contribute to the development of an intercultural competence, but the methodologies and the strategies that are likely to enhance the process of instruction and evaluation of the debated competence are not accentuated.

Assessment as a process does not only trigger off educational connotations. Per contra, this process is used in divergent fields of life and study. Le Goff (1999) shares this view as he states that today's world is engraved in soft barbarity" of assessment. The process of assessment is knotty "*because one cannot but assess as "learners tend not to pay attention to what is not assessed and therefore demand that good assessment tools be developed"*" (Sercu, 2004: 74, cited in Dervin, F. n.d.). The difficulty of assessment relates to the subject to be assessed. Unlike the other subjects that are easy to observe, like the mastery of grammar rules, cultures escape such an easiness of observation. Therefore, many scholars like Byram 1997; Kramsch 1993; Zarate and Gohard 2004, cited in ibid.) have accentuated the perplexing nature of such kind of assessment. The difficulties of assessing intercultural competence also emanate from the predicaments that assessors find to achieve reliability, validity, fairness and consistency for interculturality (Tagliante, 1994).

Not only is the process of teaching about other cultures difficult, but the phase of evaluation of learners' intercultural learning, too, is even knottier than the antecedent process. Undoubtedly, the reasons that nurture such quandaries spring from divergent sources,

including the perplexing and unfathomable understandings of the very nature of intercultural competence that, according to different scholars, denotes divergent understandings. The same thing is applicable to divergent fields of study where the concepts of cultural competence, global competence, and multicultural competence pour in the stream of intercultural competence. In the same line of thought, Fantini, A. E. (2005) argues that these conceptual ambiguities encompass the review of the literature in relation to the intercultural competence and the tools that are used in its assessment. In one view, “competence” is abstract and cannot be witnessed directly; consequently, it must be inferred by observing how one performs. Hence, competence and performance are interrelated – one being abstract and the other observable. In this view, then, one infers competence by observing and monitoring performance, rather than by talking about it only in abstraction (Fantini, A.E. *ibid.*).

Actually, the assessment of the traits of intercultural competence is tangled, but rewarding, since it provides feedback to both teachers and learners as far as the intercultural learning process is concerned. Likewise, it informs teachers about the nature and level of their learners’ intercultural performance. It is important to note that in intercultural evaluation, the focus is not on how much cultural information has been obtained by the learners during a course, but on how intercultural performance has been employed by those learners in the debated process (Skopinskaja, L. 2009). Rubben (1989: 235) has identified many shortcomings that any assessor is likely to come across when doing an evaluation of the competence in question. Diaries are among the tools that can be used to measure the progress the learners achieve along their life experiences and classroom learning. However, in reflecting about their experiences in their diaries, learners tend to be careful and less authentic. Intercultural learning, however, is prone to be developed in natural ways, what Rubben (*ibid.*) calls “*vagabond learning*” that encompasses some of the cultural features that some learners prefer to veil. By the same token, the assessment of learners’ diaries is obstructed by means of problems of validity, interpretation and objectivity. In the process of observing learners’ attitudes and behaviour towards other cultures, the assessor is hindered by various shortcomings, including subjectivity that can be enhanced by means of the fatigue, feelings and representations (Gillespie and Cornish 2009, cited in Dervin, F. n.d.). Ergo, the process of observing intercultural behaviour is a kind of knowledge construction that, undoubtedly, leaves room for subjectivity (Bensa 2008).

The assessment of intercultural learning is intricate and arduous, and hence obligates the intervention of multifarious strategies and techniques. However, this process of evaluation needs to be preceded by a clear-cut understanding of intercultural competence that, according to Deardorff, D. K., would determine the nature of the tools to be used along the evaluation process and the intercultural aspects that need to be stressed. Pottinger (1979) stresses that “*how one defines the domain of competence will greatly affect one’s choice of measurement procedures*” (p. 30). Assessment may focus on some aspects of intercultural learning such as understanding others’ perspectives, which by means of being the focal point of the evaluation process, occupies the central goal of the assessment phase. As assessors accentuate particular goals and aspects of intercultural learning by means of involving other learners in searching for valid ways to enhance the targeted aspect, they may enhance a global objective that subsidizes the whole process of intercultural learning.

Hall, M. and Teeling, S. (2012) postulate that the process of assessment and training should be employed to develop learners’ intercultural competence. However, despite the elemental nature of assessment of intercultural competence, some lists of assessment tools are provided without practical guidelines as to which contexts suit particular tools. Fantini, 2009;

Deardorff, 2009c; Paige, 2004 (cited in Hall, M. and Teeling, S. (2012). Hall, M. and Teeling, S. (2012) articulate that Deardorff outlines many ways of assessing intercultural competence; however, her models offer broad guidelines about how to evaluate the process in question, and do not delimit the oceanic nature of intercultural assessment. The same scholars have pointed to the fact that some models of intercultural assessment had been useful, since they hinge on critical thinking skills. Within this category, one finds Byram's (1997) model of portfolios, a tool that allows room for learners' critical self-reflection (Byram, 1997; Lundgren, 2009).

Hall, M. and Teeling, S. (2012) argue that the tools that scholars have suggested are grounded on commercial and economic platforms. This makes the application of such tools to other settings unbecoming. Moreover, such tools target the evaluation of something abstract and illusive. In connection with this, Lundgren (2009) inspects the potential of quantifying the attainment of intercultural competence. The perplexing nature of intercultural assessment is stressed by Byram (1997:108), who claimed that competences “*require a shift of perspective, not a movement along a scale*”. Vijver and Leung (2009: 413) share the same view as they maintain that “*most often the assessment instruments that are used in intercultural competence research are based on self-reports, which have well-documented limitations*”. Trompenaars and Woolliams (2009) subsidize the inefficiency of some assessment tools that are not grounded on solid platforms, and that each tool seems to have its own parameters and rules, which in most cases does not suit some pertinent cultural aspects. Trompenaars and Woolliams (ibid.) stress a very crucial point in relation to the making of assessment tools, pointing that most of these tools have Western origins, and therefore their adequacy in non-western contexts is debatable.

Since the process of identifying the main aspects of the intercultural competence is cardinal in relation to evaluation processes, teachers should take the necessary time to determine the most salient intercultural traits. More importantly, all the individuals who partake in this process should be taken into account. Deardorff, D. K. (n.d.) comments: “*The process itself often involves dialogue and discussion with key stakeholders, including students, to determine which specific elements of intercultural competence should be the focus of programmatic efforts and assessment endeavors*”. She adds that:

It is important that prioritization not be a one-time discussion but rather an ongoing process since priorities may change from program to program, from course to course, or from year to year. Generally, it is advisable to choose two or three specific aspects to assess at a given time, to control the amount of time, effort, and resources needed in the assessment efforts.

Due to the perplexing nature of intercultural competence, assessors are asked to use divergent methods and perspectives of assessment. Deardorff, D. K. (n.d.) argues that the use of pen-and-paper test had been chastised at different planes, since such a tool does not account for the most salient aspects of intercultural competence. The latter is believed to be influenced by the setting, the individual, and hence goes beyond the capacity of mere papers. These tools are not as informative as one may think, since the learners are the ones who judge the intercultural learning process. This subjectivity can be overcome when another person does the evaluative process, determining the appropriateness of learners' behaviours and attitudes. Other complexities that the assessment of intercultural competence generates emanate from other sources, including the perspective to adopt, the standards to follow, the persons who do the evaluation, and the degree that determines the development of an intercultural

competence. In connection with this, Deardorff , D. K (n.d.) maintains that.... “*given the complexity of this concept, it would be challenging—if not impossible—for one tool to measure an individual’s intercultural competence*”. In addition to the aforementioned cardinal elements of intercultural assessment, the assessor should be cognizant of the fact that the goals of intercultural learning should be meet the needs of the learners. Therefore, some goals would be befitting in a given course while others are useless. In relation to this process, teachers should plan the outcomes that they want to achieve, then design the assessment package, including various tools of evaluation.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this paper is to shed some light on how teachers deal with learners’ stereotypes, prejudices, and attitudes. It also reconnoiters the possibility of any mach between learners’ online journeys and classroom evaluation. Learners’ exam- copies have been selected to investigate the above-mentioned target. Our sample consists of first year learners’ exam-copies of the subject of “History of Cultural Ideas”, second year learners’ exam -papers of the subject of ‘British literature’, and third year learners’ exam -copies of the subject of ‘British literature ‘.There has been no random selection of subjects. The subject of the History of Cultural Ideas has been selected, since it includes some topics which may show students’ attitudes toward some aspects of the target culture (s). Literature has been chosen for the second and third years since culture is not taught as a single subject at these two levels, but rather retrieved through the study of the literary production of English-speaking countries like Britain. 115 copies have been selected (the three years). Exam- paper sampling intentionally included those with different marking (weak, average, good) to cover various categories of learners.

The Study Sample

Number of Exam-Copies	Bad Marks	Average Marks	Good Marks	Very Good Marks
115	30	60	20	05

Table 1: Description of Learners’ Exam –Copies

While analyzing learners’ exam-copies, we came across some symbols teachers use when correcting learners’ mistakes and other linguistic shortcomings:




Symbols	Meaning (s)
	It stands for spelling mistakes and grammatical ones.
	It stands for syntactic mistakes
?	It stands for ambiguity of meaning
	The red underlining was added for the sake of the study to highlight the cultural shortcomings.

Table 2: Teachers’ Symbols Used in the Evaluation of Learners’ Exam-copies

RESULTS**First Year learners' Views About the Other**

In the subject of the “History of Cultural Ideas”, first year learners deal with various topics. Among these topics is “Christianity”. The latter was among the issues discussed in the first term exam⁴. The lecture that teachers give to the learners in relation to Christianity covers the role this monotheist religion played during the Middle Ages. Ergo, the learners are supposed to objectively treat the issue. The learners had been asked to discuss the changes that Christianity brought to the social life during the medieval era. Admittedly, this question had provoked the attitudes of the learners, as some of them deviated from the main scope of the question. 50 exam copies had been taken to assess first year learners' intercultural competence. The cultural shortcomings had been identified in 26 copies, and grouped in terms of specific criteria pointed at earlier. For the impossibility of presenting all the shortcomings, some of them had been selected. In addition to this, some shortcomings were similar in their meanings; therefore there was no need to repeat them.

First year learners of English have expressed various types of ethnocentric attitudes, including value-judgments, cultural shortcomings and negative attitudes towards some aspects of the target culture. Value-judgments indicate learners' lack of intercultural awareness that induces ethnocentrism, usually expressed through the use of expression like ‘good’, ‘better than’, ‘the best’ ‘bad’, ‘worse than’, and ‘the worst’. Here are some examples that illustrate learners' value-judgments:

The particular role played by (Christianity) is the important and necessary role in the second monotheist religion during the Middle Ages. It means Christianity was very developed in this moment and the best religion.

Figure 1: First Year Learners' Value-judgments

Another learner postulates:

People of middle ages are very naive because they believe at every thing and the particular role is believe in their religion Christianity and respect it. And the religion is judaism. It is not interesting during the middle ages.

Figure 2: First Year Learners' Value- judgments

⁴ Discuss the role of Christianity during the Middle Ages.

In (figure 1), the learner value-judges Christianity as being the 'Best religion'. The second learner (figure.2) sees Judaism as being 'not interesting'. These value-judgments are overlooked by the teacher; the emphasis is on linguistic deficiencies. Other cultural gaps are identified in relation a misuse of cultural concepts. Cultural shortcomings are made due to a lack in learners' cultural knowledge. They are usually expressed by mixing culture-specific words. This is clear in the following paragraph:

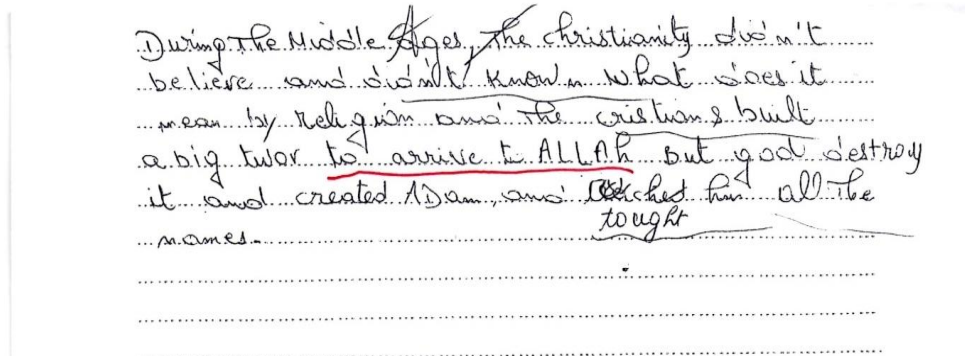


Figure 3. : Learners' Cultural shortcomings

The learner uses concepts from their own culture (religion) to talk about some aspects of the target culture. In Christianity, one should speak of God and not of Allah, a term used in Islam. Here, the cultural shortcoming⁹ made by this learner is sidestepped by the teacher; the focus is on other mistakes.

Negative attitudes are developed due to stereotypes, prejudices and ethnocentrism. Learners with negative attitudes are less successful in intercultural communication. Here, this learner, though implicitly, suggests that Christianity is not as important as their religion. This is clear when stating: 'so Christianity was and still untill now the second famous religion in the world.' They may espouse the idea of their religion (Islam) being 'the first famous religion in the world.' (though, statistically, Christianity is the first religion in the world). The following paragraph illustrates this idea best:

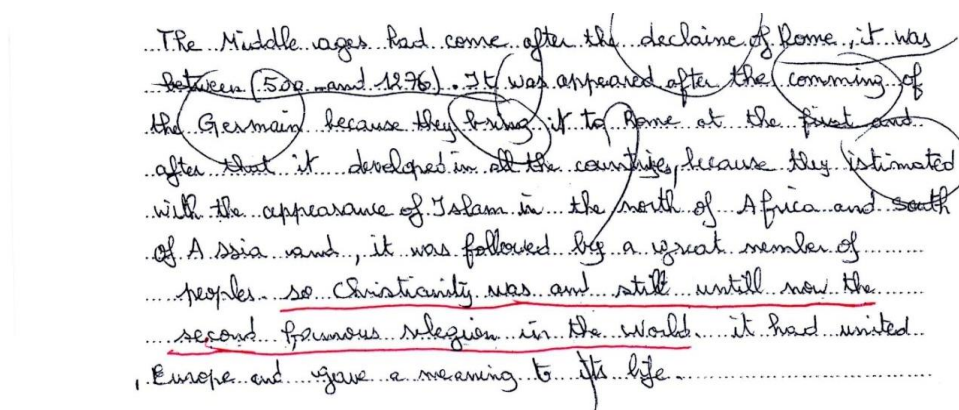


Figure 4: First Year Learners' Negative Attitudes

Another learner states:

The first people were succeeded by the rise of Christianity, the new holy book, the people were leaving in paganism without believe in god. Jesus was a Jew, that it divided into two Christianity, eastern and western. The period the people believed in one Christianity. The religion were respected the rule of Christianity. In the aspects they use them like phylidians and slaves when they were patients, they taught to them spelling persons because the ordinary people were naive they were ignorant and the religion considers them selves as mediators between the people and their god (Pope) they were more intelligent because they were educated and translated the word into the old testament and new testament when the people became less ignorant and the decline the bible and Turat but the successful book is the part of Quran, and they understand

Figure 5: First Year Learners' Negative Attitudes

Here, the learner shows their attitudes towards Judaism as being incorrect and Islam as being the 'successful religion. Attitudes towards the target culture (s) are not emphasized when exam-copies are corrected. This suggests that assessment at the level of the first year is focused on correcting learners' spelling, grammatical, and syntactic mistakes. In other words, the linguistic competence is emphasized. First year students' cultural mistakes, value-judgments and attitudes towards the target cultures are ignored, which means that assessment of learners' intercultural competence is not a pertinent criterion of teachers' evaluation.

Second Year learners' Views About the Other

Second year learners of English had been asked to discuss some themes in relation to the British novel "Pride and Prejudice". 40 exam-copies⁵ had been chosen for the sake of analyzing learners' views about some aspects of the target culture displayed in the literary work. While studying second year corpus, 8 cases of cultural shortcomings had been identified. Here are some examples

Woman in the 19th century society regarded as non active member. they were servants of men. At that time, women had no rights. So they had to disguised into men to obtained minimal rights. many movements was appeared to react against against differences between men and women. in her novel pride and prejudice, Jane Austin defended women's rights, what is contradictory is that we are in the 21st century and we have no rights as women. we must be in the 19th century.

Figure 6: Second Year Learners' Attitudes

⁵ The exam -question: "Early 19th century society was based on appearances and disguises. Discuss this statement referring to the novel of 'Pride and Prejudice.'" Here, second year LMD learners were supposed to deal with the literary movement which covered the 19th century (Feminism). In her novel 'Pride and Prejudice', Jane Austin depicts the different aspects of abuses women had to endure at that period.

Some learners expressed their disagreement with the idea of 'equality between men and women'. Others believe they are not given their rights as women. The learner here has made a lot of mistakes. These mistakes, which are identified by the teacher, are mainly grammatical such as 'regarded instead of was regarded', 'to obtained instead of to obtain', etc. In parallel, the student expresses opposing attitudes¹² when saying: '...what is contradictory is that we are in the 21st century and we have no rights as women. We must be in the 19th century.' These attitudes which are so important when it comes to learners' intercultural competence are eschewed by the teacher.

Another learner denounces the way women were treated during the 19th century. They state:

Elizabeth was a writer, used a man of a guy which is (Jane Austen) in order to published her books because at her period the woman hadn't the right to write and publish so in period of prejudice, Mr. Bennet was bad and Mrs. Bennet was clever and she was eager to marry one of her daughters to her husband. But, I think that she should not do that because she should not force our daughters to marry someone that they do not like.

Figure 7: Second Year Learners' Attitudes

Other learners disagree with the idea of equal share for both men and women (in terms of rights). This is vivid in the following paragraph:

In the early of nineteen century, this movement is a belief in the principle that woman should have the same right and opportunities as men. Jane Austen was one of the feminist novelist who said that woman were also individual part of the society, and for Austen, history was traditionally written by men and male point view. But in a indication of the right of woman. Any way, women can not be given the same rights as men as we take the double part and they take one part.

Figure 8. Learners' Attitudes

Reading the above paragraph, one can identify many spelling mistakes made by the learner. Examples of such mistakes are: centry instead of century, novelist instead of novelists, woman instead of women, etc. Once again, the learner concludes their paragraph by expressing their opposition to equality between the two sexes. These attitudes are not identified by teachers.

Another learner censures the position of women within their society. They state:

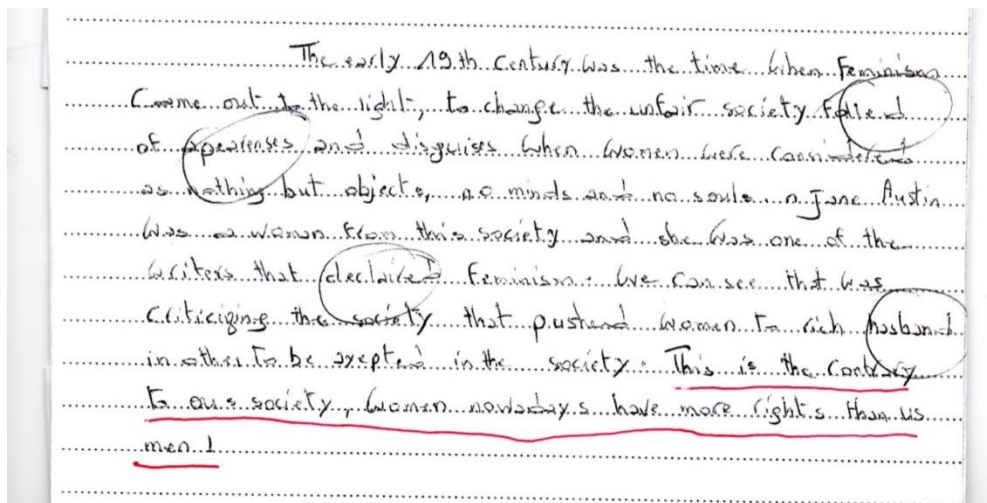


Figure 9. Second Year Students' Attitudes

A lot of spelling mistakes have been made by this learner. Likewise, other non-linguistic shortcomings, like negative attitudes, have been made too; however, they are not highlighted. At the level of the second year, emphasis is put on spelling and grammatical mistakes, which fall under the headings of learners' linguistic competence. However, learners' attitudes that constitute an essential part of learners' intercultural competence are bypassed.

Third Year learners' Views About the Other:

When analyzing third year learners' exam -copies⁶ we found that some of these learners (03 students) express their points of view, which are in most cases expressed by means of opposing the ideas that the novella describes. Here are some examples:

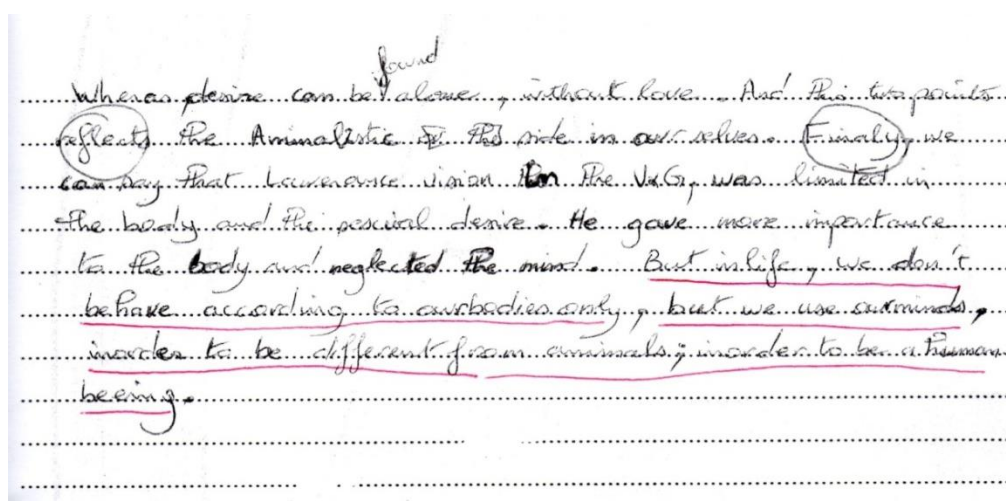


Figure 10: Third Year Students' Attitudes

According to this learner, one should be guided by their mind in any relationship they involve themselves in. This would make human beings reasonable creatures.

⁶ Exam -Question "Discuss DH Lawrence's view of man- woman relationship".

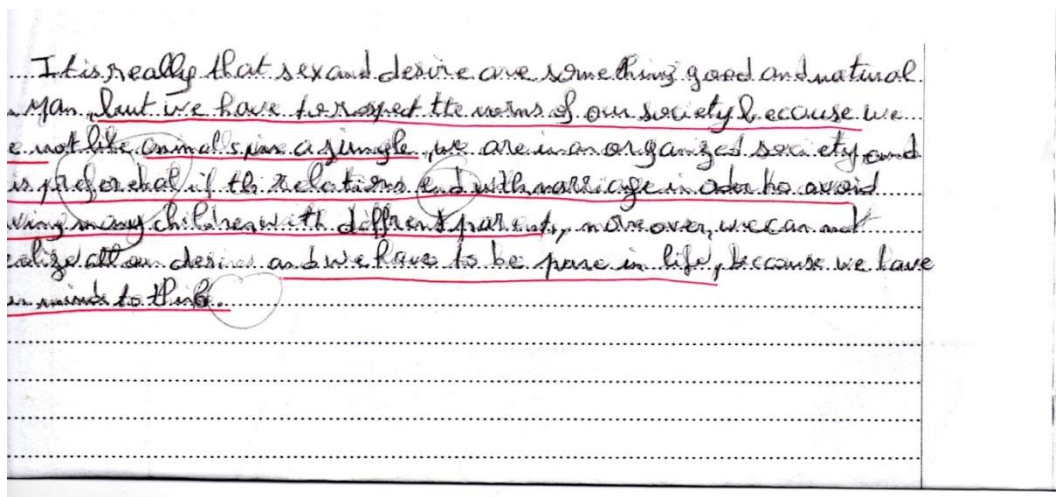


Figure 11 : Third Year Learners' Attitudes

Here, this learner believes that one should not disrespect the norms set out by the society. According to them, one should be guided by their mind. This learner's attachment to their culture seems vivid when they state that relationships between a man and a woman should end with marriage. These negative attitudes portray an intercultural competence incongruence, in the sense that the learner applies their cultural codes to a foreign society, which has its own. Clearly, the learner is not asked to judge the society in question, but rather to see how the writer views his society's cultural codes in relation to woman-man relations and whether he vindicates or denounces them. Despite the occurrence of these cultural shortcomings, they are overlooked in the phase of evaluation.

DISCUSSION

	1 st Year learners	2 nd Year Learners	3 rd Year Learners
Value-judgments	05	0	0
Cultural shortcomings	13	0	0
Negative attitudes	09	08	03
Total	27	08	03

Table 3 : Learners' Cultural Shortcomings

The above table showcases the cultural shortcomings found in learners' exam copies. First year learners are likely to value-judge some aspects of the target culture (05 cases). In the exam -copies of second year learners, no case of value-judgment had been identified. Mixing culture-specific terms is a common feature spotted in first year exam- copies (13 cases). These shortcomings are absent in the second and third years. First year learners develop negative attitudes towards some aspects of the target culture (09 cases). These attitudes are

also found in the second year learners' copies (**08 cases**). Only (**03 case**) had been identified in the third year exam- copies.

The above analysis suggests that cultural shortcomings are reduced as students pass from one level to another. The findings gathered from the analyses of learners' exam -copies have shown that the learners are prone to partake in the clash of the self and the Other. A clash that is nurtured within traditions, social norms and beliefs. More important than this, this stereotypical rapport is enhanced in virtual platforms, as the some cultures are empowered while others are chastised and discriminated. Admittedly, writing performances constitute a fertile ground for learners to express their attitudes and beliefs in relation to the self and the Other. Here, the duty of the teacher as an intercultural mediator is elemental as to lubricating the two extremes. Unfortunately, what takes place in the educational scene is not that promising. Though, the assessment of learners' cultural shortcomings is vital, most of the teachers take it for granted, as spelling, syntactic and grammatical mistakes are emphasized during the phase of correction (assessment). These mistakes fall within learners' linguistic competence. However, learners' cultural mistakes and negative attitudes are not identified. Thus, intercultural competence is disregarded during evaluation. De-emphasizing learners' intercultural competence during the correction of exam- copies may be due to the following potential reasons:

- Learners make lot of linguistic mistakes which shift teacher's attention to their correction;
- The number of students is huge, and therefore, teachers cannot pay attention to every single mistake made by every learner;
- Teachers may be limited by time;
- The main focus of teaching English in the Department of English is learners' linguistic competence;
- Difficulties in finding an appropriate model to refer to in order to assess learners' intercultural competence;
- Teachers are not trained to teach and assess culture leaning;
- Cultural learning is vague, since it includes classroom learning, online learning, and other sources of knowledge retrieval, and hence it is intricate and demanding.

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