Context and Culture in Language Teaching

语言教学的环境与文化

Claire Kramsch

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出 版 前 言

本书是讨论语言教学与环境和文化关系问题的学术专著，作者 C·克拉姆契是美国加利福尼亚大学德语和外语习得教授，曾多年在美国教授德语，并从事德语教师的培训工作。本书由 H·G·威多森教授担任应用语言学顾问。

本书从语言教学的理论和实践两个方面探讨了语言教学的环境和文化问题。在理论方面，作者阐述了环境和文化对语言教学所起的重要作用；在教学实践方面，作者评析了互为极端的教学法，提出了兼顾两极、全面施教的观点。

在对环境和文化的重要性的阐述中，作者认为：掌握一种语言并不仅限于学习语言本身，在语言学习中，目标语的文化知识不但是培养交际能力的重要方面，而且其本身也是教育的要求之一。作者指出，传统语言教学思想认为一种语言是可以被翻译成另一种语言的，于是在此基础上在全世界促成了外语教学中功能法和语用法的建立和运用，可是这些教学法在传授文化方面遇到了困难，因为各种文化之间是互有差异的，人们在相互接触时可能由于文化不同而产生冲突。作者强调指出，语言教学中的文化并不是除了听、说、读、写技巧以外可有可无的第五种技巧。文化因素始终存在于外语学习的背后，即使优秀的语言学习者的交际能力也可能因文化原因而受到限制，他们对周围世界的理解也可能因此而产生障碍。这种语言学习与文化障碍之间的冲撞就是作者讨论问题的出发点。

作者对传统的外语教学观提出了挑战，明确提出语言学习应以特定含义、环境差别和学习者的个体差异为核心，以实现"跨文化交际"为目的。作者对较为流行的教学理论进行了评析，特别指出了语言教学法呈现的两极现象：随着不同教学理论和教学法的兴衰以及社会、政治环境的变化，语言教学呈现

出在两极之间摆动的趋势,比如在侧重于语法还是侧重于功能的课程设置、以教师为中心或以学生为中心的课堂教学等两极间摆动。

作者对某些对立面加以评述,指出在两极间的摇摆阻碍了语言教学,因此,必须以更广阔的社会与政治环境为着眼点,实施均衡与全面的教学法。

作者对产生这种对立的根源进行了剖析,提出应重新界定外语教学的范围,指出呈两极化的教学法实际上反映了语言与特定环境中的言语这一久已存在语言的两重性,表达个人意义的语言与反映社会文化环境的语言的两重性。作者得出的结论是,既然语言教师既要教规范的语言,又要教不同情况下的语言使用方式,因此必须兼顾语言的个体性和社会性,需要设计一种以语境为核心的教学法。如果外语学习的目的是培育跨文化意识和实现自我价值,那么语言教学法需要解决以下几个问题:文化环境的含义是什么? 话语实践能否像教语法规则那样进行传授? 在培养第二语言能力方面文学起什么样的作用? 学习者如何通过语言实现对外国文化的内在和外在的理解?

此外,作者论及了语言教师素质的多层次概念:语言教师除了教语言以外也应是外国文化的介绍者和教育改革的促进者。

本书的使用对象为语言教师和学生。作者的目的是帮助教师对其职业进行思考,从而将语言教学置于更为广阔的社会和教育环境中;帮助学习者不仅熟练掌握语言技巧,而且成为新型的跨文化交际的人才。

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For Olivier and Christophe

Acknowledgements

Preface

This book has grown over many years of teaching foreign languages and training language teachers in the United States and abroad. Its different layers of understanding of what it means to be a language teacher, mediator of a foreign culture, and catalyst of educational change, are the product of many conversations I have had over the years with colleagues, students, friends, and family; they were also inspired by the many multilingual and multicultural people I have come to know and who, like me, live with two or more languages and cultures. To all those who have made this adventure worthwhile and who have clarified my thinking I am deeply indebted.

The idea of this book matured at MIT while I was teaching German to undergraduate students. Chapter 1 captures the questioning that went on during these years, as I attempted to make sense of the sometimes brilliant and quixotic ways MIT students learn foreign languages. The book started to take shape at Cornell University, where I visited in 1989. Chapters 2 and 3 grew out of an 'Introduction to Applied Linguistics' course I gave there and a 1990 TESOL Summer Institute course I gave at Michigan State University on 'Language Teaching as Social Interaction'. Chapters 4 and 5 are a direct outgrowth of the course 'Literature in Language Teaching' that I gave at Cornell and at the 1989 LSA/MLA Summer Institute at the University of Arizona with Yvonne Ozzello. I wish to thank those who invited me to give these courses, and those who thought through the ideas with me—my students, for their probing questions and untiring interest. Special thanks go to Linda Waugh, John Wolff, and Sally McConnell-Ginet at Cornell for their enthusiastic support of my work. I finished the book at the University of California at Berkeley. Chapters 6 and 7 reflect my current concerns as I now train graduate students to become linguistic 'go-betweens' in multicultural classrooms.

I would like to thank all the teachers who welcomed me into their classrooms and gave me valuable insights into their daily

encounters with foreign language learners. I am grateful to all those schools and universities in the United States and in Canada, Germany, France, Spain, and Russia, who invited me to give lectures and workshops in which I tried out some of my ideas.

There have been a few persons who have shared with me over the years my interest for problems of language and culture. I am grateful to Catherine Chvany for her wise mentorship, Suzanne Flynn for her companionship in linguistic matters, Michael Geisler for his grasp of popular culture, Jim Noblitt for his insights into computer literacy, Peter Patrikis for his unfailing support. Our long and sometimes impassioned conversations gave me the necessary inspiration to write this book.

My gratitude goes to the careful and critical readers of earlier versions of the manuscript: Brian Harrison and Eberhard Piepho, and, especially, Henry Widdowson, who with his wise understanding and impeccable logic encouraged me to refine my argument and to say what I really wanted to say. I should like to thank also Linda von Hoene for being the ideal empathetic and yet questioning reader and for her help in tracking down references. David Wilson was the most careful and patient editor I could have wished for. Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Cristina Whitecross and Anne Conybeare from Oxford University Press for their encouragement and support during the preparation of the manuscript. If this book can make a modest contribution to the emergence of cross-cultural understanding in a united Europe, it will be thanks to them.

Claire Kramsch
Berkeley, January 1992

牛津应用语言学丛书

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Introduction

By its very nature, foreign language teaching is predicated on the conviction that because we are all humans, we can easily understand each other provided we share the same code; all we have to do is learn that code and use it accurately and appropriately. This view of language teaching values consensus and negotiated understanding. Because we all have the same basic human needs, we only have to agree on how to fulfill these needs in various situations of everyday life. On this shared experiential basis, it is believed that one language is essentially (albeit not easily) translatable into another. In foreign language education, this belief has been most fruitful in promoting functional and pragmatic approaches to the teaching and learning of foreign languages around the world.

Where it has encountered difficulties is in the teaching of culture: for culture is difference, variability, and always a potential source of conflict when one culture enters into contact with another. Culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them.

Consider, in fact, the differences among people due to such factors as age, race, gender, social class, generation, family history, regional origin, nationality, education, life experiences, linguistic idiosyncracies, conversational styles, human intentionalities. Given these differences and the enormous complexity of human relations, communication in general and, *a fortiori*, communication in a foreign language, should be all but impossible. And yet, more often than not, we do understand one another, however imperfectly, however temporarily.

This book takes a philosophy of conflict as its point of departure, thus reversing the traditional view of language teaching as

the teaching of forms to express universal meanings. It takes particular meanings, contextual difference, and learner variability as its core: a rose, maybe, is a rose is a rose, but it is not *une rose*, is not *eine Rose*, but multiple ways of viewing and talking about roses. Such an approach is more interested in fault lines than in smooth landscapes, in the recognition of complexity and in the tolerance of ambiguity, not in the search for clear yardsticks of competence or insurances against pedagogical malpractice. It is convinced that understanding and shared meaning, when it occurs, is a small miracle, brought about by the leap of faith that we call 'communication across cultures'.

Language teachers are well aware of the difficulties of their task. But they often view these difficulties in dichotomous terms that unduly simplify the issues and prevent them from understanding the larger context.

Dubious dichotomies and deceptive symmetries

With the ebb and flow of educational philosophies and methodologies, themselves reactions to larger social and political events, language teaching has tended to swing between what it views as opposite extremes: grammatical versus functional syllabuses, teacher-centered versus student-centered classrooms, cognitive versus experiential learning styles, learning-based versus acquisition-based pedagogies. These swings have been nurtured by the belief in the linear progressive development of the 'ideal' language learning environment and the disillusion with the betrayal of earlier teaching methods. For example, professional rhetoric views the functional–notional approach as having superseded the audiolingual method and having been superseded itself by a proficiency-oriented curriculum. Such a view is comforting – teachers are given a feeling of progress and achievement – but it is deceptive. Teachers know well the variability inherent in the educational context and the impossibility of capturing this variability in any methodical way. The either compensate in enthusiasm and personal commitment to a new method what they lose in global understanding; or they minimize the conflict between methods, styles, and goals, and settle for the so-called 'eclectic' middle ground.

Not only teachers, but teacher trainers themselves are trying to escape dichotomous thinking. Swaffar *et al.* (1991: 6) describes the traditional disparity found in higher education

'between initial semesters of language training (the remedial work) and later scholarly training (the academic mission)'. Richards (1990) sees a 'dilemma' in the fact that teachers have to master low-inference techniques and teaching behaviors that can be readily learned, and at the same time follow higher-level principles of decision making. He suggests that a balance needs to be struck between holistic and atomistic approaches to teacher preparation. This idea of balance between the polarities in the teaching of foreign languages is expressed by Maley, who strives to help teachers arrive at a personal synthesis or 'balance of opposites' (personal communication). Larsen-Freeman (1990) calls for a theory of language teaching that would help teachers find their own way out of the conflicting recommendations they receive from second language acquisition (SLA) research. Lightbown (1986) encourages teachers to become familiar with SLA research—not to find out what is good and bad teaching, but to understand the nature of language and language learning.

Indeed, classroom teaching is a juggling act that requires instant-by-instant decisions based on both local and global knowledge and on an intuitive grasp of the situation. Many of the decisions teachers make are based on compromises between how they perceive the needs of their students and how they view their role and their responsibility as teachers. These many factors are often in contradiction with one another and call for personal judgment based on as broad and differentiated an understanding as possible about what is going on at that particular moment in the classroom.

Rather than fall prey to attractive but ultimately reductionist dichotomies, this book will explore their possible reformulation within a non-dichotomous perspective. In the following, I examine some of the polarities most often cited by teachers and I attempt to break their symmetry by reformulating the questions within a larger contextual framework.

Learning by doing versus learning by thinking

One of the more tenacious dichotomies in foreign language education is that of skill versus content (see Kramsch 1988a). Language is viewed as a skill, a tool that is in itself devoid of any intellectual value. As an academic subject, it becomes intellectually respectable only when learners are able to use it to express and discuss abstract ideas. This argument has two aspects that

reinforce one another. First, an administrative one. In most Western countries, the teaching of foreign languages made a late appearance on the academic scene that was traditionally reserved for the study of ancient and modern literatures. The language teacher has hence a lower academic status than the professor of literature or of civilization. The interface between upper-level language courses and literature seminars is tradition-ally a particularly sensitive area of the academic curriculum in terms of staffing and syllabus.

The second aspect of the skill versus content argument is an edu-cational one. Functional approaches to language teaching have been adopted with enthusiasm by educational systems in which educational effectiveness is traditionally measured according to its practical outcomes. For example, as Freed and Bernhardt (1992) have recently pointed out, American foreign language edu-cation values action over reflection; it believes that the sole responsibility of language teachers is to get their students to talk and write as well and as fluently as possible. Depth and breadth of thought belong to other subjects. The overall result of both these aspects of the skill versus content dichotomy has often been the trivialization of the teaching of foreign languages; it has made the teaching of culture a particularly controversial issue.

We can get out of this dichotomy by seeing learning by doing and learning by thinking as two sides of the same coin. Learners have to experience new uses of language, but they do not even know how new they are if they do not reflect on their experience. It is a fallacy to believe that students do not acquire content as they learn the forms of the language. To be sure, much of this content is not verbalized, it is the unspoken ideological sub-stratum of the educational system, the community, the peer group, the family. If we consider language learning as the acquisition of new forms of discourse, learners have to first recognize to what extent their discourse is that of their sur-rounding environment. Chapter 1 offers an in-depth analysis of a segment of classroom discourse and explores the lessons we can draw from it to define the nature of the educational chal-lenge we are faced with.

Grammar versus communication

If both action and reflection form the basis of the acquisition of a foreign language in educational settings, teachers will no doubt

argue that the two processes have to be weighted differently at the beginning and the more advanced stages: do beginning learners not have to *do* things with words before they can *reflect* with words? This was the argument made in the early 1970s against the abuses of grammatical metalanguage and structural analyses at the expense of communicative practice. Unfortunately, in many cases, the argument has been couched again in dichotomous terms as: grammar versus communication, conscious application of rules versus unconscious acquisition of conversational patterns.

Because of this dichotomous thinking, many teachers still believe that students should learn to use the language in communication only *after* they have learned to master its structures in drills and other mechanical exercises. On the one hand, it is a fact that structures have to be broken down and learned, that rules have to be explained, inductively or deductively, and that students have to get the necessary linguistic skills. On the other hand, teachers are now told that learners have to be given the opportunity to use their skills even before they have completely mastered them and that they should focus on the message, not on the form of their utterances. The pedagogical result, however, is often an 'everything-goes' attitude on the part of both learners and teachers, with a concomitant abdication of teacher responsibility.

Rather than an either–or dichotomy, grammar and communication can be seen within a view of language as social semiotic (Halliday 1978, 1989, 1990). The structures which speakers choose to use and hearers choose to listen and respond to construct the very context of communication in which learning takes place. Rather than a dichotomy, then, we have multiple options regarding the way language is used in variable contexts of use. In Chapter 2, drawing on Halliday's work but also on that of anthropological linguists like Hymes (1974), Goffman (1981), psycholinguists like Charaudeau (1983), Edmondson (1983, 1985), Ellis (1987), Long (1983, 1989), and sociolinguists like Saville-Troike (1989), I will examine the notions of context and of language teaching as contextual shaping.

Teacher-talk versus student-talk

The notion of social interaction itself has often been undermined by the phrases 'teacher-talk' versus 'student-talk' and by the