

UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

INTERCULTURALITY AND DIDACTICS OF CULTURE IN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE FRENCH PROGRAMMES IN TWO MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITIES

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By

CHIN SIN ZI

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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October 2014

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Many researchers refer to 'intercultural' as a macro phenomenon with a rather static approach to culture and neglect the importance of individual experience or subjectivity. As foreign language learners or instructors, one should not focus on solid culture, but regard liquid interculturality as the way for an individual to enter into a successful interpersonal communication with a speaker of another language. The standpoint of foreign language instructors on interculturality is very significant because they are the mediators between two languages (source and target languages) and the relationship between language instructors, learners and knowledge are interrelated. Therefore, the instructors' representations play a very important role in moving from a solid intercultural approach to that of liquid interculturality. In this research I examine the representations of interculturality among native and non-native language lecturers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 lecturers teaching foreign languages in two local Malaysian universities. Participants were asked to define the interculturality and intercultural skills and how they plan to develop them among learners. The data show that there are no significant differences between the representations of interculturality between native and non-native language lecturers: they share the idea that a minimum knowledge is needed in order to communicate with native speakers. More differences can be noted in their definition of the concepts and on the way in which they attain their understanding of 'interculturality'.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia Sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sastera

ANTARA BUDAYA DAN PENGAJIAN BUDAYA DALAM PROGRAM IJAZAH SARJANA MUDA BAHASA PERANCIS DI DUA UNIVERSITI DI MALAYSIA

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Ramai penyelidik merujuk 'antara budaya' sebagai suatu fenomena makro dengan pandangan agak statik terhadap budaya, lalu mengabaikan kepentingan pengalaman individu dan elemen subjektiviti. Sebagai pelajar atau pengajar bahasa asing, kita tidak seharusnya memberi tumpuan kepada budaya statik tetapi menganggap konsep antara budaya cair atau mudah-ubah sebagai satu kaedah bagi individu untuk mewujudkan komunikasi yang berkesan dengan seorang penutur yang berlainan bahasa. Sudut pandangan pengajar bahasa asing terhadap konsep antara budaya adalah sangat penting kerana mereka merupakan pengantara antara dua bahasa (bahasa sumber dan bahasa sasaran). Selain itu, perhubungan antara pengajar bahasa, pelajar dan pengetahuan adalah saling berkait. Maka, pendapat pengajar memainkan peranan yang amat penting dalam peralihan daripada suatu pendekatan konsep antara budaya yang statik kepada konsep antara budaya cair. Dalam kajian ini, saya menyelidiki pandangan tentang konsep dan kemahiran antara budaya dalam kalangan pensyarah yang merupakan penutur asli dan yang bukan penutur asli bahasa Perancis. Temu bual separa struktur telah dijalankan bersama 12 orang pensyarah yang mengajar bahasa asing di dua buah universiti awam di Malaysia. Para pensyarah penutur asli dan bukan penutur asli diminta untuk memberi definisi tentang konsep dan kemahiran antara budaya, serta rancangan mereka untuk membangunkan konsep dan kemahiran ini dalam kalangan pelajar. Data menunjukkan bahawa tiada perbezaan ketara antara pegangan konsep antara budaya dalam kalangan penutur asli dan bukan asli: mereka berkongsi pendapat bahawa hanya pengetahuan yang minimum terhadap konsep dan kemahiran antara budaya diperlukan untuk bertutur dengan penutur-penutur asli. Terdapat juga perbezaan dalam definisi mereka tentang konsep antara budaya dan proses untuk mencapai tahap pemahaman mereka tentang konsep antara budaya.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUM	Anxiety Uncertainty Management
CECR	Cadre Européen Commun de Référence
CEFR	Common European Framework for Languages
DELF	Diplôme d'Étude en Langue Française [Diploma in French Language Studies]
DHA	Discourse-Historical Approach
FLT	Foreign language teaching
IC	Intercultural competence
MI	Mixed Intersubjectivity
NL	Native language lecturer
NNL	Non-native language lecturer

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

The different territories that constitute Malaysia were British colonies or protectorates until 1957 (or 1963 for East Malaysia). English was widely used amongst the colonists and for communication with the local elite (Asmah, 2009) and it was in the position of a second language in the pre- and post-independence era. The teaching of French was associated to a great extent with the presence of British schools in the peninsula and its imminent disappearance from Malaysian schools just before independence was linked to the incorporation of the (British) missionary institutions into the national education system. However, the language was later reintroduced in the 1980's in some boarding schools (Lim & Machart, 2013, p. 51) and in 2014, 63 Malaysian public schools offer French as an elective subject, while two public universities offer complete bachelor programmes in French, and many other higher education institutions has French as an option (Lim & Machart, 2013, p. 59).

The vast majority of Malaysians who learn a foreign/international language are at least bilingual (Malay/English) and many even often speak three (plus Mandarin or Tamil) or more languages. Yet, this plurilingual competence of the learners is most of the time being neglected by lecturers who only focus on the students' mother tongue ('ideally' homogenised despite the linguistic diversity) and the target language, often associated with one and only country, in our case, France. The learning of French is often related to the objective of having interactions with French tourists in Malaysia, or with native French speakers in France (the country of 'origin') to develop commercial ties. The tie between French language teaching and 'interculturality' is taken for granted, but the meaning of this 'interculturality' among lecturers still needs to be questioned.

The teaching of 'interculturality' or 'intercultural skills' has become a focal point of many foreign language instructors as shown in several researches on didactics of foreign languages (e.g. Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1998; Corbett, 2003; Ware & Kramsch, 2005; Dervin, 2010a). However, 'interculturality' in foreign language classes is not interpreted in similar ways by these researchers: it covers what Dervin (2013a) calls "solid", "liquid" or "Janusian" approaches (p. 8). Thus, it is important in the field of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning to look at how lecturers understand and use this key concept, as intercultural appears as a "chameleon" concept (Earley & Peterson, 2004). The lecturers' diverse understandings of the term impact their pedagogical approaches; the way they teach 'interculturality' to learners is related to their representation of what constitutes a successful intercultural interaction and what they think learners need to know. The purpose of this study is to examine the discourse of lecturers of French, to see if there is a distancing from imagined cultures (Dervin, 2007a) and a 'source culture'/'target culture' dichotomy by including more fluidity in the linguistically and culturally diverse Malaysian context.

1.1 Background of the Study

Malaysia is a multilingual nation located in Southeast Asia where four major languages (Malay, Mandarin, Tamil and English) and many vernacular languages (Iban, Dusun, Bajau, Hokkien, Hakka, Cantonese, Punjabi, etc.) are used dynamically. Of the 137 living languages spoken in the country (Lewis, Gary, & Charles, 2013), Malay has been declared the sole official and national language after a transitional period of 10 years following independence in 1957 (Ain Nadzimah & Chan, 2003, p. 102). This language is used in most official situations: parliamentary debates, official letters, official ceremonies, etc. However, Malaysians may also use other languages in other situations, and some primary schools use Tamil or Mandarin as a medium of instruction (Machart & Lim, 2013a). The language of the former colonial rulers, English, is also widely used and sociolinguists estimate that it is used daily by 25% of urban Malaysians (McArthur, 2002, p. 325) even in official contexts (Ozog, 1990, p. 312).

English is considered as an asset because of its position as the world's major lingua franca in international business (Rogerson-Revell, 2007); it may be taken for granted in the country where it is considered "a second language" (Asmah, 2009) but its place in education (e.g. as the medium of instruction for science and mathematics) has often been debated in recent years (Ain Nadzimah & Chan, 2003; Kärchner-Ober, 2007) and its use is still being questioned especially among Malay speakers (e.g. Hafriza, 2006; Airil, 2013). Yet, English is rarely associated with UK (or USA, Australia and New Zealand) and its representations among Malaysians tend to confirm that it is perceived as a lingua franca with few connections with the places where the language was originally spoken as the mother tongue (Machart, Lim, & Lim, 2010).

Besides these languages, the government also encourages the learning and teaching of foreign languages. The Ministry of Higher Education acknowledged the importance of foreign language learning in the *National Higher Education Strategic Plan Beyond 2020* (Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia, 2007), in which it is stated that "proficiency in the third language is vital for developing human capital that drives the K-economy as well as gears the country towards competitive innovation in the international arena" (p. 62). In order to promote better human development, the Malaysian government has decided to develop foreign language learning because "a nation whose citizens are proficient in foreign languages is bound to have the distinct advantage of being betterplaced to have access to foreign technology that is crucial to nation building" (Zubairi & Sarudin, 2009, p. 74). This move is associated with the increasing internationalisation of Malaysian higher education; in 2010, 79,200 Malaysians were studying abroad, mainly in Australia and UK, and increasingly also in Egypt, France, Germany or Japan (Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia, 2011) where they study in Arabic, French, German and Japanese respectively.

On 7 July 2004, "foreign languages" have been relabelled "international languages" by the Ministry of Education at a meeting held by the Curriculum Development Centre (KPM, 2004). By including these languages in the curriculum, the Malaysian government is

targeting internationalisation and the learning of 'international' languages has been extended to government day schools in order to broaden the offer of 'foreign' languages among citizens.

Foreign language teaching officially started in some privileged secondary schools (where Japanese, Arabic, French and Mandarin are taught as an elective subject) in the 1980's. In 1998 and 2001 respectively, two public universities i.e. Universiti Malaya and Universiti Putra Malaysia started a degree programme in French (Machart & Lim, 2009). These two universities are the only institutions that offer a degree programme in French and together they enrol approximately thirty students every year. In 2013, thirteen French language lecturers (four native and nine non-native speakers) were involved in these two programmes. They become a major source of representations of the French language and intercultural skills in French for students: most of these students do not have any prior knowledge about this language and they spend more than ten hours per week with their lecturers since the first semester. Thus, it can be supposed that the lecturers' representations and their approach to interculturality would affect the students' knowledge about linguistic and intercultural skills (Beacco, 2007).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The implement of foreign language teaching and learning has started in the late 70s in Malaysia and its importance is acknowledged by the Ministry of Higher Education in the *National Higher Education Strategic Plan Beyond 2020* (Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia, 2007). Many future foreign language instructors were sent abroad to be trained in order to have a better implemention on this plan. Foreign languages were offered in order to, among others, broaden business opportunities and foreign policies. Intercultural interactions are thus important but no studies on interculturality involving foreign language lecturers in Malaysia have been done so far.

In 2014 some foreign languages, in particular French, are offered in complete foreign language bachelor programmes in two public universities, as an elective subject in 63 Malaysian public schools and also as an option in many higher education institutions (Lim & Machart, 2013, p. 59). In the process of learning a new language, the relationship between language instructors, learners and knowledge become interrelated (Houssaye, 1982) and lectures and tutorials are the main channels for these students to acquire intercultural competence, besides the Internet which is used in French most of the time under the instructions of the lecturer. However, it appears that the understanding of *interculturality* among lecturers differ largely from the acceptance of the term amongst post-modern researchers such as Abdallah-Pretceille (2001; 2005), Holliday (2010) or Dervin (2006). Most of the time, *interculturality* is treated as communication between representatives of a nation, referred to as "Methodological Nationalism" (Dervin, 2013a), rather than interactions between individuals (who may or may not share a common language). With this representation on interculturality, does the teaching of intercultural skills reveal an acceptance of the fluid "Humanism of the Diverse" (Abdallah-Pretceille,

2005, 2012) or does it convey more or less strong, culture-bound, potentially discriminatory power relations?

1.3 Aim of Study

This study aims to understand better the discourse of lecturers on interculturality and the potential implications in the didactics of foreign languages and social interactions between native and non-native speakers.

Firstly, I will analyse the different understandings of the concept of *interculturality* by the native and non-native language lecturers of the two B.A. French programmes in Malaysia in relation to their previous experience.

Secondly, I will study how they intend to develop their learners' intercultural competence in relation to their theoretical background and if they adopt an intercultural approach independent of cultural artefacts or even the "intercultural without culture" (Dervin, 2014).

1.4 Research questions

The representations and approaches to interculturality among the language lecturers who were teaching in the French B.A programmes in 2013 have been examined. Besides that, the power relation between the participants and the interviewer is also one of the focal points in this study because of its implication on participants' responses. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What does interculturality mean to the French language lecturers of the two B.A French programmes in Malaysia?
- 2) Do native and non-native lecturers share the same representations of and approaches to interculturality?
- 3) Are French language lecturers' representations of and approaches to interculturality intensifying or mitigating stereotypes?
- 4) How do French language lecturers plan to develop intercultural competences or skills among learners?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study aims to be a hint for language lecturers to realise the importance of interaction between interlocutors who do not necessarily share the same mother tongue. In addition, this study also intends to be a guide for foreign language lecturers in Malaysia to have greater understanding on interculturality in order to move away from native speakerism (where the native speaker is considered as superior) (Holliday, 2006) and solid, culturalist approaches which impede real, interpersonal interactions (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2012).

Almost all the lecturers teaching in BA French programmes in Malaysia (92%) participated in this study. This research can thus be considered as significant for this particular group of lecturers teaching the language. French language lecturers represent the biggest group of what the Curriculum Development Centre (KPM, 2004) labelled as "international language" instructors in Malaysia who are involved in a BA programme (before German) and the participants train all the undergraduate students in French in Malaysia.

1.6 Limitation of this Study

This small scale study involves the only two public universities in Malaysia which offer BA programmes in French. Due to the fact that Universiti Malaya and Universiti Putra Malaysia are currently the only universities authorised by the Malaysian government to offer these programmes, these two universities become the sole representatives of French language teaching and learning at degree level in Malaysia.

Apart from that, the interviewer's status as a master student and a former student of one of these programmes needs to be taken into consideration as this status is ambiguous. Most of the interviewees chose to reply the questions during the interviews using a teaching technique rather than merely sharing information.

However, this limitation has become one of the research angles worth examining due to the power relationship between the interviewer and interviewees. The discourse of the participants has been analysed to stress their desire to demonstrate their power (e.g. their wider knowledge or the power linked to their academic/administrative status).



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