

THE FIFTH SKILL IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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“**The fifth skill**” has become a buzzword recently in the field of teaching and learning English. Admittedly, while conducting this research it has been found out that language experts interpret the fifth skill in different ways. The studied material enables me to assert that the understanding of the term occurs at least in a threefold manner: 1) culture (B. Tomalin, T. J. Garza, D. Brown, L. Damen, C. Kramersch); 2) translation (D. Linder, M. Snell-Hornby, N. J. Ross, C. W. Schweers, J. Tang); 3) grammaring (D. Larsen-Freeman, D. Nunan, J. C. Richards, R. Schmidt, P. Simon).

Teaching **culture** as a skill, compared with reading, writing, speaking, and listening, has been undermined. Notwithstanding the fact that it is generally accepted in the language-teaching community that culture is an integral part of language instruction, there is little consensus on *what and how* to teach. Things are with vocabulary and grammar, which are concrete in their content, culture is quite fluid and amorphous and therefore difficult to define. Culture as the fifth skill stresses the learner's ability to perceive, to understand, and ultimately, to accept cultural relativity. T. J. Garza points out that culture as a fifth skill refers to a set of abilities: a) the ability to perceive and recognize cultural differences; b) the ability to accept cultural differences; c) the ability to appreciate and value cultural differences [5].

B. Tomalin determines two reasons why it is important to consider culture a fifth language skill, in addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing. They are: the international role of the English language and globalization [12]. The idea that the role of the English language is a life skill and should be taught as a core curriculum subject is highly advocated. Operating internationally necessitates using a lingua franca; assumingly, English is likely to be the language for the next two or three decades. He believes that it will be a core communicative skill that will aid one in developing the intercultural skills. Adults and children deal with foreigners in their community, go abroad, interact through email, phone, networks. B. Tomalin disagrees on the assumption that provided one learns the language, the learning of the culture takes place too. It is challenging to teach one sensitivity and awareness and how to behave in certain situations. The fifth language skill teaches us the mindset and techniques to adapt our use of English to learn about, understand and appreciate the values, ways of doing things and unique qualities of other cultures. It shows us how to use language to accept difference, to be flexible and tolerant of ways of doing things that are different to ours [12].

S. Vernier, S. Barbuzza, S. del Giusti, G. del Moral put forward the caveat that culture and grammar are sometimes called skills [13: 267]. In their paper they refer to R. Oxford who highlights that they are somewhat different from the traditional

four skills, as both of them intersect and overlap with listening, reading, speaking and writing in particular ways [13: 268]. EFL classes used to focus on one or two of the four traditional skills discretely. These segregated-skill-oriented courses dealt with language itself to the extent that excessive emphasis on rules and paradigms taught students a lot about language at the expense of teaching language itself [4: 218]. In recent decades, however, a trend toward skill integration has been observed. H. D. Brown states that EFL professionals can maintain an integrated-skill approach in their teaching with the help of five models of integrated-skill approaches: Content-Based Language Instruction, Task-Based Instruction, Theme-Based Teaching, Experiential Learning and the Episode Hypothesis [3: 232-242].

Translation and interpreting are essential social skills and a useful language learning tool preparing learners for real-life situations in their jobs and studies. B. Naimushin argues that translation and interpreting skills need to be recognized as an important element alongside the other four skills [9: 46]. The issue of translation has been rather controversial and seems to be a step backwards from the communicative approach to learning/teaching English through English. Many native and non-native teachers of English considered any usage of the L1 or translation in class as a waste of time. V. Janulevičienė and G. Kavaliauskienė emphasize that translation in this context is used in the meaning of the language learning tool, but not as a vocational skill that professional interpreters need to acquire [6]. These two scholars in their paper mention D. Linder who explicates that the discrediting of translation as a tool for learning language in classroom is related to the fact that EL teachers associate translation with the use of grammar-translation as a non-communicative method [6]. However, a shift in non-native learners and teachers attitudes towards the use of the L1 has been noticed lately. The fifth skill is understood as an ability to function fluently in two languages alternately. This implies an ability to quickly switch from one language to another without any preparation or thinking time. The results of the survey conducted by V. Janulevičienė and G. Kavaliauskienė show the importance of the L1 for teaching and learning a foreign language on a tertiary-level due to the following reasons: a) it makes advanced students aware of the L1 interference; b) it helps to introduce difficult concepts; c) it benefits developing bilingualism or multilingualism in a learner; d) it saves time and makes things clearer [6].

From B. Naimushin's perspective, special attention has to be paid to the development of the skills of rendering. This will deprive many students of stress because they start realizing that there will always be unfamiliar words, expressions but this cannot be a hurdle to successful communication and translation is not about word-for-word rendering of the original message in the target language because the entire message is supreme to separate elements of its formal expression [9].

It is contented by P. Baker that this fifth skill deserves as much attention as the other four and it is the key to mastering the language. She underscores that the weightiest argument in favour of focusing on translation skills is that use of the fifth skill is a fact of life for many students [1].

Grammar is not only an area of knowledge but it can be regarded as the fifth skill. The teaching and learning of grammar has always been one of the most debatable topics in the field of language education. Grammar refers to phonology,

syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Grammar was considered a method of language teaching and learning within the so-called Grammar-Translation Approach [2]. Language skills are about what we do with language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. D. Larsen-Freeman claims that “grammar is to be seen as a skill not as a competence” because when we speak or write, we are consciously or unconsciously involved in “doing” grammar. Hence, this process of doing grammar is termed “**grammaring**” [8: 67]. She defines grammaring as “the ability to use grammar structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately” [8: 143]. She challenges the misconception of grammar which is believed to be static. D. Larsen-Freeman coined the term "grammaring" to underline the organic nature of grammar. She is an opponent of rule-based theory of grammar and a proponent of usage-based theory of grammar. “Grammar teaching is not so much knowledge transmission as it is skill development” [8: 255] Since language should be used accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately, while doing practical activities emphasis is laid upon form, meaning, and use.

D. Larsen-Freeman is convinced that the used language teaching methodology is the source of inert knowledge problem (learners' inability to activate their knowledge of the rules when they are communicating). In this respect B. Kumaravadivelu identifies the so-called “postmethod condition” as a result of ‘the widespread dissatisfaction with the conventional concept of method’ [7: 43]. S. Thornbury explains that the demise of method is consistent with the widely held view that we are now in a ‘post-method’ era [11]. It can be stated that the aforementioned scholars are influenced by the post-method era because they are guided by a number of macrostrategies, 'maximising learning opportunities' and 'promoting learner autonomy' being some of the most important ones, and at the same time they adapt their approach in accordance with local as well as contextual factors. In N. S. Prabhu's point of view, there does not exist one method; individual teachers fashion an approach that accords uniquely with their ‘sense of plausibility’ [10].

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