Original Paper

Exploring the Cultural Awareness amongst Beninese Post-Beginner Learners of English as a Foreign Language in the Littoral Secondary Schools

Hindeme Ulrich O. Sena[1*], Egounleti Pedro Marius[1] & Gnonlonfoun Jean-Marc[2]

[1] DAn/FLLAC-UAC, Calavi, Bénin

[2] GRI-DiGeST/LARPET/ENSET/UNSTIM, Cotonou, Bénin

[*] Hindeme Ulrich O. Sena, DAn/FLLAC-UAC, Calavi, Bénin

Abstract

Teaching a Foreign language also involves transmitting knowledge about the target culture or the country in which the language is spoken. This study aimed at investigating on the place culture in English as Foreign Language classrooms at secondary schools level in Benin context and the post-beginner learners' cultural awareness in relation to successful communicative performance and language proficiency development. With that aim, a cultural awareness test was administered to three hundred and sixty participants selected randomly at the rate of thirty-six per school from ten secondary schools of the Littoral region of Benin. Two hundred and sixty valid answers were then collected and analyzed quantitatively using Microsoft Excel 2007. The results revealed that many teachers seem to underestimate the importance of culture, which explains a gap between their perceptions and practices in dealing with culture. Consequently, Beninese learners did not acquire cultural awareness. Indeed, EFL teaching in Benin may have missed the focus on cultural aspects of the foreign language and thereby explains learners' failure to achieve successful intercultural communication. Some respondents also viewed comparing aspects of the students' own culture with those of the target culture as the commonest way of developing cultural awareness. Moreover, shortage of time was seen as the main obstacle for teaching culture in classrooms. Students do not recognize the cultural aspect of the language despite their close relationship, which was proved in the dual and simultaneous improvement of advanced students' performance in linguistics, and cultural knowledge, which, in turn, engenders their lack of cultural awareness being a key element in language proficiency and intercultural communicative competence. This research paper comes up with the recommendations that school

authorities should design a specific culture oriented syllabus that covers all the different levels of English learning at secondary school level. In this regard, all the variables (setting, cultural, institutional, linguistic, and methodological) should be taken into account and mainstreamed in the curriculum. In the same vein, EFL teachers should consider Culture as an integrative factor in language teaching process.

Keywords

Benin Context, EFL Post-beginners, Cultural awareness, Variables

1. Problem and Purpose

The aim of teaching culture is to highten students' awareness and to develop their curiosity towards both the target and home culture (Travares & Cavalcanti, 1996). In addition; KaiKKonen (2001, p. 64) asserted that "the most important goal of foreign language education is to help learners grow out the shell of their mother and their own cultures". Ritlyova (2009) contented that students improve their perception of a foreign culture and their own culture by gaining awareness of a foreign language.

English is a foreign language in Benin where educational authorities aim at helping learners to achieve intercultural communicative competence to hold conversations in English with speakers of English in real life situations. To learn EFL, Beninese learners generally resort to their native linguistic rules and cultural conventions creating communication breakdowns.

However, teachers sometimes do not much address cultural issues in language classroom due to the factors like shortage of time, lack of cultural knowledge, or lack of training as to which aspects of culture to teach among other things. Besides, in some EFL contexts, addressing too much cultural issues might be viewed as promoting the foreign language value and undermining the local ones

Being able to communicate in a foreign language does not involve the mere acquisition of vocabulary and grammar; it also requires knowledge about paralinguistic elements and cultural awareness, defined as developing sensitivity and understanding of another ethnic group. This usually involves internal changes in terms of attitudes and values. This is so because communication requires comprehension and production as well as a need to understand and be understood by others both at the linguistic and conceptual levels. Accordingly, foreign language learners are supposed to be aware of cross-cultural differences in order to develop a sense of acceptance and appreciation of the foreign culture. That is why the current study investigates Beninese EFL post-beginners' attitudes towards the English culture on the one hand and the impact of cultural awareness on their language proficiency development on the other. It is assumed that teaching Beninese post-beginner EFL learners linguistic and cultural knowledge about the English language could enable them to develop cultural awareness and a deep understanding of cross-cultural differences thus contributing to enhance their language proficiency.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Attitudes and Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness reveals its development at three levels; two of which were mentioned in the previous part, and the third one in this part. The third element refers to the emotional change in the individual or to his attitudes towards the target culture and its people. Indeed, the role of attitudes has been investigated to be of great significance in second and foreign language learning development, especially in learning the foreign culture.

The relationship between cultural awareness and attitudes was first introduced by Byram (1994) in his notion of intercultural communicative competence with the five savoirs. This idea was inspired from the role of attitudes in second language learning. In fact, attitudes have been proved to be either a cause or a result of successful second and foreign language learning. According to Byram's model, attitudes are of a dual role. The first is that attitudes can be a cause for achieving intercultural communicative competence or one of its components (in addition to knowledge and skills), in the sense that they refer to the willingness and readiness to learn about others' perceptions and to communicate with them. Yet, he stressed the significance of the learners' attitudinal changes as an important outcome of intercultural communicative competence that enhances their language proficiency and influences their intercultural communication. In other words, Byram considered cultural awareness in its affective dimension to be crucial and important for successful intercultural communication and an interesting element in intercultural communicative competence. Despite the difference in his perception of attitudes from that of Byram, McDonough (1981) believed that success in target language learning and positive attitudes are interdependent. Expressed differently, success in foreign language learning leads to gaining positive attitudes towards the target language people.

Additionally, though Gaston (1984), Hanvey (1979) and Oxford (1994), though differ in their focus of the most representative aspect of cultural awareness achievement, they all agree upon the significant psychological changes in the learners' personality and perceptions towards the target culture as an initial step for cultural awareness development. Risager (2007, p. 24) was, also, one of the proponents of the notion that the change of attitudes is a result of foreign culture learning and culture awareness teaching when she said that "the feeling of being disconcerted which is an indication of a change of attitudes and concepts, of a modification of culture-specific schemata, which cultural awareness teaching should bring about".

Seen from another perspective, attitudes are considered to have a great impact on the learners' second or foreign language learning process on the basis that language occurs in social settings and communication that involves, tacitly, the integration of personal feelings, attitudes, and motivation. In relation to the field of foreign language teaching, things are very much the same, i.e., the learner's personal attitudes about oneself and the foreign language people will interfere in his learning of and communication with the target language (Seliger, 1988)

According to Littlewood (1984), attitudes permit the learners to look at the communicative need from a

335

different angle. That is, holding positive attitudes about the target culture and recognizing the nature of communication help the learners to adopt new patterns of communication, different from their own, and accept that of the foreigners. Positive attitudes, then, allow the learners to move from ethnocentricity and overwhelming feelings towards the native cultural patterns and behaviours to ethnorelativity, acceptance, and appreciation of differences between cultures. Little wood was more interested in the role of attitudes in the learners' language proficiency achievement, in a direct way, rather than through cultural awareness. In the same vein, Brown (1987) argued that the enhancement of linguistic proficiency involves some affective feelings such as the excitement at the newness and the shock at the difference.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) were also interested in the role of attitudes in second language learning and its correlation with motivation. They reached a conclusion that the learners' motivation is a set of collected attitudes that urge them, either positively or negatively, to learn the foreign language and culture. Thus, holding positive attitudes towards the target culture gives the learner an integrative motivation or a desire to learn more about the target language in order to be able to communicate with its speakers successfully and appropriately, as expressed by Lambert (1972, p. 180): "motivation to learn is thought to be determined by the learner's attitudes and by his orientation towards learning a second language".

Another area where attitudes, particularly socio-cultural awareness, play a vital role in culture learning is when the learners experience culture shocks in their communication with natives. Culture shock is a term introduced by Oberg (1960, p. 1) to refer to "the anxiety resulting from not knowing what to do in a new culture" where he set six negative aspects of culture shock:

a)   Strain resulting from the effort of psychological adaptation;

b)   A sense of loss and deprivation referring to the removal of former friends, status, and role;

c)   Rejection by or rejection of the new culture;

d)   Confusion in the role definition, expectations, feelings and self-identity;

e)   Unexpected anxiety, disgust, or indignation regarding cultural differences between the old and new ways;

f)   Feelings of helplessness because of not coping well in the new environment.

Adler (1975) was also interested in culture shock. For him, cultural shock is a process rather than a single psychological event. It involves five stages ranging from the "honeymoon stage" to the "reciprocal interdependence stage". Yet, he believed in its positive dimension in the learning process. Moreover, culture shock, according to Adler, is related mainly to intercultural, which leads to develop self-awareness and self-perception growth.

Another important figure in this area of study is Brown (2007, p. 280) where culture shock is seen as "the process of acculturation, phenomena involving mild irritability, depression, anger, or possibly deep psychological crisis due to the foreignness of the new cultural milieu". Thus, people, who learn and understand the cross-cultural differences, develop positive attitudes that enable them to be successful in

cross-cultural communication; whereas, those who reject learning new cultures, because they are stereotyped by their own culture, may develop negative attitudes and may run the risk of experiencing culture shocks. Stereotypes are more of a hindrance than a help to successful intercultural communication. Stereotype hinders understanding of the reality of foreign cultures and the development of an objective view towards one's own and foreign cultures, whence, misunderstanding, indifference, rejection and disapproval of cultural diversity. Additionally, stereotypes are generally based on pure groundless observations of daily facts and can engender some wrong prejudices about the culture group members. Thus, stereotypes, prejudices with the individuals' intuitive ethnocentrism, form an affective and psychological barrier to learning the foreign culture and communicating using its language appropriately.

A similar view to that of Byram is that of Hofstede (2002) who saw culture as "a set of emotional and psychological organizations or programs internalized by the members of a given society which urge them to have some specific psychological and particular reactions" (cited in Shaules, 2007, p. 50). Thus, learning a new culture involves learning another psychological program in order to react appropriately in that culture context. Hofstede (1997) set five different cultural values that he believed are universal categories of cross-cultural comparisons. These are power, distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, avoidance of uncertainty, and Confucian dynamism.

This value system was the result of investigations he made about how these values are perceived in different cultures and the effects they may have on people's daily behavior and reactions in different situations on the basis of their internalized psychological programs. Another important point, which Hofstede raised, is that "the core of intercultural awareness is learning to separate observation from interpretation" (Hofstede, 2002, p. 17). This is to say that the communicator should focus on actual behaviour in his interaction rather than personal interpretations that he makes about that behavior (which may result in prejudice, common stereotypes and generalizations). According to Hofstede, interpretation of the foreigner's behavior should not be from one's native standpoint, but rather from the foreigner's perception of values. This of course, is not an easy matter; it needs a deep understanding of the target culture and ability to decentre oneself. Culture shock, for him, occurs after living a long time in the foreign culture and may cause a feeling of frustration for the individual in his attempts to adjust and accommodate to the new cultural environment. It should be mentioned, here, that Hofstedes's views are similar to that of Brooks (2004).

Attitudes have been proved to be of a significant value in second language learning, in general, and in cultural awareness, in particular. Change of intuitive attitudes, common stereotypes, and development from ethnocentricity to empathy and appreciation of foreign cultures are the signs of cultural awareness development, which in turn, help for succeeding in intercultural communication.

2.2 Intercultural Communicative Competence and Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness development has been used to refer to some change in attitudes in the learner's mind toward the target culture and its people. Indeed, attitudes are seen as the key element in managing

337

successful communication. Thus, cultural awareness recently gained grounds in the field of foreign language teaching because of its basic concern with attitudes; a basic element in intercultural communicative competence.

For a long time now, albeit in vain, specialists in the field of foreign language teaching haves strived to train students to communicate successfully using the target language in different contexts. Yet, the emergence of the communication theory, which emphasizes the role of attitudes in communication, has inspired researchers to make of the intercultural dimension of language a goal of communicative competence that gives more validity and importance to the attitudinal aspect of the learners. Intercultural communicative competence was, then, set as a surrogate to communicative competence. In addition to the knowledge and skills that the latter comprises, the term intercultural communicative competence coined by Byram includes a third element known as attitudes. These three dimensions are categorised in the five proposed components or savoirs that make up intercultural communicative competence which are *knowledge (savoir), skills (savoir comprendre, apprendre and faire)*, *and attitudes* (*savoir-etre*) *where the focus is on the* willingness to discover and know about others' *perceptions in life, and dispositions and* orientations to act (*savoir s'engager*) where the research focus is cultural awareness.

Despite the classification of these components, as mentioned above, they are interlinked and correlate with each other in practice. Each component supports the other as for example with "*savoir-etre*" and "*savoir s'engager*" as investigated in the present research and which constitutes its main concern. In addition, developing cultural awareness cannot occur without a personal willingness on the part of the learner to engage in making different relationship with people of the foreign language or in the case of having inherited negative stereotypes about the foreign culture. Cultural awareness, according to Byram et al. (2001, p. 53), is "the ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices, and products, in one's own and others' cultures and countries".

Seen from this perspective, cultural awareness is primarily linked to cognitive processes of comparison, analysis and evaluation of one's own and foreign views on the basis of explicit behavior. It contributes to the making of an intercultural speaker who appreciates the two cultures, his own and that of the foreign language. It permits the learner to step from his judgments as an outsider of the foreign culture to see and feel as an insider after putting his own deep culture in awareness rather than out of awareness. This collaboration between the two cultures allows the learner to be in-between or go-between situations as claimed by Byram and Zarate (1994) to which Kramsch referred as a sphere of interculturality and mediation between the two cultures. Byram's idea of cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence seems, for me, to be more realistic and appropriate to the foreign language classroom setting, unlike the other works, which are more ideal and cannot serve the context of language education.

More important, I believe that cultural awareness is a central element in the development of intercultural communicative competence and during the foreign language learning process as a whole.

It is the first step towards developing positive attitudes about the foreign culture and its people, which, in turn, affects the learners' communicative acts in the foreign language, and thereby achieving the development of their language proficiency, a basic and crucial aim of learning and teaching foreign languages. This growing importance has prompted many researchers to provide some teaching models, which emphasize cultural awareness as an inevitable element, as, will be demonstrated in the following sections.

2.3 Cultural Awareness and the Teaching of Culture

Cultural awareness has proved its primary role in the learners' language proficiency achievement and communicative performance effectiveness in the foreign language. Many researchers have, consequently, tried to present some culture teaching models, which make of cultural competence a central element or objective to achieve. Hence, two recently proposed models are to be presented in this part.

The first model to be dealt with is the one Byram outlined in his book Mediating Languages and Cultures (1991). This model has four parts or components; two of a cultural nature and the two others relate to language. This comprehensive model is a result of the belief in the intertwined relationship between language and culture and the non-possibility of teaching language and culture separately but language-and -culture in tandem (Byram & Morgan, 1994). Byram's viewpoint on the relationship between language and culture is that "language is not simply a reflector of an objective cultural reality but an integral part of that reality through which other parts are shaped and interpreted" (Byram, 1991, p. 18). Consequently, teaching a foreign language implies, indirectly, teaching its culture at the same time. His model makes use of two major techniques: the use of the learners' mother tongue in comparison between the native and the foreign cultural aspects and teaching language as a subject and medium of experience. Expressed differently, Byram used these two techniques in the process of applying his model, which involves language learning, language awareness, culture awareness, and cultural experience:

a)   Language learning: skills- oriented; foreign language focus; mainly foreign language medium.

b)   Language awareness: sociolinguistic knowledge oriented; L1 medium; comparative focus.

c)   Cultural awareness: knowledge oriented; L1 medium; comparative focus.

d)   Cultural experience: knowledge oriented; FL medium; foreign culture focus.

According to Byram, these four elements have a mutual effect on each other and do work interchangeably. To phrase differently, cultural awareness goes in parallel with awareness of the language; the study of the nature of the language as a social and cultural phenomenon following a comparative analysis of the two linguistic systems and their cultural meanings.

Cultural experience would, also, intervene in cultural awareness by selecting activities about some cultural phenomena presented to the learners and to be performed using the foreign language. The learners' socio-cultural awareness can also be raised through comparative analyses of the linguistic and cultural meanings of the native language and the target language. Language awareness, in this sense,

339

can support the acquisition of linguistic skills by making the learners reflect on the different social function, which the learnt linguistic structures can be used to fulfill. More importantly, the learnt linguistic forms themselves can be used to reinforce the cultural and language experience learners are presented with. Language learning is, thus, seen as a rehearsal process of the already learnt knowledge as well as being used as a medium of experiencing cultural situations. Subsequently, all these elements are of equal importance and opportunity to be applied. Yet, Byram mentioned that the time of applying them depends on the learners' level and the degree of achievement of each of these components. However, he insisted that cultural awareness is deemed a crucial objective to be reached by all these components, which may enable the learners to change their attitudes towards the common stereotypes, and puts them in the feet of ethnographers and informants, hence building new schemata and developing intercultural communicative competence.

The second model is that of Kramsch(1993), who stressed cultural awareness as a crucial aim in foreign language teaching. Like Byram, Kramsch advocated the interrelationship between language and culture but from a different angle. According to her, the relationship is that of text and context, as presented by Halliday and Hassan (1989). Culture is seen not as a fifth skill in foreign language teaching. Instead, it is integrated in language teaching because language learning is a social practice that takes place in a surrounding context, which, in turn, helps in interpreting it. Therefore, language expresses personal thought and reflects social order. Culture, on the other hand, refers to "facts and meanings as well as a place of struggle between the learners' meanings and those of native speakers" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 24).

This struggle would be revealed in dialogues. Thus, the teacher's role is not to dictate to the learners how to react in such situations but to give them space to reflect by themselves and find appropriate interpretations useful for understanding the opposed viewpoints of the natives. This can be done through recognizing the space of differences with the natives in favour of similarities. Kramsch's model focuses on differences from a dialogic perspective. The learner should look at the foreign perspectives in relation to his own, hence to focus on what is culture—specific rather than what is culture universal. Thus, the learner would be expected to decentre from his own culture and become a mediator between his and the target cultures.

Another point, which supports the hypothesis investigated in the present research, is the idea that "culture awareness must be viewed both as enabling language proficiency and as being the outcome of reflection on language proficiency", Kramsch developed. Lastly, she (1993, pp. 205-206) has set the following principles to teach culture:

a)   Setting up a sphere of inter-culturality: to relate first culture to foreign culture and to reflect on conceptions of first culture and foreign culture.

b)   Teaching culture as an interpersonal process: to present not only cultural facts in a structural way, but also to present understanding processes, values, beliefs or attitudes;

c)   Teaching culture as difference: culture is not only national traits, but also race, gender, social

340

class, etc.

d)   Crossing disciplinary boundaries: in order to carry out this approach, teachers need to have a wider knowledge on subjects related to culture such ethnography, psychology, sociology or sociolinguistics.

Cultural awareness is fundamental in foreign language teaching particularly in the development of intercultural communicative competence and language proficiency; the basic teaching goals of foreign languages. Developing positive attitudes towards the target culture via comparison of differences between the native and the target culture prompts the learners' ability to use the language efficiently in communicative acts with foreigners.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research question guiding this study what was Beninese EFL post-beginners' attitudes towards the English culture and what was the impact of cultural awareness on their language proficiency development. To answer these questions, a quantitative analysis was carried out. The research design included a test (known as "Written Discourse Completion Task") for data collection.

3.2 Research Population

The region emphasized in this study is the Littoral region of Benin. As such, we have selected the participant students from schools located in this region. The total number of participants is 360. It is important to note that, in each school, students were selected from SS1 (18 students) and SS3 (18 students). Therefore, the 360 EFL learners have been selected randomly at the rate of 36 per school from ten secondary schools of the region. These secondary schools are namely CEG Littoral, CEG le Nokoué, CEG Akpakpa-centre, CEG Suru-Lere, CEG Gbégamey, CEG Houéyiho, CEG Dantokpa, CEG Kouhounou-Vèdoko, CEG les Pylônes and CEG Zogbo. During the random selection, there were finally more boys than girls in the sample. But we were not interested in carrying out analyses related to gender in this study,

3.3 Research Instruments

We have used the Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT henceforth) as the test to collect the data necessary for my study.

The WDCT is a widely used research tool in because of its simplicity and practicability in dealing with the participants' performance in naturally occurring interaction.

In this study, the version of the WDCT used is made up of three parts. The first part is meant to collect some background information about the students. The second part aims to get some insights into the participants' linguistic and pragmatic knowledge. The third and last part evaluates the informants' cultural knowledge and awareness of the English culture.

The questions given have an MCQ form where the participants are required to react and to hypothesize about how a native speaker might react in some situations that may cause misunderstanding between

341

the interlocutors because of cross-cultural differences in beliefs and patterns of behaviors.

3.4 Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was organized from October to November 2016 during the 2016-2017 academic years. Authorities in the selected schools have been orally informed. So, no official letter of any kind was sent to them. After this step, the participants were kept, in each school in two groups: the group of SS1 students and the one of SS3 students. By the start of the study, instead of 360 participants planned, only 300 effectively took part in the test. The valid responses obtained and used for data analysis were actually 260 students.

Following Allah (2016), data analysis is to be considered as a methodical process that consists in selecting, categorizing, comparing, synthesizing and interpreting data to provide relevant explanations of the problem under study. Therefore, the analysis process truly starts with a large quantity of data that is further cut down to small sets. Here, data analysis has been done through the use of Microsoft Excel 2007 spreadsheets to realize the tables and/or diagrams displayed in the following chapter, which deals with the findings of the study.

4. Findings

The total number of participants considered in this analysis is 260 distributed equally between SS1 and SS3 students. As such, there are 130 SS1 students and 130 SS3 students.

- **Background Information**

- **Question Items 1.4, 1.5 &1.6**

To diagnose the participants' motivation in studying English at the university is the aim of question items 1.4, 1.5 & 1.6. In question item 1.4, participants were asked:

Was studying English your first choice:

  Yes   *No*

Question item 1.5 is a follow up to the previous question and requires the participants who answered the previous question negatively to say *how they feel now that they are studying English* and were given the following options:

  a- Bored

  b- Motivated

  c- Indifferent

In fact, studying English was a personal choice of 80% of the participants, whereas, some of the participants (20%) were interested in other areas of study. Yet, despite the fact that English was not their first choice at the beginning, they then claimed to be motivated in studying it since their answer to the question item 1.5 was (b) with a percentage of 20%. By correlating the responses of question items 1.4 and 1.5, it can be said that the whole sample 100% was motivated in learning English, as displayed in the table below:

Table 1. Correlation of Participants' Answers to Question Items 1.4 &1.5

	Question item 1.4		Question item 1.5		
	Yes	No	a	B	c
SS1 participants	80%	20%	0%	20%	0%
SS3 participants	80%	20%	0%	20%	0%

Question item 1.6, too, requires the participants, who chose response (a) in question item 1.5, i.e., those who claim that they feel bored in studying English, to say whether their boredom was due to:

a- Other interests and expectations

b- Your negative attitudes towards the English people

c- Differences in beliefs and concepts between your culture and the English culture

Responses to 1.6 were not supplied then. Participants neither had negative attitudes towards English people nor apathetic to learn English because of cultural differences in beliefs and concepts. Accordingly, the forthcoming analysis of the data will take into account the students' motivation in learning English, an important variable in the learning process, in general, and cultural awareness acquisition, in particular.

- **Question Items 1.7 &1.8**

Question items 1.7 and 1.8 aim at probing the students' self-concept and awareness of their ability to communicate successfully with foreigners. The questions also aim at diagnosing the students' realization of the nature of communication that involves culture alongside the language used as well as the different aspects that are necessary for successful communication.

Question item 1.7 enquires the participants about their views with regard to their ability/inability to run a conversation with a native speaker. The participants had to answer with "Yes" or "No".

Question item 1.8 is designed specifically to those who considered themselves unable to do so. It deals with the possible hindrances that would face them when conversing with natives using the target language. This item dictates:

If no, is it because of:

    a- Linguistic problems

    b- Lack of cultural knowledge

    c- Inability to use linguistic expressions appropriately

    d- Other factors (psychological: self-confidence)

In fact, first year participants' responses to question item 1.7; can be divided into two groups, 40% of them answered "yes", i.e., they were able to run a conversation with native speakers, whereas, 60% claimed they were unable to do so. This was mainly due to linguistic problems (a) with 26.67%, inability to use linguistic expressions appropriately (c) with 26.67%, or the lack of cultural knowledge (b) with 6.66% of the participants' answers. The last choice (d), *psychological factors may hinder their ability to converse with native speakers,* was not taken into consideration by the participants (0%). This

343

has many interpretations that will be presented later in the discussion.

Additionally, in answering question item 1.7, 73.34% of SS3 students considered themselves able to run a conversation with the natives, whereas 26.66% said they were unable. Their responses are distributed as follows: Answer (a) = 0%, answer (b) = 25%, answer (c) = 0%, and answer (d) = 75%. Participants, at this level thought they had sufficient linguistic knowledge (a) about English, i.e., they master its grammar and vocabulary as well as the pragmatic knowledge (answer c). They did not have any problems with these two language aspects involved in communication. The two basic obstacles were the lack of cultural knowledge and self-confidence. More details are presented in the following table:

Table 2. Correlation of Participants' Answers to Question Items 1.7 &1.8

	Question item 1.7		Question item 1.8			
	Yes	No	a	b	C	d
SS1 participants	40%	60%	26.67%	6.66%	26.67%	0%
SS3 participants	73.34%	26.66%	0%	25%	0%	75%

In comparing the results yielded by the analysis of the responses of first year with that of the third year, some differences emerge. First of all, the percentage of participants who thought they were able to run conversations rose from 40% (SS1) to 73.34% (SS3).

This means that there is some kind of improvement in the course of learning English (for more details see below). Yet, this would help to confirm slightly one of the hidden assumptions that the more the learners get acquainted with the English language, the more they enlarge their bulk of knowledge necessary for achieving successful communication with the target language. Second, the reasons given for their inability to make successful communication were almost different between first and third year participants. SS1 students were interested in linguistics and pragmatics, two basic and primary elements to be included, hence learnt, by students in communication, whereas, SS3 students have developed other views on the nature of communication that involves culture and psychology. Hence, the latter category of participants show their awareness development alongside their learning progress.

SS1 participants' ignorance of the psychological factors can be interpreted either that they were confident of themselves or that they were not aware of the crucial role that their psychological state plays in their learning process, particularly, self-confidence. What can be, also, noticed from the obtained results is that pragmatic and linguistic problems are of equal value and interest to the participants.

In sum, the obtained results from the two samples show that all the participants were motivated in learning English at the university even if it was not their preferable choice. Hence, participants do think to have neither bad attitudes towards the English people nor problems of differences in beliefs and concepts between the Beninese culture and the English culture.

344

- **Linguistic and Pragmatic Competence**

The following part investigates the participants' linguistic and pragmatic knowledge. These two elements were included in this test on the basis of the Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC henceforth) components that were set by Byram (1997). Thus, including linguistic and pragmatic competence would help in the investigation of the students' cultural awareness acquisition as one of ICC components.

- **Question Items 2.1** & **2.2**

The first two parts (Question items 2.1 & 2.2) are of linguistic nature. The aim is to diagnose the participants' linguistic knowledge, hence competence. In 2.1, the subjects are required to "Fill in the blanks in some sentences using the appropriate verb from a list given..." The verbs provided are near synonyms that have some slight differences in their conceptual meanings. The expected answers to this question are the following:

1. *I **think** it is raining*

2. *Well, I **suppose** you know you could just show your face, couldn't you?*

3. *I **gather** there is to be a further inquiry*

4. *You mentioned two friends in particular who I **assume** are about the same age as you.*

In question item (2.2), the participants were required to "Indicate the different meanings that the term '**right**' has in a given conversation excerpt". The meanings referred are linguistically and culturally loaded connotations. The expected answers are the following:

      Right (1): **Conversational** implications.

      Right (2): **Intellectual** implications.

      Right (3): **Moral** implications.

The participants did not give these exact words but used some terms that give the approximate meaning.

Statistically speaking, with regard to SS1 participants, the overall percentage of the correct answers was 27.62%. These results show that the subjects' linguistic competence is below average. In the analysis of the participants' responses to the two question items related to the linguistic aspects of the language, it becomes clear that the participants did better with the first question with 18.10% and only 9.52% of their answers to second question. Hence, the correct answers to question item 2.1 could possibly be a matter of coincidence. Thus, in relation to the participants' responses to the question item 1.8 which indicates that 26.67% of their weakness is because of linguistic problems, it can be said that the participants were aware of their actual abilities.

As far as SS3, participants are concerned; their responses show that 61.92% of their answers are correct. Their linguistic competence was better in comparison to that of second year participants' linguistic knowledge as shown in the Table 3 below.

In 2.1, among the answers obtained, 50% were correct responses. This means that the participants have developed enough linguistic knowledge about English. It is believed then that there was no coincidence.

This was, also, proved by answers to question item 2.2 where 11.92% of the answers were correct. Participants understood and differentiated the different meanings that the term "right" has in the given conversation excerpt. In this part, there were no blank answers given by the subjects, as it was the case with first year participants. This shows the participants' achievements of linguistic competence.

Table 3. Distribution of Participants' Responses to Question items 2.1 & 2.2

	Question item 2.1	Question item 2.2
SS1 participants	18.10%	9.52%
SS3 participants	50%	11.92%

- **Question Item 2.3**

This sub-part is designed to evaluate pragmatic knowledge and competence. In fact, the content of this part comprises two situations where the participants are required to choose the appropriate expression in relation to the surrounding context.

In 2.3.1, the situation requires the respondents to apologize to someone after pushing him accidently. The statement is the following:

You accidently push someone behind you when getting on a bus s/he almost falls down. You say:

      a- Excuse me, I did not see you.

      b- I beg your pardon.

      c- I am sorry, I did not see you.

In fact, each of these expressions has its appropriate context of use. The appropriate expression to apologize, in this situation, is "*I am sorry, I did not see you*".

Statistically speaking, 66.66% of SS1 respondents apologized correctly in this situation, while 33.34% failed to do. Some of them (26.67%) answered (a) and 6.67% answered (b).

The statistics of SS3 participants was higher than that of first year participants. Indeed, 73.32% of the respondents succeeded in selecting the appropriate answer (c) whereas the rest (13.34%) was distributed between options (a) and (b).

In 2.3.2, the subjects are exposed to a situation where sociolinguistic rules should be taken into account rather than the pragmatic ones. The situation is about:

When you speak about a boss who takes right decisions concerning his employees, you say:

      a- He is good.

      b- He is correct.

      c- He is fair.

In this situation, too, the appropriate expression to be selected is (c), "*He is fair*" because option (a) *good* or (b) *correct* do not fit such a situation.

The answers of SS1 participants in this situation are distributed as follows: Option (c) = 40%, Option (a) = 33.34% and Option (b) = 26.66%. Concerning SS3 students' distribution, it is as follows: Option (a)

346

= 6.67%, Option (b) = 6.67%, Option (c) = 86.66%. These results are given below in tabular format:

Table 4. Participants' Responses Distribution in Situations 2.3.1 &2.3.2.

	Situation 2.3.1			Situation 2.3.2		
	a	b	c	a	B	c
SS1 participants	26.67%	6.67%	66.66%	33.34%	26.66%	40%
SS3 participants	13.34%	13.34%	73.32%	6.67%	6.67%	86.66%

A comparison of the two sample performances reveals that, as in linguistics, SS3 participants proved to be better than SS1 participants. This means that their pragmatic knowledge of the social rules of using English in different situations has developed alongside the linguistic one.

SS1 participants' performance in the two situations is different. In the first situation, 66.66% of the participants gave the appropriate answer, while in the second situation, only 40% did so. In correlating their total performance in question item 2.3 (50%) with their responses in question item 1.8, where 26.67% of them claimed that their failure to communicate successfully with natives is because of the lack of pragmatic knowledge(c), the possible explanation that can be given is that their answers to the first situation were a matter of pragmatic transfer. SS1 participants seem to have resorted to transfer their native language linguistic and social rules and apply that on English as a solution to their deficiency and lack of pragmatic rules that correspond to such situation.

Unlike SS1 participants, SS3 students' responses were not a matter of pragmatic transfer. This is revealed by the comparison between the two situations given (73.32% in the first situation and 86.66% in the second one) and the high total percentage in pragmatics with 80%. Moreover, these participants showed their awareness of their own actual abilities as they claim to have no problem in pragmatics (0% for inability to use linguistic expressions appropriately in 1.8).

All in all, SS3 participants have actually developed a certain degree of linguistic and pragmatic competence, as they claim in 1.8, in comparison to SS1 participants.

- **Cultural Knowledge and Awareness**

In the last part of the questionnaire administered to participants, the focus is on the cultural aspect of learning a foreign language. In other words, the purpose of this part is to probe the subjects' cultural knowledge of the English culture. It is divided into two main parts, the first is devoted to socio-cultural knowledge about the English etiquette and behavior and the second is devoted to cultural awareness where the participants were required to react and to hypothesize about possible reactions of native speakers in given situations.

- **Question Items 3.1 & 3.2**

To start with, question items 3.1 and 3.2 are designed to test the participants' cultural knowledge. In the first situation (3.1), unlike all the previous questions, the informants were required to *fill in the gaps with correct answers.* In this question item, no response choices were given. The participants were

347

expected to have some basic cultural knowledge about the English history and some factual knowledge. Expressed differently, this sub-part tries to highlight the participants' level of big C culture. The subjects were expected to give the following answers (written in bold):

> *a- The union jack is **the** flag of UK.*
>
> *b- Elizabeth 2, queen of UK from 1952, is the daughter of **George** 3 and Queen **Elizabeth**, the mother queen, and the mother of Prince **Charles** and Princess **Ann**.*
>
> *c- Margaret Thatcher **was the prime minister of UK** and known as **the iron lady**.*
>
> *d- Christmas day is on **25t^h December**.*

Concerning this sub-part, the analysis of data of SS1 participants showed that just 11.42% of the participants gave correct answers, 15.24% gave wrong answers and 73.34% of them did not give any answer. The sentences were left blank which means that these participants do not have enough factual knowledge about the English culture and history.

SS3 participants, at this level, showed more interest in the cultural side of the English language in the sense that 17.14% of them gave appropriate answers and 82.86% of them gave inappropriate ones.

Question item 3.2 aims at investigating the subjects' knowledge about some English behavioral patterns. The participants were required to *say whether the given statements are true or false* in relation to English behavioral conventions while eating and at work. Some of these statements are:

> *a- The host himself starts eating before the guest.*
>
> *b- At the end of the meal, the knife and fork should be put on the side of the plate.*
>
> *c- At work, it is not important what you wear but how you do work.*
>
> *d- At work, the employees are treated differently, each according to her/his educational qualification.*

All the statements given are *false*. The data obtained from SS1 student participants, on the one hand, show that 41.66% of them gave correct answers. Approximately, half of the answers given were obtained.

On the other hand, 50% of the SS3subjects gave correct answers. Thus, it can be said that both categories of participants were imparted with enough behavioral patterns of English culture but with an improvement within third year sample.

Table 5. Participants' Performance in Question Items 3.1 &3.2

	Question item 3.1	Question item 3.2
SS1 participants	11.42%	41.66%
SS3 participants	17.14%	50%

While observing the figures above, it can be noticed that the participants' performance in both groups in the two question items (3.1 and 3.2) is largely different. The difference was about 30% (SS1 participants shifted from 11.42% to 41.66% while third year participants from 17.14% to 50%).

Additionally, the majority of the correct responses in 3.1 were that of (c) and (d).

This is, in fact, one of the contradictions that emerge from the results obtained. Participants were expected to have more factual knowledge of the English culture rather than knowledge about English social behavioral patterns. This can have two explanations: either participants are more interested in acquiring knowledge about English people behavioural patterns and their social rules that would serve their daily use of the language instead of internalizing bulk of useless factual knowledge or that their acceptable performance in 3.2 was a matter of coincidence.

SS3 participants' total performance in this part (3.1 and 3.2) is measured with 29.09% in comparison to 21.82% of the SS1 participants. This indicates that culture acquisition is consistent with language acquisition; one of the interesting points of this research hypothesis.

- **Question Item 3.3**

Question items 3.3 and 3.4 deal with cultural awareness. The questions in this sub-part are of MCQ nature. The informants were provided with three options or alternatives to choose from.

Question item 3.3 tries to achieve one of the present research aims. It attempts to highlight the influence of cultural awareness on the participants' language proficiency and communicative performance. In this part, the informants were presented with two different situations that may cause some misunderstanding between people, especially a native and a non-native speaker.

In 3.3.1, the situation is a business call dialogue. Thus, formality and politeness between the interlocutors were to be taken into consideration because of the common conversational and social rules followed in such contexts (politeness the conversational sequences to be followed in order to establish social relationships). In this conversation excerpt, there was no consensus in interaction between the interlocutors (Cooperative principle of Grice). This would engender an intercultural misunderstanding and a disorientation of the participants behavioural reaction because of unexpected answers interpreted in a wrong way. This misinterpretation of the businessman's intention would reveal the participants' lack of cultural awareness. The problematic expression is "*I am hot*" as a response to "*how are you*". There were three different answers that may indicate the participants' position; whether they had some degree of cultural awareness or not, and how that would influence their language proficiency or language fluency in communication. The question given was: *How would you react to BM's answer:*

  a- You say you're what!

  b- You continue the conversation about the heat.

  c- You pretend not to hear well and you move to the main topic.

The appropriate reaction, which indicates the participants' cultural awareness, is (b). Choosing the third option would indicate the opposite, i.e., the participants' unawareness.

Statistically speaking, SS1 participants' answers distribution was as follows: 6.66% of the participants chose (b) (right answer); 33.34% (a) and 60% (c). These results show the informants' unawareness of this culturally loaded linguistic expression and reveal clearly its influence on the conversation flow.

The participants, here, did not take the behaviour as it is but did interpret it before reacting, a basic hindrance in achieving intercultural awareness (Hofstede, 2002).

For SS3 participants, 20% of the respondents chose (b) (right answer) 13.34% (a) and 66.66% (c). These statistics show that despite their low performance in this situation, more improvement or awareness is acquired in comparison with the SS1 students' group.

The second situation (3.3.2) is approximately similar. The puzzling answer is "yes, *in a manner of speaking*" as a response of a stranger to a student's enquiry about his job "*Oh, yes, are you a student*". The three reactions given are as follows:

   a- You continue asking questions till you understand his job.

   b- You stop talking to him.

   c- You change the topic.

The expected answer is: (a). the two other options (c and d) indicate unawareness or misinterpretation of the stranger's response.

Concerning this situation, the data generated from SS1 students' sample show that 46.67% of the participants answered (a), 26.67% answered (b) and 26.67% answered (c). In this situation, approximately, half of the participants responded appropriately.

For SS3 informants, the generated data show that 60% answered (a), 20% answered (b) and 20% answered (c). In this situation, too, a development of the SS3 participants' performance is clear.

Table 6. Distribution of Participants' Responses in Situations 3.3.1 &3.3.2

	Situation 3.3.1			Situation 3.3.2		
	A	b	c	a	b	C
SS1 participants	33.34%	6.66%	60%	46.67%	26.67%	26.67%
SS3 participants	13.34%	20%	66.66%	60%	20%	20%

As mentioned in the above figure, a contradiction between the two situations in first year collected data is noticeable. The second situation was correctly answered in comparison with the first one. This can have many interpretations: first, the expression used in the second situation does not cause as much misunderstanding on the part of the participants as that in the first situation. Second, the participants did not recognize the real meaning of the expression "*I am hot*", or that the obtained data of responses on this situation was a matter of shared cultural values between the participants and not a matter of awareness.

Another important point in this part is that the obtained data of SS1 students from the two situations reveal some of Hofstede values theory. This is clearly shown by the two highly scored answers 60% (c) and 46.67% (a) in both situations (3.3.1-3.3.2) where participants do share approximately the same cultural values and visions towards the external world which in turn influences their behavioral patterns or reactions with people from different cultural backgrounds.

350

This explanation can be given, also, to SS3 student participants. In fact, they share the same cultural values towards the English people as that of SS1 participants. SS3participants chose (c) and (a) with 66.66% and 60% respectively in both situations (3.3.1-3.3.2).

- **Question Item 3.4**

The last part in this WDCT is in the form of MCQ with three options in four situations that involve culturally bound reactions. It aims at uncovering the students' cultural awareness in terms of cross-cultural differences in beliefs and concepts between the English and Beninese native cultures. The informants were required to hypothesize about a native's reaction in some given situations and to give their own reactions in the same situation.

The data generated about the participants' reactions will be evaluated in relation to the frequency of occurrences for each given item, for both their own reaction as Beninese people and their hypotheses about the English people reactions.

In this part, the obtained data for SS1 informants show that 32% only were able to hypothesize appropriately concerning the native speaker's reaction. This clearly shows the participants' unawareness of the cross-cultural differences between the native and the target culture. While for SS3 participants, 51.42% of them were able to hypothesize appropriately concerning the native speaker's reaction.

- **Situation 3.4.1**

In the first situation (3.4.1), there was *a man who scattered another man's bag on the ground while he was hurrying in order to be on time for his job interview*. The participants were required to give their own reactions as well as that of the native speaker from this set of options if they were in the place of the first man (who was in a hurry):

     a- To apologize and keep running.

     b- Not to apologize and to keep running.

     c- To stop, apologize, and give the man a hand to gather what is scattered.

Concerning the English people reaction, the appropriate answer was (c) obtained by 20% of SS1 participants, while 60% was given to (a) and 20% to (b). With regard to their own reactions (as Beninese) in this situation, 80% answered (c) and 20% answered (a) and 0% answered (b).

For SS3 participants' responses on the native speaker reaction, the obtained data was as follows: 46.66% (a); 13.34% (b); 40% (c), With regard to their own reaction, 66.66% answered (c), 6.66% answered (b); and 26.66% answered (a). This data are displayed in the figure below :

Table 7. Participants' Responses Distribution in Situation 3.4.1

	Native'sreaction			Non-native reaction		
	a	b	c	a	b	C
SS1 participants	60%	20%	20%	20%	0%	80%
SS3 participants	46.66%	13.34%	40%	26.66%	6.66%	66.66%

In the analysis of this situation, some conclusions can be drawn: The participants' awareness of the English cultural values seems to improve between SS1 and SS3 data (20%-40%), whereas, their own reactions are nearly similar with regard to their answers distribution. This means that they share the same cultural values, which are similar to those of the English people.

- **Situation 3.4.2**

In (3.4.2), the situation involves *two neighbors where one refused the other's complaint*. The proposed reactions were:

    a- To respect the neighbor's view and return back.

    b- To get into a hot argument with the neighbor.

    c- Not to care.

The appropriate answer for the native reaction was (a) obtained by 46.38% of SS1 participants. The others (26.66%) answered (b) and 26.66% answered (c).When expressing their own reactions, these participants mostly agree on (a) with 46.66% of the total number of answers; 40% chose (b); and 13.34% chose (c).

SS3 participants showed more awareness in this situation; 46.66% of them answered (a), whereas the rest chose (b) 26.67% and (c) 26.67%. With regard to their reactions in this situation, the most often chosen option is (a) with 53.34% of the answers (a), 20% (b) and 26.66% was given to (c).The same points as in the first situation are to be drawn.

Table 8. Participants ' Responses Distribution in Situation 3.4.2 2.

	Native reaction				Non-native reaction			
	a	b		c	a	b		C
SS1 participants	46	.38%	26.66%	26	.66%	46,66%	40%	13.	34%
SS3 participants	46	.66%	26.67%	13.	34%	53.34%	20%	26.	66%

- **Situation 3.4.3**

In 3.4.3, the situation is about the participant's reaction about *someone jumping the queue while buying a ticket for a theatre show*. The choices given are the following:

    a- To lecture the man on good manners.

    b- Not to comment on such silly situations.

    c- To jump the queue.

The answer provided by the near native speaker was (b) which was answered by 20% of SS1 participants while 33.34% have responded (a) and 46.66% (c). Their own reaction was basically (a) as responded by 73.34% of the participants, while 20% reacted as in (b), and 6.66% as in (c).

SS3 students' sample was different from that of SS1, either in relation to their hypotheses about the native's reaction or about their own reaction. Concerning their hypotheses about the native's reaction 66.66% of them responded (b) while 26.67% responded (a) and 6.67% did (c). The data obtained about

their own reactions is as follows: (b) 66.66%; (a) 20%; and 13.34% for (c).this data is displayed shown in the following figure:

Table 9. Participants' Responses Distribution in Situation 4.3 2.

	Native reaction			Non-native reaction		
	a	b	c	a	b	c
SS1 participants	33.34%	20%	46.66%	73.34%	20%	6.66%
SS3 participants	26.67%	66.66%	6.67%	20%	66.66%	13.34%

- **Situation 3.4.4**

In (3.4.4), the situation is about the participant's reaction about *his friend who does show up at the time of the arrangement, whether they*:

     a- Will become angry and leave.

     b- Will wait till he comes.

     c- Will call him to know if everything is all right.

The appropriate answer to this situation as provided by the near native speaker is either (b) or (c). Concerning SS1 participants data, the answers' distribution about the native reaction was as follows: 40% (a); 40% (b); and 20% (c), while they chose to react as in(c) with 100%.

For SS3 participants' data, the two appropriate answers about the English native reaction were scored with 40% to (b) and 40% to (c) while (a) was chosen by 20% of the participants. Meanwhile, their own reactions were distributed as follows: 60% (c); 13.34% (b); 26.66% (a). This data is displayed in the table below:

Table 10. Participants' Responses Distribution in Situation 3.4.4

	Native reaction			Non-native reaction		
	a	b	c	a	b	C
SS1 participants	40%	40%	20%	0%	0%	100%
SS3 participants	20%	40%	40%	26.66% **i**	13.34%	60%

In order to clarify the picture of the participants' overall performance in the Discourse Completion Task, Table 11 below presents the overall results obtained in the different parts:

Table 11. Participants' Overall Performance in the Test

	Motivation	*Linguistic and pragmaticknowledge*	*Cultural knowledgeand awareness*
SS1 participants	100%	32.60%	26.29%
SS3 participants	100%	65.92%	35.18%

This summary table shows clearly the differences between the performances of SS1 and SS3 students either in linguistic or cultural knowledge. This reveals that the more learners progress in their learning of English, the more they develop their knowledge about the linguistic, pragmatic and cultural aspects of language. Additionally, despite the fact that all the participants are motivated, a difference between their linguistic and cultural input is revealed. Linguistic knowledge is higher than the cultural one, which means that culture is not equally acquired/taught as the grammatical rules of English.

5. Discussion

As can be observed through each of the tables displayed above, many conclusions and interpretations can be drawn either at level of difference between the two sample participants performances or at the level of the whole performance between the different parts that comprise the test. These conclusions will be presented below because of a correlation of the whole test obtained results in different parts.

Starting from the main conclusion of this research, Beninese learners' cultural awareness is not perfectly acquired. Indeed, they do show a lack of cultural awareness of the cultural dimension of English being a foreign language in Benin. This is the case of both SS1 and SS3participants, despite the subtle improvement in their performances, as mentioned in last part of the test (3.4) in the four different situations.

Subjects, then, have not suspended their common stereotypes about the English people and do use their own cultural values as a standard to judge natives behaviours. They have not developed from their feeling of ethnocentricity to ethno-relativity because of their unawareness of the cross-cultural differences between their culture and the English one. Moreover, participants do not react as they observe the behavior but as they interpret it. Meanwhile, a culturally aware person is the one who can deal with the actual behavior as it is with no interpretation that is based on his own stereotypes so that to avoid misinterpretations of culturally different behaviors (Hofstede, 2002).

Another point, which corresponds to Hofstede theory, is that of the shared cultural values. This was investigated in the participants' responses about their own reactions in 3.4 to the given situations. Participants in this research share the same cultural values or visions that influence their behaviors in communication.

Moreover, the lack of cultural awareness has influenced their linguistic and communicative performance in English, that is to say the lack of cultural awareness accounts for their language proficiency enhancement failure as mentioned in (3.3) where 6, 66% in 3.3.1 and 46.67% in 3.3.2 of SS1 participants have correctly responded the two situations while 20 % in 3.3.1 and 60% in 3.3.2 by SS3 participants.

Linguistic knowledge proved to be insufficient for developing language proficiency and enhancing cultural awareness. As the case with SS3 participants, despite their good performance in linguistics and pragmatics (65.92%), and the low performance in cultural knowledge evaluation (29.09%), their cultural awareness is not yet perfectly acquired.

354

Additionally, the lack of cultural knowledge has been proved in 2.2 where some cultural knowledge was necessary to answer in a correct way where only 9.52% of answers were obtained by SS1 participants and 11.92%. Similarly, this lack of cultural knowledge was proved in 2.3. SS1 participants showed their pragmatic transfer from their native language into English as mentioned in the obtained results between the two situations: 66.66% in 2.3.1 and 40% in 2.3.2.

Thus, teaching foreign languages in Benin may be considered as having missed the focus on the cultural side of the foreign language and country, which accounts for the learners' failure to run conversations in the target language or to achieve successful intercultural communication, hence holding negative attitudes about strangers. This point can be deduced from the learners' motivation to learn English and their unawareness of the cross-cultural differences between cultures and the cultural dimension of the foreign language and its effects on their language proficiency. The focus, as revealed from the data obtained, is laid on teaching linguistics, grammar rules, and vocabulary items, the necessary but not the only elements included in communication.

All these conclusions mean that students do not recognize the cultural aspect of the language despite their close relationship, which was proved in the dual and simultaneous improvement of SS3 students' performance in linguistics, and cultural knowledge, which, in turn, engenders their lack of cultural awareness being a key element in language proficiency and intercultural communicative competence.

In sum, it can be said that the Beninese learners' cultural awareness level is not sufficient to enable them to achieve successful communication in the target language. Despite the fact that they have enough linguistic knowledge about English, the lack of cultural knowledge is the source of their failure in acquiring cultural awareness. Thus, some recommendations and suggestions about enhancing the learners' cultural awareness that would help them to gain positive attitudes about the English culture will be formulated in the following chapter.

6. Conclusion

In sum, the results of this study have shown that Beninese learners' cultural awareness level is not sufficient to enable them to achieve successful communication in the target language. Despite the fact that they have enough linguistic knowledge about English, the lack of cultural knowledge is the source of their failure in acquiring cultural awareness.

Further studies are needed to address the limitations to the present study among which one limitation is related to the research instruments: a test has been used for data collection since, as indicated by Hounkpetodé (2016) and Gnonlonfoun (2014), the most appropriate tool for the topic under investigation. Another limitation is about the research area and population: post-beginners of the Littoral region in Benin. Attention has not been focused on learners of other levels (intermediate and beginner levels) and from other regions, who are definitely excluded from this study. Still, another limitation is in the fact that participants have all been selected randomly. Gender balance has not been considered during the selection of target population.

355

References

Adler, P. S. (1975). The transitional experience: An alternative view of culture shock. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, *15*(4), 13. https://doi.org/10.1177/002216787501500403

Aguilar, M. J. C. (2007). Dealing with intercultural communicative competence in the FL classroom. In S. Eva Alcon, & J. M. P. Safont (Eds.), *Intercultural language use and language learning* (pp. 59-78). The Netherlands: Springer.

Austin, John L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Clarendon, Oxford.

Bennett, M. J. (1993). Towards ethno relativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In R. M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience* (pp. 21-71). Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Boas, F. (1911). Introduction, handbook of American Indian languages. *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 40*. Smithsonian Institution, Washington.

Brooks, P. (2004). *Cultural intelligence: A guide to working with people from other cultures*. Yarmouth Maine: Intercultural Press.

Brown, D. H. (1987). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall Regent.

Bubel, C. (n.d.). "How are you?" "I am hot": An interactive analysis of small talk sequences in British-German telephone sales. In K. Buhrig, & Jan D. Ten Thije (Eds.), *Beyond misunderstanding: Linguistic analysis of intercultural communication* (pp. 245-259). Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Byram, M. (n.d.). Teaching culture and language: Towards an integrated model. In D. Buttjes, & M. Byram (Eds.), *Mediating languages and cultures* (pp. 17-32). Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M., & Fleming, M. (Eds.). (1998). *Language learning in intercultural perspective: Approaches through drama and ethnography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Byram, M., & Morgan, C. (1994). *Teaching-and-learning language-and-culture*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M., & Risager, K. (1999). *Language teachers, politics and cultures*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M., & Zarate, G. (1994). *Definitions, objectives, and assessment of sociocultural competence*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Byram, M., Nichols, A., & Stevens, D. (Eds.). (2001). *Developing intercultural competence in practice*. Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters, Ltd.

Byram, M., Sarries, V. E., & Taylor, L. (1991). *Cultural studies and language learning: A research report*. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

356

Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, *1*, 1-47. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/1.1.1

Chomsky, N. (1957). *Syntactic structures*. The Hague: Monton.

Cushman, D. P. et al. (1988). The rules perspective on organizational communication research. In G. M. Goldhaber, & G. A. Barnett (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational communication* (pp. 55-100). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Fantini, A. E. (2000). A central concern: Developing intercultural communicative competence. *School for international training occasional papers series*. Inaugural Issue.

Gaston, J. (1984). *Cultural awareness teaching techniques*. Brattleboro: Pro Lingua Associates.

Geertz, C. (1973). *Interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Goodenough, W. H. (1957). Cultural anthropology and linguistics. In P. L. Gravin (Ed.), *Report of the Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language* (pp. 74-78). Washington: Washington University Press.

Graham, John L. (1995). Culture, negotiations and international cooperation ventures. In S. M. Gass, & J. Neu (Eds.), *Speech acts across cultures* (pp.317-342). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Grice, P. (1975). Logic and conversation. In P. Cole, & J. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics: Speech acts* (pp. 41-58). New York: Academic Press.

Gumperz, J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gumperz, J., & Hymes, D. (1964). The ethnography of communication. *American anthropology*, *66*(6), 182.

Hall, B. J. (2002). *Among cultures: The challenge of communication, foreign language teaching*. Worth: Harcourt.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1975). *Learning how to mean: Explorations in the development of language*. London: Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M. A. K., & Hassan, R. (1989). *Language, context and text: Aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hanvey, R. (1979). Cross-cultural awareness. In E. C. Smith, & L. F. Luce (Eds.), *Towards internationalism: Readings in cross-cultural communication* (pp. 46-56). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Harris, M. (1999). *Theories of culture in postmodern times*. Walnut Creek: Altamira.

Hofstede, G. (1997). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hofstede, G. et al. (Eds.). (2002). *Exploring culture: Exercises, stories, and synthetic cultures*. HofstedeGert Jan.

Hymes, D. H. (1972). On communicative competence. In J. B. Pride, & J. Holmes (Eds.), *Sociolinguistics*. Harmond sworth, England: Penguin Books.

Kaikkonen, P. (2001). Intercultural Learning through Foreign Language Education. In V. kohonen, R. Jaatinen, P. Kaikkonen, & J. Lehtovaora (Eds.), *Experiential Learning in Foreign Language*

357

Education (pp. 61-105). Harlow, Essex: Longman.

Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kramsch, C. (1998). The privilege of the intercultural speaker. In M. Byram, & M. Fleming (Eds.), *Language learning in intercultural perspective: Approaches through drama and ethnography* (pp. 16-31). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lambert, W., & Gardner, R. (1972). *Attitudes and motivations in second language learning*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.

Littlewood, W. (1984). *Foreign and second language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lucy, J. (1992). *Language diversity and thought: A reformulation of the linguistic relativity hypothesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Maryam T. Y., & Hossein R. (2014). Developing Cultural Awareness in EFL Classroom at Secondary Schools Level in an Iran Educational Context (Ilam University) Ilam, Iran. In *2nd Global Conference on Linguistics and Foreign Language Teaching, Linelt-2014, Dubai-United Arab Emirates, December 11-13*.

McDonough, S. (1981). *Psychology in foreign language teaching*. London: Allen and Unvin.

Oberg, K. (1960). Culture shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology*, *7*(177). https://doi.org/10.1177/009182966000700405

Oxford, R. (1994). Teaching culture in the language classroom: Toward a new philosophy. In J. E. Alatis (Ed.), *Educational linguistics, cross-cultural communication, and global interdependence* (pp. 27-45). Georgetown University Press.

Paulston, C. B. (1992). *Linguistic and communicative competence: Topics in ESL*. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.

Porpora, D. V. (2001). *Landscapes of the soul: The loss of moral meaning in American life*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Principles of language learning and teaching. (2007). Pearson Education: Longman.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Risager, K. (2006). *Language and culture: Global flows and local complexity*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Risager, K. (2007). *Language and culture pedagogy: From a national to a transnational paradigm*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Ritlyova, A. (2009). Cultural Studies in Language Teaching. In M. Ferencik, & J. Horvath (Eds.), *Paper presented at the Language, Literature and culture in a changing Transatlantic World International conference*.

Sapir, E. (1949). Language. In D. G. Mandelbaun (Ed.), *Selected writings of Edward Sapir in language, culture, and personality* (pp. 7-23). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech Acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Seliger, H. (1988). Psycholinguistic issues in second language acquisition. In L. Beebe (Ed.), *Issue in second language acquisition: Multiple perspectives*. New York: Newbury House.

Shaules, J. (2007). Deep culture the hidden challenges of global living. In M. Byram, and A. Phipps (Eds.), *Languages for intercultural communication and education*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Tavares, R., & Cavalcanti, I. (1996). *Developing cultural awareness in EFL classrooms English Forum*, *34*(3), 1-18.

Tomalin, B., & Stempleski, S. (1993). *Cultural awareness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tylor, E. B. (1871). *Primitive culture: Researchers into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, language, art and custom*. London: John Murray.

Van Ek, J. (1987). *Objectives for foreign language learning*. Volume II: Levels. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, Council for Cultural Co-operation.

Whorf, B. L. (1956). *Language, thought, and reality*. New York: Wiley.

Yule, George. (1996). *The study of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.