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The Significance of Postcolonial Studies for The Cognitive, Socio-Affective, And Procedural Objectives In Multicultural Foreign Language Teaching

Volker Raddatz[1] (iD)

Corresponding Author:

Volker Raddatz

Department of English and American Studies, Humboldt University Berlin, Germany. Email: volker.raddatz@web.de

Abstract: The study of postcolonial literature and culture corresponds with recent developments in the didactics of foreign language teaching at the advanced secondary school level and, for that matter, at the university level as well. This article aims to highlight three significant interfaces connecting postcolonial and didactic discourse. Firstly, the challenge posed by the "center" to the "periphery" implies a radical change in perspective and consciousness. In parallel, modern didactics have been advocating a transition from a teacher-oriented to a student-oriented approach, as part of a paradigm shift from "instructivism" to "constructivism," emphasizing a high degree of self-determination and learner autonomy. Secondly, the dialectics of "self" and "other" involve a dual search for identity, which is directed both inwardly and outwardly. What holds true for individual students and their peer groups during adolescence is, to a varying extent, applicable to many postcolonial communities during their extended journey of rediscovering self-awareness and self-respect. Thirdly, the significance of the intercultural learning process, often associated with empathy, becomes evident in Postcolonial Studies, the foreign language classroom, and academic discourse.

1.   Introduction

For many decades, the adequate transformation of academic disciplines at the school level has been the subject of fierce controversies among representatives of tertiary and secondary education in Germany and elsewhere. These debates have primarily revolved around the traditional absence of vocational awareness in academic courses designed for prospective teachers, along with the lack of vocational requirements. These requirements encompass a wide range of cognitive, affective, and procedural teaching objectives, including knowledge, enthusiasm, and self-awareness, as well as essential tools to enhance the learning process. These tools involve the selection of student-relevant topics, the choice of stimulating methods, the social forms of interactive learning, various forms of feedback, and, not least, individual strategies to promote a reasonable degree of learner autonomy. Clearly, these meta-cognitive qualities extend beyond the mere acquisition of practical skills, encompassing a sophisticated network of cultural competence that involves multicultural communication, understanding, and empathy.

This shift in paradigms encourages critical awareness of affirmative patterns that have become evident in the widespread existence of individual and collective stereotypes, ranging from personal biases to intercultural prejudices. Psychologically, this awareness provides considerable insight into one of the most significant aspects of adolescence: the search for identity, largely motivated by the experience or fear of alienation. However, the traditional dichotomy between identity and alienation, based on the concepts of ethnic and national homogeneity, can no longer be sustained in light of postmodernist and postcolonial understandings of hybridity that embrace multiethnic and transnational features of identity, subject to constant change. Consequently, the experience of alienation can no longer be considered a rare exception to the rule. On the contrary, it is becoming a fragile mode of existence, characterized by dislocation and homelessness, which is terminologically manifested as the "third space" or "hyphenated existence" in postcolonialism, and referred to as "patchwork identity" in foreign language teaching. This article aims to highlight three significant interfaces connecting postcolonial and didactic discourse.

2.   Methodology

The modern concept of foreign language teaching is grounded in a set of key objectives, which have been deliberated by politicians, psychologists, sociologists, and representatives of primary, secondary, and tertiary education. In light of this

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[1] Department of English and American Studies, Humboldt University Berlin, Germany. Email: volker.raddatz@web.de

development, it becomes evident that the didactics of foreign language teaching intersect with certain aspects of postcolonial literature and culture. There are at least three significant interfaces that facilitate this convergence:

1. Under the dichotomy of "instructivism vs. constructivism," modern didactics advocate a shift from a teacher-oriented to a student-oriented approach. This shift is strongly felt in universities and schools alike, resulting in a social upheaval both in seminar rooms and classrooms. Correspondingly, within the framework of Postcolonial Studies, the substantial challenge posed by the "center" to the "periphery" implies a radical change in perspective and consciousness. This shift has led to a redefinition of roles among the agents of the colonial discourse.

2. The dialectics of understanding "self" and "other" entail a dual quest for identity, directed both inwardly and outwardly. This holds true for individual students and their peer groups during adolescence, as well as for many postcolonial communities striving to regain self-awareness, self-respect, and self-confidence through political, economic, and, most importantly, cultural independence.

3. Over the past decade, the relationship between education products and processes has been under scrutiny across all levels of education. This critical examination has resulted in a determination to emphasize (a) the importance of learning strategies and methodological resources, (b) the assessment of students based not only on cognitive knowledge (e.g., their command of English) but also on socio-affective knowledge (e.g., their ability to develop patterns of social behavior and intercultural appreciation), and (c) procedural knowledge, i.e., active participation in the learning process with a high degree of self-determination. This third objective, often referred to as learner autonomy, can manifest itself through various student responsibilities, such as collecting materials or establishing intercultural communication via email, modeled after the concept of a global classroom. Virtually all of these student-centered activities can be seen as forms of experiential learning, fostering social interaction within various collaborative settings, including partner work, teamwork, or project work.

In the subsequent discussion, we will attempt to theoretically and empirically highlight the corresponding elements between the didactic discourse and the postcolonial discourse. The examples chosen have been deliberately tailored for advanced students of English as a foreign language, both at the school and university levels.

3. Culture, Identity, And Alienation

In addition to its interdisciplinary nature, intercultural learning has become a fundamental concept in the study of foreign languages. Given the increasing internationalization of personal experiences through media, tourism, and global trade connections, education faces the challenge of preparing young individuals not only as future visitors to unfamiliar places but also, and perhaps more significantly, as future hosts within their own diverse, multicultural environments.

This paramount concern is often encapsulated in the widely accepted term "empathy," which signifies students' ability to empathize with cultures beyond their own realm of experience. Such a form of "goodwill" necessitates the interactive skills of communication partners to engage in the constant exchange of information and personal perspectives, including the reevaluation of stereotypes.

At this juncture, it is worth noting a significant shift in the concept of culture, which, along with communication, has been a foundational element of foreign language teaching for a considerable period. The term "culture" has evolved from a monolithic, homogeneous, normative, aesthetic, and elitist concept to a much more diverse, heterogeneous, dynamic, and everyday alternative. Its current tendency to encompass virtually all aspects of a particular community has unlocked a vast potential of themes, problems, and questions that were long overlooked.

Undoubtedly, this emphasis on popular culture has a significant impact on the scope, intensity, and quality of Postcolonial Studies, both at the tertiary and secondary levels. Emerging from a shared primary socialization experience, the newly defined notion of culture often appears as a people's "collective programming of the mind" (Hofstede, 1991).

The parameters discussed thus far constitute a critical reevaluation of teaching as a form of instruction versus learning as a process of construction. This reevaluation aligns with essential developments in the field of Postcolonial Studies, particularly the transition from colonial to postcolonial discourse. Long before Salman Rushdie's renowned TIMES interview titled "The Empire Writes Back - With A Vengeance" (1982), Australia, as a former colony, had begun to respond, directly and indirectly, to the former center. This response, characterized by bitterness, irony, or humor, emanated from the periphery, signifying not only a change in physical location but also a profound shift in perspective and cultural awareness. This transformation is eloquently demonstrated in works from various origins, such as J. Furphy's "Such Is Life" (1903) and D. Horne's "The Lucky Country" (1978).

In broader terms, Australian literary production, albeit less strikingly than in India or the Caribbean, reflects the postmodern and postcolonial assertion that revising the master-slave paradigm equates to revising the master narrative. This shift entails moving away from a single, quasi-objective text monopoly towards a multitude of subjectively crafted regional narratives. It is no surprise that Manning Clark, a prominent figure in Australian

historiography, concluded a visit by Chinua Achebe, a key figure in West African literature, with the following plea: "I hope you come back and speak again here because we need to shed the biases of our past. So, come and help the young grow up without the prejudices of their forefathers" (Achebe, 1988: 50).

Placed within its appropriate context, this appeal encompasses some of the central issues relevant to Postcolonial Studies and the didactics of foreign language teaching, including history, identity, multiculturalism, stereotypes, perspectivity, process-orientation, and interdisciplinarity. As discussed earlier, all these categories are reflected in the dialectics of understanding "self" and "other," with empathy as their educational objective.

4.   The dialectics of "self" and "other": ethnocentrism vs. empathy

In theory, the simultaneous process of rediscovering and re-establishing one's own identity through the gradual perception of someone else's (and vice versa) should result in empathy. In practice, however, ethnocentrism has given rise to various defense mechanisms against the recognition and appreciation of "otherness," including clichés, prejudices, and various forms of deliberate or unintended ignorance. For centuries, British colonial policies represented colonized peoples in terms of binary opposition and alterity, perpetuating the dichotomy of master and slave, often personified as Shakespeare's Prospero and Caliban:

"... by establishing oppositions between 'us' and 'them,' between self and other, fictions of empire served as an important means of maintaining an advantageous British self-image and constructing Britain's national identity." (Nünning/Nünning, 1996: 20)

However, the theoretical assumption of a fixed binary opposition between one dominant culture and marginalized subcultures has been deconstructed by poststructuralism, postmodernism, and postcolonialism. It is crucial for educators and scholars to realize that within the dialectics of understanding, any degree of xenophobia is logically counterproductive, as it promotes misunderstandings, hampers communication, and ultimately leaves both the "self" and the "other" in a state of disorientation.

A significant component of individual and collective identity is the process of remembering one's past. In the postcolonial context, this often entails a challenging and sometimes painful reconstruction of a people's "collective memory" (Hofstede, 1991: 5). Foreign language teaching has adopted a similar perspective on the relationship between identity and history: "Die Spurensicherung trägt bei zur Bestimmung der eigenen Identität." (Kubanek, 1987: 86). This effort to trace and uncover clues contributing to one's identity includes the perception and analysis of stereotypes, such as the European image of Africa (the noble savage) and Africans' own concept of négritude.

Through discussions of identity and alienation, understanding and misunderstanding, empathy and ethnocentrism, several cognitive, socio-affective, and procedural learning processes are initiated, serving both academic and educational purposes. The following examples aim to illustrate the fundamental assumption that postcolonial and didactic discourses share several points of correspondence, as outlined earlier.

A notable example of ethnocentrism is Rudyard Kipling's renowned poem "The White Man's Burden" (1899), widely regarded as an expression of imperialist ideology:

"Take up the White Man's Burden

Send forth the best ye breed -

Go bind your sons to exile

To serve your captives' needs;

To wait in a heavy harness

On fluttered folk and wild -

Your new caught, sullen people,

Half devil and half child."

Kipling, through this poem, articulates his arguments for missionary zeal and reveals his state of blind ethnocentrism, both cognitively and affectively.

Here is an example from colonial and postcolonial literature that illustrates the causes and effects of ethnocentrism, primarily Eurocentrism. Often, the unconscious inclination to consider one's personal views as absolute truths is rooted in the lasting effects of primary socialization. This clash of cultures frequently leads to misunderstandings ("errors of performance") that can ultimately jeopardize the entire process of intercultural communication.

M.R. Anand's novel "Coolie," written about a decade before India gained independence, provides a rich source of Anglo-Indian incompatibilities. The sequence of intercultural encounters is portrayed as a series of tragi-comical misunderstandings that culminate in confusion and embarrassment. These errors of performance, arising from a miscalculation of potentially sensitive situations, reveal a failure to respond adequately to unfamiliar

challenges. It is essential to note that, in 1936, such incongruities were still embedded in the colonial discourse, characterized by a traditional, unquestioned power dynamic between the center and the periphery.

Examples in the novel range from Indians' astonishment at the British way of making tea (35), their bewilderment at British notions of physical hygiene (39), to their struggles with British social behavior. A notable chapter highlights Mr. England's (representative of the center) reluctant visit to Babu Nathoo Ram's (representative of the periphery) home. Depending on one's perspective, the circumstances of this visit can be seen as either amusing or depressing. For the Indian host, the attempt to create a favorable impression turns into a social disaster, as his English guest seems incapable of responding positively to the numerous signals of hospitality. Instead, Mr. England's unrestrained display of ethnocentrism (specifically Anglocentrism) obstructs any perception, let alone appreciation, of otherness. Due to a mutual lack of empathy, the afternoon becomes a nightmare for both host and guest. Every detail, from the oppressive heat to the uncomfortable chairs, the nostalgic photos, the music, the food, the clumsy servants, and, most crucially, the inability to communicate, conspires against the ill-fated invitation. Both Mr. England's deep sigh ("He wished it would all be over soon.") and Babu Nathoo Ram's desperate groan ("And it had all gone to waste.") reflect the disastrous outcome (57, 59).

It is crucial to understand that the literary message, "The tea-party had been a fiasco" (60), aligns with the didactic message that the Anglo-Indian encounter, despite its good intentions, impedes the establishment of intercultural communication on cognitive, socio-affective, and procedural levels (Anand, 1957).

5. Periphery and centre: postcolonial discourse as a challenge to colonialism

During the past few decades, it has become evident how powerfully the former colonial periphery has responded to the center. Just one year after Salman Rushdie's TIMES interview, South African writer L. Nkosi emphasized the postcolonial quest for a newly defined identity: "Africa no longer desires to be spoken for by self-appointed spokesmen. Africa desires to speak for herself." (Nkosi, 1983: 111) As early as 1962, the colonial theme of "The White Man's Burden" encountered its postcolonial counterpart in Chinua Achebe's article, "The Black Writer's Burden."

Such a shift in perspective must have deeply affected V.S. Naipaul when he visited India, the country of his ancestors, which left him with profound disappointment: "It was my eye that had changed." (Naipaul, 1964: 48) Once again, this example highlights the complementary nature of postcolonial studies and foreign language teaching. The great significance of individual perception for interactive meaning negotiation in postmodern literary criticism corresponds to the importance of perspective in the constructivist approach to student-centered language learning.

The biography of South African writer Mphahlele, who experienced various exiles, reveals a profound and enduring identity crisis, both physical and mental, primarily resulting in a failure to develop intercultural empathy—the very objective of foreign language teaching:

"*I'm the personification of the African paradox, detribalized, Westernized, but still African -... Three years in Nigeria. Three years of adjustment, and still no solution in sight. A hard fact to live with: that once an exile, always one. My wife and I find we are still far from accepting whites in Nigeria simply as human beings, try as we might. ... I keep applying the standards of an underdog to Nigerian situations. When Nigerian smiles in gratitude at a white man's paternalistic or patronizing treatment of him, I react violently ... Only after the event do I remind myself that the Nigerian has ceased to regard the white man's presence as a challenge. ... And so I realize now something I was never aware of when I was in South Africa: that the white man has poisoned my life at the spring; it goes against me all the time, this anger, in my dealings with white people*." (Mphahlele, 1962: 66, 223 f.)

Most notably, the reference to "poisoning my life at the spring" illustrates the importance of previously acquired knowledge (Vorwissen) for the "top-down/bottom-up" process. This extends beyond cognitive data, encompassing socio-affective qualities and procedural skills, all of which are critical for fostering learner autonomy and tolerance. In light of Mphahlele's self-critical experience, the failure to change perspectives can hinder empathy and must be addressed through interactive forms of learning.

The tension between the process of alienation and the search for identity can be illustrated by numerous literary examples from various regions of the former British Empire. Concerning Africa, for instance, the alienation from one's roots is evident in Achebe's "Things Fall Apart," where the hero's personal tragedy mirrors the tribe's cultural disintegration due to the activities of English missionaries and the community's own lack of resistance and resilience. It's no surprise that this pioneering novel has been included in school syllabi in many countries worldwide.

6. The significance of perspectivity

Regarding India, the issue of alienation is explored in Salman Rushdie's fictional microcosm in "Satanic Verses," where the central theme of identity quest is introduced as early as chapter one through the recurring question "Who am I?". However, the attempt to answer this question in terms of a "metamorphosis from an Indian to a would-be Englishman" (Lindblad, 1992: 85) appears overly simplistic, as Rushdie does not seem to adhere to a fixed notion of identity. Instead, he advocates eclecticism and hybridity. In his "Imaginary Homelands," Rushdie states:

"One of the most absurd aspects of this quest for national authenticity is that - as far as India is concerned, anyway - it is completely fallacious to suppose that there is such a thing as a pure, unalloyed tradition from which to draw. The only people who seriously believe this are religious extremists. The rest of us understand that the very essence of Indian culture is that we possess a mixed tradition, a mélange of elements as disparate as ancient Mughal and contemporary Coca-Cola American. To say nothing of Muslim, Buddhist, Jain, Christian, Jewish, British, French, Portuguese, Marxist, Maoist, Trotskyist, Vietnamese, capitalist, and of course Hindu elements. Eclecticism, the ability to take from the world what seems fitting and to leave the rest, has always been a hallmark of the Indian tradition..." (Rushdie, 1991: 67).

In this context, the traditional belief that culture and nation are intertwined to form a system of collective identity is widely deconstructed, not only in India but also globally. Even Frantz Fanon's earlier calls for a "national consciousness" and a "national culture" (Fanon, 1967: passim) as survival strategies for colonized people are criticized as narrow and one-sided perspectives.

Salman Rushdie further challenges the conventional perspective by deconstructing not only the Indian experience but also by scrutinizing England from within. This dual perspective, which encompasses a focus on British identity, demonstrates to students how complex the central theme of "Decolonizing the Mind" can be. Rushdie provides a biting commentary on the postcolonial aftermath in Britain, which he refers to as "the new colony":

"But the members of the new colony have only one real problem, and that problem is white people. British racism, of course, is not our problem. It's yours. We simply suffer from the effects of your problem. And until you, the whites, see that the issue is not integration, or harmony, or multiculturalism, or immigration, but simply the business of facing up to and eradicating the prejudices within almost all of you, the citizens of your new, and last, Empire will be obliged to struggle against you." (Rushdie, 1991: 138).

It is evident that, with the departure of the colonial master, the master narrative also disappears—the concept of an objective frame of reference that is universally reliable and permanently valid. People develop their personal, highly selective habits of perception, which interactively compete with each other. Successfully implementing intercultural empathy, whether in multi-ethnic relations, patchwork families, or foreign language classrooms, requires individuals to realize the conditions of their own cultural backgrounds. Perspectivity and consciousness are intertwined, as identity is significantly shaped by the experience of a collective past. To conclude this line of thought, here is a statement by South African writer L. Nkosi, a spokesman for a suppressed majority, who titled his journey to self-awareness "A Question Of Identity":

"I took my color for granted. I discovered my Africanness the day I learned I was not only black but non-white. ... Here were three million whites living in the midst of twelve million blacks, and instead of describing themselves as non-blacks, they happily called us non-whites." (Nkosi, 1983: 31 f.)

7. Conclusions

The cognitive, psychological, and socio-affective aspects of the postcolonial experience have the potential to foster diverse forms of multicultural learning in schools and universities, particularly in classes and seminars characterized by distinct patchwork identities. The growing belief that this promotion of mutual understanding and empathy can be largely attributed to the alignment of academic discourse with classroom discourse represents a breakthrough in the history of foreign language teaching, as it consolidates previously disparate resources for the common goal's benefit.

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About the Author

Prof. Dr. Volker Raddatz
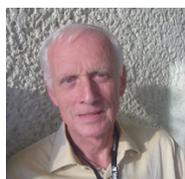
Professional Experience

2009 - 2018	11 SES assignments in Myanmar, Kazakhstan and Indonesia (further training of English teachers and translators, scientific writing and publications)
1994 – 2008	Professor in English teaching methods at the Humboldt University of Berlin
1992 – 1994	Professor in technical English at the University of Applied Sciences of Mainz, department of civil engineering and architecture
1971-1972	DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service)

Initial and Continuing Professional Training

1986	State examination as translator/interpreter at a state examination board in Berlin
1986	Post-doctoral lecturing qualification at the Free University of Berlin (Habilitation) (English/education)
1974	University of Saarbruecken: PhD in didactics in the subjects of English and education
1972 – 1974	Doctoral scholarship at Saarbruecken University
1970 - 1971	Teacher training college in Giessen: Second state examination (English, history)
1965 – 1966	University of Edinburgh: Scholarship at the Department of English
1963 – 1969	Free University of Berlin: English language and literature studies / history; first state examination.