

Ivanna, Three Little Pigs, and Cultural Sensitivity in Teaching English

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Abstract:

This paper deals with cultural sensitivity in teaching English. Several studies and research reveal the fact that most teachers encounter challenges in teaching English for learners from different cultures, so this paper shows how important that a teacher be aware of all learners' cultures before starting teaching. Some studies and research enhance the fact that cultural sensitivity has been representing a big challenge in teaching English, and it raises concerns how to deal with English language learners (ELLs) in classrooms. Schools, nowadays, are full of learners from different countries, speaking various languages with diverse beliefs and traditions. Accordingly, teachers might find challenges in teaching that huge diversity of cultures. What is culturally accepted by some learners might be rejected by others and vice versa. So, in this paper, the researcher is using qualitative research method, basing on literature review and interviews with ten international students to highlight how important for teachers to be culturally aware to avoid hurting some ELLs' feelings, focusing on the use of word 'pig' in diverse cultures. The analysis of the data obtained reveals that there is a challenging regarding cultural sensitivity in teaching English. Based on the findings, the researcher presents some recommendations ad hoc.

Keywords: *Cultural sensitivity; connotative meaning; striving reader; culture.*

1. Rationale:

It is difficult, if not impossible, to find a definition for language, as language is something abstract processed in the brain people use without thinking. In this vein, Omar and Altaieb (2015) claim that “it is not an easy task for people to define something abstract and keeps changing overtime, such as ‘language’” (p. 740). Yet, we might give some facts or features about the noise or sounds that an individual issues to communicate, which is called language, when decoded meaningfully by the receiver. Yet, being aware of the culture of the language used becomes a condition for capturing meaning and effective communication. In this paper, the researcher is focusing on a fact that says, “Language is culture,” which indicates that knowing about language entails knowing about its culture and vice versa.

Language is culture, which requires that we should know about one’s culture to understand their language. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) say it clearly that “when people who are talking don’t share the same culture, knowledge, values, and assumptions, mutual understanding can be especially difficult” (p. 231). People acquire their cultural attitudes from the surroundings, starting from the family and ending with the whole community, which is now represented in the globalized world. Being unaware of others’ cultures, might make trouble or misinterpretation. For example, Johnston (2004) said, “I recently attended an Indian wedding. Among other blunders, as I proceeded down the reception line, I tried to shake hands with the woman in the wedding party, which made them uncomfortable because it is not their normal greeting and because they were not used to such contact with men” (p. 7).

2. Literature Review:

As a secondary resource, the researcher uses literature review to cover the theoretical part of this study. The literature

review of this study highlights facts and information about language, culture, cultural sensitivity, and relevant topics. The literature review is core in this study as the researcher enhances the findings obtained from the participants of the study to quotations or paraphrasing from relevant articles or books.

2. 1. Language:

Though language is acquired through community, we cannot neglect the fact that language consists of rules, which, according to Chomsky, constitute universal grammar to help people acquire or learn native language as well foreign languages. So, Chomsky emphasizes “the role of universal grammar in language acquisitions, basing his generative grammar theory on the assumption that grammatical configurations work independently and, hence, can be defined away of any particular syntactic configuration” (Omar, 2018, p. 379). This indicates that acquiring language is innate, yet it is enhanced by communicating with others in reality.

Rodrigues and White (1974) agree with Chomsky and stipulate that in addition to this universal grammar system, a person should be acquainted with the semantic system, which includes word meanings, and syntactic system, which includes the structure of sentences and arrangements of words. Gilles and Pierce (2003) describe that universal grammar system as “one of many such meaning-making, meaning-sharing systems” (p. 68). In this vein, Omar (2019b) argues that “for the role of universal grammar in using language unconsciously, such universal rules enable people to communicate, using different structures and word order to determine the meaning of sentences” (p. 217).

Pei (1966) sees language as a system of codes or noise people use for communication arbitrarily with diverse meanings in various cultural contexts through vocal symbols in forms of speech. Similarly, Finocchiaro (1964) believes that language is a symbolic system people produce and use arbitrarily through vocal symbols to interact with others who live and share the

same cultural values and backgrounds. Omar and Altaieb (2015) believe that language is a tool “used to reveal people’s personal identities, backgrounds, characters, and ways of thinking in a particular cultural setting. Language is a tool used to shape and link all aspects of cultural backgrounds” (p. 742).

Omar (2018) believes that the symbolic system of language can never give similar meanings to the same word in different contexts as each person has a specific perspective to what has already been seen or thought. For example, talking about a tree is unclear as each person has a specific image in the external world (reference) to the tree based on their cultural context. Those who live in the south of Libya, for instance, most probably will think of palm trees; others who live in south of Lebanon will most probably think of rice trees; those who live in hot countries in Africa might think of banana or mango trees; and so on. But what about those who live in Eskimo, where trees can hardly live due to the freezing weather! In this regard, Omar (2012b) claims that “people use meaningful sounds and symbols in form of words to convey meaning in different cultural contexts” (p. 327).

Language, then, is a complete system spoken by people in specific time and specific situation. The people who belong to that system can interact with one another and share ideas about what they have seen or felt. Language in such a situation is a reality to its users for conveying specific meaning in specific time, which indicates that words have no specific meaning; rather, people give meanings to words in specific situations. Omar (2014) justifies that people who live in a same community for a while can communicate and share ideas effectively because they have similar references in realities to the images in the brain. So, talking about a tree, in the example above, is clear to the people who live in the same area in specific time and have similar cultural backgrounds.

Vygotsky focuses on the role of language in conveying meaning through words, taking into consideration that words that have similar meanings carry different semantic features based on a number of criteria, among of which is how the users of these words see the reality. So, when people capture the semantic features of these words, they can interact with one another, and words carry specific meaning, not general (Kozulin, 1986). This supports the idea that language works as a bridge among people, who perceive meanings of words based on their own beliefs governed by their deep-rooted ways of thinking. Accordingly, Slethaug (2007) emphasizes that “each culture has its own ideology, advantages, and limitations, and those who enter a new culture need to be aware of and sensitive to it” (p. 9).

2. 2. Culture:

People use language for several functions, “amongst of which is to communicate with each other in various social contexts” (Omar, 2019a, p. 25). It is believed that language constitutes people’s mode of ethnic identity through selecting the variety of language that fulfils its function as a way of communication. In this vein, Gitlin (1995) claims that “people think within the intellectual and cultural currents that surround them-currents with histories, even if the sources cannot be seen from downstream” (p. 200), which indicates overtly that people speak culture in a form of language.

However, culture plays a vital role in acquiring and learning language. For Halliday (Cited in Omar, 2020), language is “a socio-semiotic system embedded in its culture and used for functional purposes in various communicative situations” (p. 7). Though it is unclear to define culture, some scholars have given some facts and features for culture. For instance, Short and Fox (2003) believe that culture represents “all the ways in which people live and think in the world” (p. 6). This indicates that culture is what shapes peoples’ beliefs and perceptions to the

surroundings. It is worth mentioning here that people in various cultures perceive the surroundings differently. Hence, Moffett (1983) believes that culture “determines the thought of the individual through belief systems and postulates about nature built into its languages and supporting institutions” (p. 69). Language, for Jenkins (2009), is culture as it is “the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history” (p. 196).

Language, then, is used as a way of communication and a conveyer of people’s culture, where each complements the other. Culture is “a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world” (Jenkins, 2009, p. 196). Hall (1990), in one hand, classifies culture into overt and covert. The overt culture is the one that can be seen and described; the covert culture is the one that cannot be seen or described. Of course, the covert culture constitutes challenging to teachers in education and needs more care and investigation.

Bennet (1998), on the other hand, argues that intercultural communication is based on how people perceive and interact with differences and similarities in the given cultures. Accordingly, people interact and perceive reality based on the following two stages, which each contains three sub-stages:

1. Ethnocentrism: In this stage, people perceive the reality based on their own culture’s parameters. So, they always have the belief that their own culture is the most significant one. Accordingly, their own culture is the superior. In this stage, there are three sub-stages as:

A) Denial: An individual perceives cultural diversities with a naked eye, accepting cultural aspects as food, holidays, schedules, dress, and the like, but denying the deeper intrinsic diversities as religions, traditions, and the like.

B) Defense: An individual criticizes other cultures using negative terms to encounter the threats of other cultural

aspects. This defense leads to discrimination against other cultures.

C) Minimization: An individual thinks that people's behaviors and values are universal and similar to his.

2. Ethnorelativism: In this stage, people recognize that cultures are different and not universal. So, they have to learn other peoples' cultures to get involved in interactions. This stage contains three sub-stages as:

A) Acceptance: An individual sees the diversities of the cultural attitudes, even those that do not go with his, and respects the cultural differences for the sake of improving interactions with others.

B) Adaptation: An individual works to change his cultural behavior or attitude to fit the other culture in order to improve interactions in different cultural contexts.

C) Integration: An individual works hard to integrate the different cultural aspects and attitudes in order to go with his.

As we mentioned above, "language is culture," which entails that one can never interact with native speakers unless being aware of their cultural parameters because language carries the speaker's culture and ways of thinking. People can be distinguished through their ways of speaking, behaving, and thinking. For instance, Arabs ask about privacies, such as salaries and marital status, which are considered taboo for the Westerns. Hall (1990) gives an example regarding this issue, saying "Our first mistake is in the assessment of the value of bargaining in the Middle East and the role it plays in everyday life. Americans tend to look down on people who haggle. They restrict their serious trading to houses and automobiles. To the Arabs, on the other hand, bargaining is not only a means of passing a day but actually a technique of interpersonal relations. (p. 107)

People, in fact, use and understand language in their cultural contexts within people that belong to or at least be aware of that culture. People perceive and capture meanings of words not as a still reality in a particular situation, but as a carrier of some semantic features determined by speakers of these words. The word foxy, for instance, has different meanings in British, American, and Australian cultures. Whereas it means tricky in the British culture, it means sexy in the American and Australian cultures (Omar, 2012b).

2. 3. Cultural Sensitivity:

Cultural sensitivity is defined as “a set of skills that enables us to learn about and understand people who are different from ourselves, thereby becoming better able to serve them within their own communities” (PennState Extension, 2019, para. 1). According to Slethaug (2007), teachers should take care of the various types of cultural sensitivities, namely the social taboos while teaching cross-cultural classrooms, emphasizing that a teacher “will therefore have to decide what is culturally sensitive in a given locale and whether it is important (or legal) to show a film that violates these sensitivities” (p. 134).

The question of cultural sensitivity has been raised in education recently. Banks (2002), for example, emphasizes the role of culture as “a major concept in multicultural education” (p. 52). Other studies and research reveal that being aware of all students’ cultural backgrounds is core and sensitive in the field of education. Teachers need only not to be aware of how people use language properly, but also to know about their students’ own cultures that is because, as Pederson (1999) argues, culture is “the total way of life of a people including their interpersonal relations as well as their attitudes” (p. 7). Similarly, Arredondo et al. (1996) believe that culture provides “patterns of learned thinking and behavior of people communicated across generations through traditions, language, and artifacts” (p. 40).

However, culture, in its wide range, includes a set of beliefs, values, and thoughts of a group of people belonging to the same community, same ethnic group, same language, and same religion, which all of these make these people different from other people from other communities, other ethnic groups, other languages, and other religions. Thus, culture plays a crucial role in shaping each group according to their beliefs, values, and awareness of things surrounded, and this is what always causes a great deal of misinterpretations. For example, in the Western culture, looking down while somebody is talking is unacceptable, while it is acceptable and preferable in Eastern cultures. Therefore, it is very significant that people be culturally sensitive to understand, respect, and deal with others from other different cultures.

To show the importance of being culturally aware, Khan (2007) has narrated the below incident:

She was fuming with anger and deeply shocked as to why he did not shake her hand rather just said “Hello Maam”. I am referring to an incident in 1988 which happened in Karachi Pakistan during a function where many diplomats were invited. The lady who was angry was the wife of an American diplomat while the person who avoided shaking her hand was a high court judge. The lady thought she was not treated with respect while the judge as customary in most Muslim culture out of respect avoided shaking her hand and thus verbally greeted her. I was sitting on the same table with this lady, her husband and some other people and she got further shock when I explained to her that in Pakistan and in fact many Muslim countries men are not supposed to shake hands with females who are not their close relatives. It was only then that she cooled down. (para. 1)

According to the incident above, people might have the ability to distinguish one person from the other not only linguistically through the language spoken, but also culturally through the behaviors and the way of behaving, listening, and

speaking. For example, it might be easier for the receiver to culturally distinguish whether the speaker is American, British, Arabic, Chinese, and so forth. The receiver might be able to distinguish the cultural backgrounds of the speaker through mannerisms, way of standing, hand motions, the distance kept from the listener, head movement, listening posture, and many other minute cultural behaviors that indicate to the receiver impression about the speaker.

2. 4. Cultural Sensitivity in Classroom:

It is a matter of fact that countries are different not only because people in different countries speak different languages, but also because people have different cultures. People look at things culturally in different ways; thus, what is culturally accepted in one culture might be rejected in another, and vice versa. That is because, as Omar and Altaieb (2015) claim, “language can only exist only when it is immersed in the context of its culture. Similarly, culture can exist only when language centers its texture” (p. 742). For example, some European companies take symbols, such as ‘*dog*’, ‘*pig*’, and ‘*owl*’ as best ways for attracting customers. These three symbols particularly are not accepted in the Arabic culture, namely Muslims. Thus, we cannot expect that an Arab passenger uses an airline, whose symbol is an owl. In the Arabic culture, ‘*owl*’ is a symbol of a bad omen; whereas, ‘*owl*’ is a symbol of wisdom in the English culture.

The denotation of ‘*dog*’ in English and Arabic refer to the same kind of animal. Connotatively, English people associate ‘*dog*’ with faithfulness, good companion, and English people usually keep dogs in their houses as pets. Hence, the English use the expression ‘You are my lucky dog’ as a kind of praising. In contrast, most Arabs associate ‘*dog*’ with dirt, guarding and defending their properties from thieves. They see dogs as noisy animals that should not be kept inside houses. Hence, Arabs use the expression ‘dirty and guarding dog’. So, the expression ‘You

are my lucky dog' is a kind of compliment and praising in the English culture, but it is a kind of insulting and dispraising in the Arabic culture (Omar, 2012b).

Thanks to globalization, societies now are multicultural, where schools are full of students from different cultures, different languages, and different religions: Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, non-believers, and so many others. So, it seems so challenging for teachers to teach in such circumstances without being aware of their students' cultural sensitivities. I can imagine how Hindu students are psychologically hurt when a teacher teaches a funny book about cows, which are sacred in their culture. But the situation might be much more harmful when teachers talk badly about mice, which are worshiped in some cultures in India.

However, teaching a classroom full of students from different cultures is still one of the most challenging jobs a teacher may encounter in his career. Speaking one language in the classroom, let us say English, does not mean that these students share the same beliefs and cultural backgrounds (Altaieb and Omar, 2015). Similarly, students from the same country and speak the same language does not mean that they share the same cultural backgrounds. For example, students from the United States might have different cultural backgrounds though they speak the same language and belong to the same country. These students may differ in religions, beliefs, traditions, and so on; that is, they have different cultural backgrounds.

As language is described as a mode of human behavior and culture as patterned behavior, it is clear that language is a vital part of culture if not culture itself. In other words, people most often reflect their cultural attitudes in their ways of their speech patterns because they bring with them deeply-rooted backgrounds of culture. Language, in this sense, is a product of the culture, which is shaped by how the language allows its users to view it in several cultural contexts, which indicates that

language and culture reinforce each other. Hence, people need to be aware of cultural sensitivity in selecting the language used. In this regard, Jenkins (2009) states that:

Language, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture. Take English. It is spoken in Britain and in Sweden and Denmark. But for Swedish and Danish people, English is only a means of communication with non-Scandinavians. It is not a carrier of their culture. For the British, and particularly the English, it is additionally, and inseparably from its use as a tool of communication, a carrier of their culture and history (p. 195).

Khan (2007) has defined cultural sensitivity as “the ability to understand, relate to and respect the culture of other people” (para. 1). This indicates that teachers should be able to identify the cultural varieties among students in the classroom. Of course, it is not so easy sometimes that a teacher notices these varieties, namely in covert culture. But, in other situations, namely in overt culture, a teacher can identify these varieties easily. In either case, teachers are supposed to be able to see each individual as a unique identity affected, governed, and led by their beliefs, traditions, attitudes, values, languages, and the like.

Sekaquaptewa (Cited in Stent, Hazard, and Rivlin, 1973) argues that dealing with cultural sensitivity in education is very crucial, as public schools are now full of students from many different ethnic groups with completely different cultural backgrounds. Teaching such multiplicity of cultural sensitivities requires teachers to be aware of their own cultures besides all other students’ cultures. In this regard, Zanger (1991) claims that “when the relationship between teacher and student breaks down due to primary cultural differences, the consequences are disastrous for the learner. Cultural differences become a source of trouble between students and teachers” (pp. 18-19).

Consequently, taking into account that not all students are from the same cultural backgrounds represents a major step for

achieving educational purposes, needs, information, and skills, which all collaborate effectively for the development of education system in each society. Teachers need to be familiar with their students' cultural backgrounds before starting teaching as they do not teach curricula and language only, but they also teach cultures. To make in another way, "it seems impossible to learn English away from its cultural context" (Omar, 2012a, pp. 12-13).

2. 5. Conclusion:

The discussion above indicates that teaching a diversity of students requires, first of all, full knowledge about all students' cultural backgrounds and teaching according to that framework of cultural boundaries. On the contrary, teachers need to be sensitive to their students' feelings and emotions according to their deep-rooted cultural beliefs. In this regard, Carrasquillo and Rodriguez (2002) said, "Language minority students are racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse. Describing typical culturally diverse students is highly problematic, and educators must be careful not to stereotype all students from the same ethnic group" (p. 41).

3. Methodology of the Study:

To conduct this study and reach findings and recommendations, the researcher has followed some steps and procedures as below:

3. 1. Methodology of the Study:

In this study, the researcher conducted qualitative research method, where he based his findings and recommendations on the literature review, as a secondary resource, and the data obtained from the participants' interviews, as a primary resource. He based on his interpretation to the data obtained to reach the findings and then submit the recommendations. He interviewed the participants of the study and asked them

questions related to the use of the word ‘pig’ in different cultures. (See the appendix attached). The researcher’s goal in interviewing these participants was to find out whether these participants were culturally sensitive with the word ‘pig’ in their cultures or not.

3. 2. Problem of the Study:

Ivanna was a doctoral student in English Education at an American university. She started her program in Fall 2008 and graduated in Fall 2012. In Spring 2009, Ivanna took a class of *Striving Readers*, in which she was supposed to meet and work with a striving-reader student as a class requirement. Ivanna had to meet and work with that striving-reader student several times to see the student’s points of strengths and weaknesses and to help that striving-reader student improve points of strengths and tackle points of weaknesses.

The researcher knows Ivanna as she took almost ten classes with him in their doctoral program in English Education. The researcher had a good relationship with her as they started the doctoral program at the same semester, Fall 2008. Ivanna asked him if she could come to his apartment to meet and work with his daughter, Sana, who was 11 years old then and was a striving-reader student. Sana’s English was not good enough at that time, and she had difficulties in reading books in English. Sana was excited to meet and work with Ivanna.

Ivanna came to the apartment and brought with her a story named *Three Little Pigs*. For the first meeting, Ivanna sat with Sana and gave her the story, asking her to read. Doing so unintentionally, Ivanna hurt Sana’s feeling. Ivanna was not aware of what she was doing, and she did not realize that in Sana’s culture, as a Muslim, pigs are disgusting animals and completely avoided talking about, let alone reading a story about. In Islamic culture, pigs are pigs no matter little or big. Sana kept silent and turned her eyes away from the story, not showing any kind of interest to read.

Ivanna's experience of teaching Sana such a story, led the researcher to ask this question "Who is going to be blamed: Ivanna, Sana, or him?" In fact, Ivanna was completely unaware of Islamic cultural backgrounds, so she was unaware of Sana's cultural sensitivity. The researcher, thus, sees that there is a problem in this regard, namely if the class consists of students from various cultures.

3. 3. Questions of the Study:

Based on literature review, regarding culture and cultural sensitivity, and interviews with ten international students, the researcher posed the following questions to be answered as:

- How do the participants see '*pigs*' in their own cultures?
- What is the effect of the word '*pig*' on people in different cultures?
- What is the cultural sensitivity behind using the word '*pig*' in different cultures?

3. 4. Objectives of the Study:

The main objective of this study was to explore the role of cultural sensitivity in teaching students from multi cultures. Thus, the study focuses mainly on carrying out a thorough investigation about some facts relevant to cultural sensitivity and teaching multi-cultural students, through literature review and interviewing ten international students. Findings of this study propose some recommendations, according to the interviews with ten international students and analyzing their experiences, for understanding cultural sensitivity in classroom. This study, also, might be used for future investigations for the same or relevant topics.

3. 5. Participants of the Study:

The participants of this study are ten international students, who were studying at the University of Missouri Columbia. Five of the participants are Muslims from Albania, Jordan, Somalia, Tajikistan, and Turkey. Out of the five Muslim participants, two are Arabs from Jordan and Somalia. The other three are from Europe. Five of the participants are not Muslims. They are from China, Germany, Spain, South Korea, and Taiwan. Two are from Europe and three are from East Asia. The participants speak ten different native languages, but all share in using English as a foreign language in their home countries and as a second language in the United States. Seven of the participants were grad students, and three were undergrad. The participants had different majors though.

The table below shows some information about these participants, taking into account that the last three columns in the table include the participants' answers about questions regarding these titles. Also, more discussions about the participants' answers and comments are presented in findings, data analysis, and conclusion. The researcher is using the first two letters of the participant's name and the first two letters of the participant's country as pseudo names.

No.	Name	Country	Native language	Other languages	Level of education	Major
1.	AmAl	Albania	Albanian	English / some German / Italian / Arabic	PhD student	English TESOL
2.	MaJo	Jordan	Arabic	English	PhD student	Computer Science
3.	AlSo	Somalia	Somali	English	B.A. student	Political Science
4.	AzTa	Tajikistan	Tajik	Russian / English	PhD student	Sociology
5.	AdTu	Turkey	Turkish	English / Arabic	PhD student	Policy Science
6.	YaCh	China	Chinese	English/some	PhD	Reading

				French / Korean / Japanese	student	Literacy
7.	LyTa	Taiwan	Chinese Taiwanese	English/some Japanese	PhD student	English Education
8.	LoKo	S. Korea	Korean	English	PhD student	English Education
9.	SaSp	Spain	Spanish	English / Catalan	B.A. student	Journalism
10.	GoGe	Germany	German	English / French / Latin / little Spanish	B.A. student	Social Work

3. 6. Data Collection:

The researcher collected the data of this study from both primary and secondary resources. The primary resources included interviewing ten international students. The researcher based findings of this study on the participants' answers and comments besides his own observations during and after interviewing the interviewees. Interviewing the participants was core in conducting this study because it provided the researcher with opportunities to know more about the phenomenon of the study. As for the secondary resources, they included books, journals, articles, and Websites.

4. Data Analysis:

Question: Thinking about your native language and your culture, what associations do you have with the concept *pig*?

The data analysis shows that Muslim participants have perceptions different from non-Muslim participants. The data analysis shows that Turkish, Tajiks, Albanians, Somalis, and Jordanians (Muslim societies) avoid even talking about pigs. They see that these animals are completely prohibited. So, using '*pig*' is the highest rank of insult in these communities. Also, from Somalia, confirmed this, saying,

Traditionally, we are Muslim society and for us pigs we saw them very thing, that prohibited, have them or to eat them or, you know, to anything to do with pigs we see negative. So, if you say you look like pig means, also, we expression, you

know, society we have seen if pig something ugly. So, if you talk about pig, you talk about something ugly, physical appearance. For example, if you have physical appearance. If you compare some or you call pig that you are putting in ugly position or bad position.

AzTa, from Tajikistan, affirmed what is said above. He said, “Since my society is Muslim society and according to the Sharia according to the understanding of the people, we usually don’t use pig in our culture, and you cannot even find in some literature even, or people tried avoid to using of this.” AzTa’s speech indicates that it is not a good idea to use pigs even in literature. MaJo, from Jordan, kept laughing and did not give his comments about the use of the word ‘pig’ in his community.

AmAl, from Albania, was disgusted when he talked about pigs, saying “Pigs! God forbid. They are absolutely negative connotation. If you say to somebody, you know, like, they live like the pig, they have it (He said something in Albanian) in Albania. That is the ultimate negativity about to say to somebody, ‘It is a person who is also he is unjust and everything opportunity that’s a pig’.” Similarly, AdTu, from Turkey, was disgusted and answered in few words, saying, “Pigs, you know, we don’t like pigs.”

Dissimilar to Muslim communities, the word ‘pig’ might be seen neutrally or positively in some other communities. For example, in South Korea, seen pigs in dream is a sign of good luck, as LoKo explained, saying “Pigs is a kind of a symbol of good luck, usually money, economically. So, if you see pig in your dream, usually that we believe it says something good.” LyTa sees that ‘pig’ is not good, but ‘piggy’ is positive. She said, “Pig is not good. If I say because you call me pig, I am lazy or stupid. Pig is not good, but it is not, it depends on the context. Sometimes I would say you are like a cute piggy that is good. But if I say you are stupid as a pig, that’s not good.”

In Germany, having pigs in villages is acceptable as they are used for food. This is shown from GoGe quotation: “Pigs? They’re well. When I think about the pigs, I definitely think

about all the dirt first like the smell and like about farms and that they don't really like in the inner cities, like just like outside somewhere separated actually! I think about the food that" In China, using the word 'pig' to silly people is common. This is expressed by YaCh, who said, "Pigs! Pigs! When people like hurt other people or think other are silly, they will say you like a pig." In Spain, the use of the word 'pig' depends on the context. Question: Can you think of any expression that you use to refer to these animals?

The answers for this question vary, too. AdTu said, "Ya! If someone is really extremely angry, this person call the other one 'You are new pig.'" AzTa refused even to answer to this question. He answered, "You mean pigs, right? No, no, I cannot, I cannot, I cannot remember." His answers with five negations in one sentence indicateing that he does not like to talk about pigs. Also sees that greedy people are called pigs in his culture. He said, "Pigs? If somebody pig, somebody who eats a lot. So, I actually see people if they call you a pig means sometimes you ugly and you eat too much, got big stomach, big belly. So, we call them pigs those who have big bellies".

While MaJo said, "Auum, they used usually in terms of cursing", AmAl thinks that those who do not care are seen as pigs in the Albanian culture. He confirmed that

I see (long thinking). We say for somebody, for example, some has a pig's skin, that means the person (He said some words in Albanian) which means the person is kind of is not open to any criticism, or he doesn't care about anything. He's just watching his own business, and he is sometimes in English he's got a pig's skin. But in Albania, we say (He said some words in Albanian) that means he is very. He doesn't care about what's going on around him, no matter criticism or something that he doesn't care.

In Chine, people use the expression "As stupid as a pig." In South Korea and Taiwan, people do not have expressions related to pigs as pigs have positive connotation in South Korea and

neutral connotation in Taiwan as LoKo and LyTa explained. In Germany and Spain, they use expressions related to pigs in the eating setting particularly. GoGe said, “Pigs in Germany are often used as like insults, so like ‘Hay you behave like a pig; you eat like a pig’ things like that,’ so there like viewed as. I don’t know like very. We don’t really think about them very highly just, ya.” SaSp said, “Ya! Like we use (She speaks in Spanish) don’t be a pig. Maybe like a person is not behaving properly; let’s say while he is eating just like using his hands, and like, you know, it is like don’t behave like a pig (big laugh), I would say, (big laugh).”

All of the participants - except AlSo and LoKo – see that the word ‘pig’ has a negative connotation in the English culture. AaAl justifies that, saying “Because pig in the connotation, the symbol of someone or something dirty, nasty, and something that is basically pretty much wild and sadness.” YaCh explained, “Oh! I don’t know if like English speaking people like pig or not, but like in my culture, we always say like the most like a pig that probably that is stupid and not very good.” SaSp said, “Uuuuum I guess because of the connotation it has like pig has a negative connotation in general terms, so I think it’s, you know, like comparing, like something, like nasty or, like just dirty!” GoGe justified, “Uuum because usually pigs are considered to be like dirty because they are in the open like playing around in the mud.”

The proverb: That’s like putting lipstick in a pig.

Based on how the participants see pigs in their own cultures, there were several different interpretations for the above proverb. For example, AzTa, from Tajikistan, interpreted this expression as an indicator to originality, saying, “If original things you never can change. Doing some artificial action or something. So, original is original.” YaCh, from Chine, had a different perspective about this expression, where she thought that ‘pig’ was an indication to stupidity. Hence, she interpreted this expression as “So, I think this sentence may mean it is not

necessary to do this.” LyTa, from Taiwan, was thinking that saying something like this was funny. She could not imagine a pig with a lipstick. She laughed and commented, “See putting a stick, you can visualize (big laugh) putting a lipstick on a pig! It is very funny, right?” LoKo, from South Korea, and AdTu, from Turkey could not imagine the idea and refused to give any interpretation to this expression.

Similar to LoKo and AdTu, MaJo, from Jordan, did not like to give his guessing about this expression, but he commented, saying, “Actually I am not sure because somehow I heard some, for example, in the movies, they care by using ‘You pig’ which means not good.” AmAl, from Albania, was sure from his interpretation to that expression, which was “cover an image portrait in a way it isn’t you try a kind of superficial, changing to something that simply not the thing one to be or the thing that matches to for something. So, it is like you want to alter the form but the content is bad.”

SaSp, from Spain, heard about this expression, so she interpreted it as “It means that even though you can put like tons of makeup you like beautify something like it is not going to do any good. It doesn’t matter how try to like beautiful it. It always going to look ugly or bad.” GoGe, from Germany, did not hear about this expression before, but he guessed the meaning, saying, “I haven’t, but I guess it means something like trying to cover up something ugly not to offense like a pig now, but something to cover out something ugly with something more beautiful like just hiding something.”

Looking carefully at these interpretations, made the researcher think of a study closer to find appropriate justification for that diversity of interpretations. In an article, which was about “figurative meanings of animal terms,” Nesi (1995) claimed that “many common terms such as ‘cat,’ ‘cow’ and ‘mouse’ were found to have a wide range of figurative meanings, and discussions with informants revealed that even

advanced learners tend to think in terms of the connotations of their first culture when they encounter or use these words in a figurative sense in English” (p. 272).

5. Findings of the Study:

Based on analyzing the data obtained from the participants' interviews, the researcher has reached the following findings:

- The concept 'pig' has different associations in different cultures. For example, seeing a pig in dream in South Korea is an omen of good luck. The Taiwanese see 'pig' negative, but 'piggy' is positive though 'pig' and 'piggy' indicate the same animal. And maybe that is why Ivanna selected *Three Little Pigs*. Those who use their hands in eating are called pigs in Spain. In Germany, 'pig' is associated with dirt and bad smell. In China, 'pig' is an indication to stupidity and silliness. The Turkish see that 'pig' is a term called for angry people. Somalis call ugly people as pigs. In Albania, unjust people are called pigs.
- Language presents different meanings to same words, and these meanings change from one cultural context into another according to how people use and see these words in their communities. In this regard, Omar (2012b) claims that “meanings of words differ from one cultural context into another according to the connotative effects of these words on people using them” (p. 334).
- Dictionary meanings can be seen and understood similarly in different cultural contexts, but connotative meanings vary according to the effect of a word in the community. In this vein, Nida (1998) argues that people of different cultures can refer to different connotations while using the same language forms. For example, saying 'lunch' an Englishman may be referring to hamburger, French fries, or pizza, but a Chinese man will most probably be referring to steamed bread or rice.
- Cultural background about English helps English language learners understand connotative meanings of words in

different cultural context. In this regard, Bobda (2009) explains that “the cultural context helps to understand the connotative meaning. It is the cultural context which determines the kind of association that a word has for us” (379).

- When English language learners lack English cultural backgrounds, their own cultures dominate their interpretations for English words. This is seen in some of the participants’ answers to the English proverb ‘That’s like putting lipstick in a pig,’ in which every participant’s meaning was dominated by their cultural background.
- The participants’ understanding of the word meanings is based on the effects of the word on people in their own cultures. So, there were different associations, attitudes, and meanings to the same expression. For example, pigs bring luck in South Korea and are completely forbidden in Islamic cultures.
- Lack of cultural knowledge may result in communication failure even when the speaker is apparently fluent in the language.
- The confusion between cultural context meanings often causes misunderstandings and misinterpretations among people in different cultures.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings obtained, the following recommendations are presented:

- It is essential that teachers consider meanings of words connotatively, not denotatively, because these meanings change from one community into another, so “much confusion happens because of understanding meanings of words denotatively, not connotatively” (Omar, 2012b, p. 334).
- Teachers should be aware that it is effect that gives a word its meaning, not a dictionary. This might be supported by Wolfram and Estes (2006), who said, “A given word may

have not only a central, core meaning but also a host of peripheral meanings and associations that make it difficult to pin down the meaning of the word with precision” (p. 60).

- Teachers should be aware of cultural sensitivity in dealing with their students in classrooms and fully responsible about acquiring full knowledge of all different cultures in their classrooms. In this vein, Peregoy and Boyle (2008) argue that “our first task as teachers, then, is to become aware of our students’ personal histories and cultures, so as to understand their feelings, frustrations, hopes, and aspirations” (p. 3).
- Teachers should respect their students’ cultures, whatever they are, and deal sensitively and carefully with their students’ beliefs, religions, thoughts, traditions, and the like. Then, as teachers “we need to look closely at ourselves to discover how our own culturally ingrained attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and communication styles play out in our teaching and affect our students’ learning” (Peregoy and Boyle, 2008, p. 3).
- Teachers should create a good environment for learning, taking into account each student’s cultural background and attitude towards learning. That is because “school itself is a culture within a culture, and a teacher can ask no more pertinent question than what kind of a culture school should generate. Learning never exists in a vacuum but issues from and feeds back into some particular society. And nothing is more integral to culture than language” (Moffett and Wagner, 1992, pp. 4-5).
- Teachers should encourage their students to share different cultures with other students in the same classroom through different activities and visual aids such as movies and the Internet. Yet, Slethaug (2007) recommends cross-cultural classrooms “to consider choosing films that can represent the ethnicity of the students themselves and raise important questions about identity in general” (p. 141).

- Teachers should carefully prepare curriculum, which takes into account students' unique cultures and interests. In this vein, Banks (2002) discusses that when teachers have gained knowledge about cultural and ethnic diversity themselves, looked at that knowledge from different ethnic and cultural perspectives, and taken action to make their own lives and communities more culturally sensitive and diverse, they will have the knowledge and skills needed to help transform the curriculum canon as well the hearts and minds of their students. (pp. 33-34)
- Teachers should create a learning environment, in which all students are seen and dealt respectfully according to their own cultural heritages because, as Banks (2002) argues, “a major goal of multicultural education is to provide all students with the skills, attitudes, and knowledge needed to function within their ethnic culture, within the mainstream culture, and within and across other ethnic cultures” (p. 2).
- The best way for teachers to avoid misunderstanding is to be culturally aware: to know the cultural meanings associated with time, place, person, and circumstance and to know how to use the language in those circumstances. Tran and Le (2018) emphasize that teachers need background information related to the student cohort they will be teaching so as to be able to respond appropriately and tailor course content.

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Appendix (Questions of the Interview)

Background:

What is your home country?

What is your native language?

Do you know any other languages?

What is your level of education?

What was your emphasis in college?

What are you studying now?

English questions:

Consider the following expression in English “That’s like putting lipstick on a pig!”

Have you heard this before?

What does this expression mean?

When might someone use it?

Why does it talk about a pig?

Do English speakers think of it positively or negatively?

Thinking about your native language and your culture, what associations do you have with the concept ‘pig’?

Can you think of particular expressions that refer to these animals?

How are pigs viewed in your culture?