



Francisco Javier Díaz-Pérez,
María Belén Díez-Bedmar,
Paula García-Ramírez &
Diego Rascón-Moreno (eds)

Global Issues in the Teaching of
Language, Literature and Linguistics

MEHRSPRACHIGKEIT IN EUROPA
MULTILINGUALISM IN EUROPE

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FRANCISCO JAVIER DÍAZ-PÉREZ

Introduction to Global Issues in the Teaching of Language, Literature and Linguistics

1. Global citizenship and the teaching of language, literature and linguistics

Within the context of an economic crisis on a worldwide scale which is widening the gap between the rich and the poor in many countries, which is provoking a cut in many developed countries' public funds destined to development aid, and which is making the European welfare state totter, it is even more important than it used to be to focus on global issues at all educational levels. As stated in Sampedro and Hillyard (2004: 5) and discussed by Rascón-Moreno in this volume, there is a growing interest in global issues in the field of education and particularly in English Language Teaching (ELT). This growing interest can be attested by the existence of groups focusing on global issues in the two major international English teachers' associations, namely IATEFL and TESOL. According to Osler and Starkey (2005),

Throughout the world there is a growing interest among language teachers in how they might support their students in developing the skills to become effective citizens. At the same time there is, internationally, increased discussion and debate about citizenship and identity and about the ways we might educate citizens in multicultural contexts and in the context of an increasingly inter-dependent, yet unequal, world. (Osler and Starkey 2005: xiii)

The novelty of this volume resides in the fact that it mainly focuses on the university level and particularly on the teaching not only of language, but also of literature and linguistics. It contains a collection of essays which include the reflections of teachers and scholars with different academic backgrounds on the inclusion of global issues in

the teaching of the disciplines mentioned above. But what is meant by global issues? As stated by Bhargava (2006: 1), '[m]ore than at any other time in history, the future of humankind is being shaped by issues that are beyond any one nation's ability to solve.' Thus, certain social, political, economic, health and environmental concerns increasingly affect our lives as citizens of the world. Among those concerns, issues related to a global economy are included – such as poverty, inequality, or international trade –, but also environmental issues – such as climate change or deforestation –, or all those aspects related to human rights.

Snarr (2008) uses the term *global issue* to refer to two types of phenomena. In his own words,

First, there are those issues that are transnational – that is, they cross political boundaries (country borders). These issues affect individuals in more than one country. A clear example is air pollution produced by a factory in the United States and blown into Canada. Second, there are problems and issues that do not necessarily cross borders but affect a large number of individuals throughout the world. Ethnic rivalries and human rights violations, for example, may occur within a single country but have a far wider impact. (Snarr 2008: 2)

There is a tendency to think that when a problem does not affect us directly as individuals it should not necessarily be a concern for us. Why should I worry about women's rights or LGTB rights in Iran if I am not an Iranian lesbian woman? The famous statement by the German pastor Martin Niemöller – and wrongly attributed to Bertold Brecht – about the German intellectuals' silence following the Nazi rise to power could be remembered at this point:

First they came for the communists,
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a communist.
Then they came for the trade unionists,
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak out because I wasn't a Jew.
Then they came for me
and there was no one left to speak out for me.

(Retrieved from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_they_came...> [27-03-2013])

Related to this, Seitz and Hite (2012: 1) defend the thesis that ‘something new indeed is happening in the world as nations become more interdependent’. Thus, whereas their welfare largely depends on how they run their internal affairs, increasingly countries are facing issues that they cannot solve on their own. If those problems are not solved, the lives of many people around the world will be affected. Obvious examples of the interdependence of nations are for instance instability in oil-rich Middle East countries and oil dependence in western countries, or dependence on other countries to buy any nation’s products. But interdependence can also be illustrated by less obvious examples, such as world hunger. Seitz and Hite (2012: 1) state, in this sense, that even starving or malnourished people in Africa also affect people in rich countries since our nature and character depend on how we react to human suffering.

One of the most important functions of university education is to educate responsible and critical citizens who are able to think by themselves and adopt their own positions with regard to the problems which affect a world which is anything but fair. In this sense, the promotion of critical thinking among students should always be one of the main goals of any university teacher. In a society in which the market seems to decide the destinies of countries and their inhabitants and in which expressions such as social justice, equality, solidarity, or environmental awareness tend to be associated with the dreams of outmoded idealists, universities have an urgent task to accomplish. This task is related firstly to raising awareness about certain global issues and secondly to fostering critical thinking.

In a Competence-Based Learning model, which seeks to develop generic or transversal competencies as well as the specific competencies pertaining to each profession, the inclusion of a generic competence focusing on global citizenship is, in our opinion, necessary in today’s world. In this sense, Dublin Descriptors, designed in 2004, include the students’ ‘ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements.’ This global citizenship competence would allow students to develop critical thinking about global issues. A competence has been defined

as ‘good performance in diverse, authentic contexts based on the integration and activation of knowledge, rules and standards, techniques, procedures, abilities and skills, attitudes and values’ (Villa Sánchez and Poblete Ruiz 2008: 29). The definition of competence provided by the OECD (2003) reads as follows:

A competence is defined as the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context. Competent performance or effective action implies the mobilization of knowledge, cognitive and practical skills, as well as social and behaviour components such as attitudes, emotions, and values and motivations. A competence – a holistic notion – is therefore not reducible to its cognitive dimension, and thus the terms competence and skill are not synonymous. (Quoted in Pérez González 2009: 96)

As any other competence, global citizenship competence covers knowledge, skills and attitudes. Thus, it would include, for instance, knowledge of human rights, social justice, equity and related social economic and political issues, or knowledge of globalization and interdependence among different countries. Among the skills included in global citizenship competence, the following could be mentioned among others: ability to think globally to consider issues from a variety of different perspectives: cultural, social, economic, political, etc.; ability to engage in problem-solving, shared perspective-taking and negotiation to solve conflicts; and critical analysis of conventional thinking, inequality and injustice. Attitudes are particularly important in this competence. Among the attitudes required, we could point out, for example, appreciation of and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity; commitment to justice, equity, environmental sustainability and civic obligations; commitment to the defense of human rights; or concern for the environment and commitment to sustainable development.

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consequently, with the introduction of global issues in language, literature and linguistics courses.

2. Overview of the volume

2.1 Global issues and language teaching

The volume is divided into three main parts, each one of them dealing with a different aspect of the inclusion of global issues in the teaching of language, literature and linguistics. Section I examines global issues in general and their inclusion in language teaching. The first chapter, by DIEGO RASCÓN-MORENO, focuses on global issues and ELT. RASCÓN-MORENO provides examples of the combination of global issues and the teaching of English from different countries. These examples include governmental and non-governmental promotion of global education, classroom experiences, materials and educational trends. In the second chapter RICK SAMPEDRO advocates trying to change the world through education and particularly through language teaching. He addresses ELT teachers and tries to convince them to use the great variety of resources at hand which can also serve for awareness raising.

2.2 Specific global issues and the teaching of language, literature and linguistics

If the first section of this volume deals with global issues in general in connection with language teaching, the second section is devoted to specific global issues and language, literature and/or linguistics teaching. Thus, JUAN RAMÓN GUIJARRO-OJEDA pays attention to a global issue in particular, respect for different sexual identities, and relates it to teaching in different disciplines of English Studies. He starts by presenting the theoretical foundations of Queer Theory and then he