

Integrating Mass-Media Discourse in Algerian EFL Classrooms: Pedagogical Insights and Challenges

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Abstract

The present investigation studies the influence of mass-media discourse on foreign language instruction. In fact, the phenomenon largely known as the 'information explosion' has already been with us for some time, however, due to the widening spectrum of related problems it has increasingly turned into a matter of real concern in scientific discussions. If one tries to reduce the subject to FL instruction, one cannot but confirm a general feeling of uneasiness with regard to the multiple difficulties that the teacher encounters in the use of mass-media means in the FL class. Consequently, we advance that problems like imbalances in information, intercultural unawareness and imported programmes that are politically bias represent a real challenge to the effective employment of media in FL education. In an attempt to provide some solutions to such questions, we have undertaken a field work study with the collaboration of FL teachers and Master students of English studies at Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra. A mixed research methodology has been adopted and, accordingly, two research tools have been used, namely a needs analysis questionnaire that has been submitted to the students enrolled in Discourse Studies, and the organisation of a workshop with a sample study of FL teachers at the Department of English Studies and Literature. The principal objective that we have reached- after the elaboration of a needs analysis procedure and workshop activities with teachers- is the efficient and advantageous use of mass-media discourse as an educational tool in teaching English as a foreign language. In sum, the process of careful selection and appropriate exploitation constitutes the necessary prerequisite of the utilization of mass-media language in FL.

Keywords: mass-media discourse; FL instruction; difficulties; advantages; needs analysis

1. Introduction

There is a general acknowledgement of the essential role of communication as a potentially decisive factor in international understanding and as a means of promoting greater mutual tolerance between peoples. In fact, mass media should be enlisted in the tasks of strengthening the defenses of peace, economic welfare, intercultural awareness and free dissemination of knowledge. In sum, mass communication

constitutes a powerful means of bringing about universal integration and motivating people to build a better world.

It is important that authentic teaching materials should emanate from preferably Anglophone countries which share certain historical, political and sociocultural characteristics which have their origin in Britain. By this word, is generally meant the countries (UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand), whose primary language is English, and whose legal, political, cultural and religious traditions are directly descended from Britain. The mass-media discourse which is broadcast from such nations reflects the unity of language, to begin with, but through that language with a common-sense view of the world that is distinguishable from other countries.

In consequence, the English language teacher should identify common sociocultural features which derive from a shared history of the Anglosphere and that should be naturally included in the course content. These features are embedded in mass-media discourse and are widely spread throughout the world. Indeed, the most significant elements are the democratic political systems, the common law, the liberal economic organization and the belief in the free market. Besides, special focus- due to their paramount importance in ELT- should be put on cultural traditions which are based on the corpus of English-language literature, philosophy, theatre and cinema, completed and enriched by native cultural traditions that can also be part of the syllabus.

Lastly, with a view to facilitating and improving English language teaching, action should be taken to remove obstacles to the international circulation through mass-media discourse of educational, scientific and cultural materials.

2. Literary Review

2.1 A Brief Overview of Mass-Media Discourse

Mass-media discourse is usually coined with interactions that take place through a broadcast platform in written or spoken record which is addressed to a non-present reader, listener or viewer. In the near past, this kind of discourse was directed toward recipients who very often could not make instantaneous responses to the producers of the discourse. However, the situation has overwhelmingly changed with the advent of new media technology that is available at present time. Indeed, the written or spoken discourse is oriented to the readership or listening/viewing audience respectively, as a consequence, mass-media discourse constitutes a public manufactured, on record, form of interaction. Apart from some exceptional situations or contexts, this type of discourse is not ad hoc or spontaneous (as one can imagine it with casual speaking or writing), in fact, it is neither private nor off the record. (Henry and Tator, 2002).

On the other hand, recipients and/or interlocutors are aware that mass-media discourse is evidently manufactured. Therefore, it is important that the consumed messages are continually appraised to satisfy different types of audiences in terms of critical, entertaining or educational perspectives. Besides, the public nature of mass-media discourse makes it fall under the scrutiny of many discourse analysts who are interested in it as a form of institutional talk, which can be compared with other forms of mundane speech. The fact that mass-media discourse is on record make it attractive to foreign language instructors because of the online availability of newspapers, radio programs, television and Internet products that are practically used by syllabus designers and practitioners. Advances in technology even allow live interactions that take place through a broadcast platform, whether spoken or written, between teachers and learners of English as a foreign language.

2.2 Shifting Media Functions toward ELT

Broadcasting in education represents, along with its pedagogical benefits, a source of amusement and recreation; learners could be greatly relieved of the classroom stress and sometimes fatigue. In fact, news and other educational programs from all the corners of the world are available and time and distance are reduced. As a matter of fact, the instructional importance of broadcasting- a fund of inexhaustible knowledge- is very helpful in universities or even schools such as, talk on different subjects, model speeches relayed, useful in teaching correct pronunciation of the foreign language (O'Discoll, 2009). However, educators should be constantly aware of the danger to guard against- Propaganda a double-edged weapon; the tendency to spread unhealthy ideas and infuse hatred for the people of other nations is fraught with danger. Internet or other means of communication should not be the mouth-piece of any particular extremist, intolerant, racist or xenophobic individual, party or global organizations.

Mass communication plays an important role in keeping citizens informed of environmental issues and event related to crucial problems that face humanity such as, pollution, shortage of food and water supplies, air and soil degradation, etc. For instance, when natural disasters occur like tsunamis, hurricanes; traditional and social outlets are the key communication tools to relay information about procedures and measures that should be taken into account. The English teacher can use such materials for the achievement of various social and pedagogical objectives, namely, environmental awareness, social solidarity and citizenship rights and duties; along with the enhancement of language skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking).

Traditional news outlets once were the only arbiters in the assignment of news worthiness and the manner in which broadcasters and journalists interpreted information. Today, social media platforms do not impose 'middlemen', consequently,

the language teacher and learners can correlate events in an objective and interpretive way. It is manifest that such language teaching approach encourages and improves students' critical thinking and independence. In sum, the two major aspects of mass communication are definitely characterized by the great interest in environmental global issues and the possible correlational function media and education.

For example, a major instructional function consists of target culture transmission. In fact, media discourse is particularly effective in reflecting and influencing cultural manifestations and social norms. The media serve as transmitters of sociocultural messages, letting the language learner understand what are considered acceptable forms of behavior in the foreign speech community. Sociocultural awareness and tolerance are incidentally transmitted to learners for better and developed proficiency in the English language.

In summary, the dichotomy of education and entertainment has become an axiomatic reality in FL teaching/learning. Indeed, media discourse can also serve as target culture transmitters that both educate and entertain language learners. Long before the advent of mass media, teachers were obliged to elaborate their own rudimentary teaching materials and use them in classrooms. Nowadays, the development of the information and communication technology offers nearly limitless means and techniques to transform media discourse into a pedagogical tool for the language teaching operation. Social media platforms take the entertainment factor into countless varieties and forms. Consequently, the language teacher and learners no longer need to rely on radio broadcasters or producers, they can rapidly and easily upload any materials they would eventually use in the teaching/learning process (Hinkel and Fotos, 2001).

2.3. Communication, Education, Culture and ELT: Advantages and Drawbacks

The prospects created by technological developments of communication enhance the role of this latter as a device of education and culture. In fact, the growth of the educational value of communication enables it to create an educational medium which would be supplementary if not competitive to the role of the school. One can observe that the present situation gives rise to increasing interdependency between communication and culture, because means of communication in modern societies constitute excellent devices for the dissemination of culture although they pose at the same time a serious threat in terms of assimilation (not acculturation) phenomena. Therefore, certain precautions should be taken by the policy-makers of foreign language education.

However, communication is able to deprive the education system of an instructional monopoly practiced for a long time; not only that but communication would itself become a subject of education. The actual context reflects the mutual relation

between communication and education, a relationship which is undoubtedly destined to grow and develop and to remain always both positive and fruitful if the adequate conditions are installed. As far as teaching English in particular is concerned, the development of industries relevant to culture and communication throughout the world is probably among the factors that would encourage dialogues leading to promotion of understanding and intercultural relations among peoples (Fairclough, 2003).

These perspectives are certainly motivating and encouraging, yet it should also be taken into consideration that the same factors could as well lead to serious aspects of cultural estrangement should such industries remain concentrated in some parts of the world at the detriment of others. Likewise, programs and messages produced would focus on specific cultures with no regard to other different cultures. Hence, it is obviously necessary that better arrangements are required for fair dissemination, production, transmission of programs and messages.

Indeed, it seems primordial that a balance should be drawn between those who are producing and exporting cultural programs and those who have no option other than having to receive such programs. In short, the conception and implementation of policies related to communication, information and education should respond to the actual means of different countries towards getting hold of the scientific and technological information as well as economic and industrial practices (Harcup & O'Neil, 2001).

On the other hand, certain lethal policies and activities represent serious drawbacks to the beneficiary use of mass media discourse in English language teaching. Unfortunately, in parallel to their traditional functions, the information media are actually utilized deliberately as instruments of mass persuasion, whether for political or commercial ends. As a result, these attempts at manipulation have given rise to a certain mistrust of the mass media, to which an almost mythical omnipotence is attributed, quite irrespective of the environment in which the target audience lives and moves.

Indeed, the development of universal dissemination of information gives advantage to a very small number of nations since it opens the way for a one-way flow of information. Because it is commonly known that the over-increasing volume of data in an organization or institution are indeed manifold. We all realize that political, economic, and even educational life has become more complex and, accordingly, a continuous stream of information is necessary for the provision of adequate solutions. This situation constitutes a controversy. Although people generally complain about the flood of information, it is very peculiar that there are as just many bitter complaints from others who strongly feel that they should have received a greater amount of information due to the various available means (Boyd, 2013).

The process is held down by certain essential facts, not the least of which is the uneven international availability of facilities for press communication. Unfortunately, no account is taken of the needs and aspirations of numerous peoples unable to make their voice heard at a time when the principles which might form the basis of a philosophy of communication are taking shape at a tremendous speed. In some countries, even if unwittingly, information media are used for mercenary or even oppressive ends, for propaganda or profit.

Therefore, the availability of information will continue to grow but a greatly improved potential towards more selectivity will enable us to retrieve only that part of the total information which is relevant of our immediate requirements. In addition, technical solutions are primordial because the immediate and fast display units and the data base management systems, providing direct access to vast numbers of data in whatever structure or combination needed have already and will increasingly help to overcome the adverse effects of the information explosion. In sum, political and educational motives sway the relevant decisions and taint the basic ideas (Mautner, 2008).

In summation, communication is an essential component in a new social and economic order, and equal access to information sources and flows between and within societies is necessary for its establishment. As far as FL education is concerned, competition in modern technology is actually leading towards reducing the size of equipment, increasing the revenue and minimizing the cost of production. Although this may help in increasing productivity, it may at the same time speed up the outdateding of the equipment. Even the relatively earliest means of communication like the book or the newspaper are not immune against the effects of such development by which they could be seriously harmed.

Contrarily, this situation can be of great benefit to the FL teaching operation since modern means of communication would be financially more accessible to the teacher and learners. In addition, the tremendous development and sophistication of mass media communication represent additional opportunities to innovate the methods and procedures of foreign language teaching. In other words, those developments of the various aspects of means of communication like methods of production, ways and technicalities of transmission and reception, would not only affect the future of the information media but also to a much further extent, the future of foreign language teaching and learning.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In view of the fact that the present study seeks to examine the effectiveness of mass media discourse in enhancing FL learners' discourse interpretation proficiency as

well as to explore teachers' perceptions regarding its use in the language teaching operation, the researcher has adopted a mixed quantitative-qualitative research methodology which proved to be adequate in this type of investigation.

The quantitative component involved learners' perceptions of mass media and the role they can play in FL instruction. The quantification measures of learners' perceptions in terms of precise percentages have been carefully calculated and analyzed. Besides, the qualitative component consisted of an in-depth study and interpretation of learners' appreciations and tendencies. This procedure is intended to elicit the students' attitudes, experiences, and reflections regarding the use of mass media in foreign language classroom contexts. This combination ensured a comprehensive and triangulated understanding of the assigned objectives of the research work.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The participants in this study are Master students enrolled in English Studies, Applied Language specialism and the course study is Discourse Analysis. A sample study of 30 students- of a total population of 110 students- was selected through convenience sampling by choosing an intact group based on students' availability. Therefore, participation was voluntary, and all ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly observed.

3.3 Research Tool

A structured questionnaire was submitted to the sample study in order to gather learners' perceptions and views of the role of mass media in FL instruction. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended and open-ended questions which were arranged and organized around three essential parts: Part 1. Influence of mass media on FL instruction; Part 2. Advantages and drawbacks of the linguistic structures of mass media discourse in FL education; Part 3. The psychological and sociocultural parameters of mass media as an efficient technique in discourse comprehension. In fact, the emphasis was on students' discourse interpretation development and motivation through mass media in classroom situation.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data collected in the present investigation were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative procedures in order to determine the effectiveness of mass media in developing learners' capabilities in discourse interpretation. The quantitative findings were statistically and descriptively analyzed by examining the frequency and recurrence of similar responses in order to identify students' engagement, perceived difficulties, and opinions with regard to mass media integration and, its eventual efficiency in ameliorating learners' discourse interpretation. The qualitative part of the analysis

provided deeper insights into how mass media as an educational technique should be received and practiced in the FL classroom along with the factors that facilitated or hindered its effectiveness.

3.5 Limitation of the Study

The research work was particularly limited by the relatively small sample size and the students’ reluctance in totally and openly developing their opinions. In consequence, such situation limited the possible generalizability of the findings.

4. Results and Discussion

Treatment of Students’ Questionnaire.

Question one: Do you think that Mass-Media Discourse (particularly Internet or Social-media communication, Radio, Television and Newspapers) could have a positive influence on FL acquisition? Whatever your answer, please justify.

Response	Number of Students
Yes	30
No	0

Table 1. Students’ Responses on Whether Mass-Media Discourse Positively Influences FL Acquisition

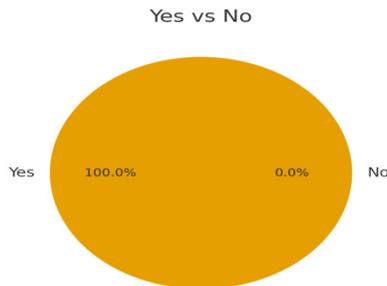


Figure 1. Students’ Opinions on the Positive Influence of Mass-Media Discourse on FL Acquisition

Justifications.

1. The shadowing process on the part of FL learners of native speakers of English can enhance FL development.
2. Long lasting ‘exposure’ to social-media platforms (time factor) may be influential.
3. To learn the FL in contextual situations (language in context) may be positive.
4. Exposure to authentic (natural) FL.

5. Provides opportunities to practice and interact with native speakers.
6. TV programs propose various and rich entertainment in terms of Talk Shows, Debates, and Interviews (with very short videos), therefore, FL learners can concentrate only on the discourse.
7. Mass-Media Discourse provides FL diversity.
8. Programs of Interactive Learning.
9. Presents samples of real-life language use.
10. Suggests innovative series of FL teaching.
11. Furnishes opportunities of pre-school FL learning (from age 4 up to 6 years old).
12. Increases learners’ motivation because it combines learning and entertainment.
13. A convenient and flexible way to practice FL cultural manifestations.

Question Two: Do you believe that Mass-Media Discourse could be handicapped- as a learning aid- by some negative linguistic phenomena?

Category	Number of students
Informal Language (rude words, idiomatic expressions, etc.)	11
Regional Accents	2
Distortions in Pronunciation, Vocabulary and Grammar	4
All of them	13

Table 2. Types of Mass-Media Language Issues Reported by Students

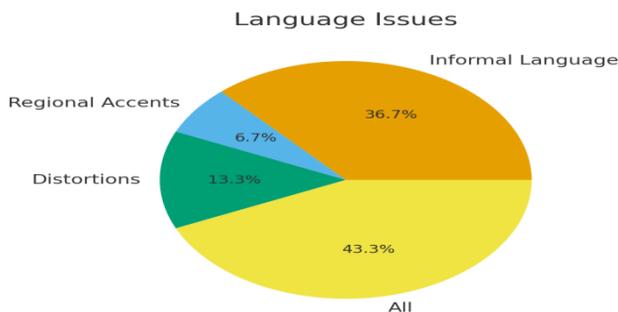


Figure 2. Distribution of Language Issues Encountered in Mass-Media Discourse

Interpretation: Obviously, the majority of students (28) clearly apprehend the negative aspects of some Mass-Media Discourse despite their positive attitude with regard this type of discourse, yet such legitimate dread does not represent a constraint to the students.

Question Three: What foreign language skill could be particularly developed through Mass-Media Discourse? Why? You are kindly invited to select more than one skill if you wish.

Skill/ Component	Score
Speaking	25
Writing	11
Listening	28
Reading	16
Target Culture	24

Table 3. Skills Most Influenced by Mass-Media Discourse According to Students

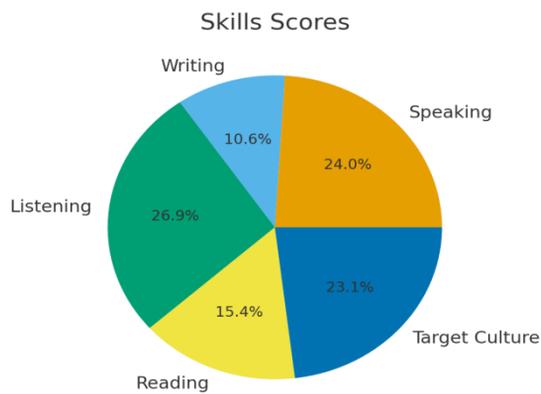


Figure 3. Skills Strengthened Through Mass-Media Exposure

Justifications.

1. Contextual presentation of target culture.
2. Opportunity to 'listen' to native speakers.
3. Television shows, movies or podcasts may develop listening practice and improve pronunciation.
4. All the skills cannot be separated from each other, and development of a particular skill depends on individual learners.
5. Allow intercultural communication.
6. Provide more comfort and ease during the learning process.
7. Permit the FL learner to put emphasis on one particular skill.
8. The speaking skill especially can be noticeably enhanced because Mass-Media Discourse offers opportunities for the 'imitation' of native speakers in real-life interaction.

9. Extensive 'exposure' to the FL limits or excludes culture shock.
10. Better learner's engagement in all language skills.
11. Enrich the listening skill because of the increase of awareness of different accents and discursive organization.
12. Expansion of the FL vocabulary within cultural contexts.
13. Informal language (through Mass-Media Discourse) does not encourage or even hurdles academic writing.
14. All the language skills because the time factor is important since Mass-Media Discourse services are constantly (all time) available to the FL learner as compared to the limited allotted time in classroom situation.

Question Four: Do you think- in terms of motivation and effectiveness- that Mass-Media Discourse could be more fruitful in a formal or informal learning environment?

Setting Type	Score
Informal Setting	13
Formal Setting	0
Both	17

Table 4. Students' Preferences Regarding Exposure Settings to Mass-Media for FL Learning

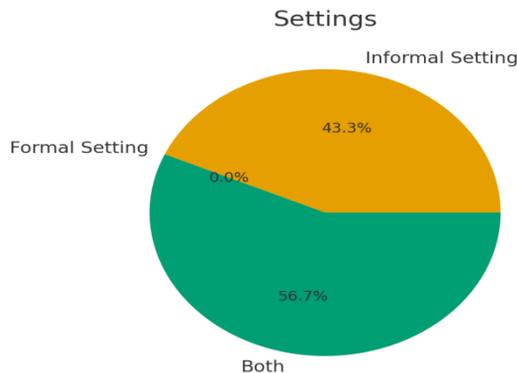


Figure 4. Preferred Contexts for Beneficial Mass-Media Exposure

Justifications.

1. Both settings are important because the formal setting provides organized education in terms of aims, methodology and content of learning whereas the informal setting is much more entertaining, casual (less solemn) and offers freedom of choice in connection with the selection of material and means.
2. The preferred setting depends on the individual due to differences in the learning strategies.

3. Informal setting is engaging and accessible in nature.
4. Informal setting requires mastery of modern technology.
5. Informal setting is coined with real-life situations and genuine communication.
6. Formal setting implies teacher’s supervision and selected learning tasks which can constitute a de-motivating factor.
7. Both settings are complementary, the foreign language learner acquires certain skills in the formal setting which s/he can put into practice in the informal setting.
8. Informal setting implies longer periods of time (duration factor) of foreign language acquisition.
9. Informal setting provides authentic material.
10. Informal setting displays a variety of different types of media such as television or social-media whereas in the formal setting the only source of knowledge is the foreign language teacher.

Question Five: It is evident that foreign language learners should have been ‘exposed’ to Mass-Media Discourse directly or indirectly and over a long or short period of time. Could you please indicate the degree of this influence, if any?

Level	Score
Very high	10
High	16
Average	4
Low	0
Very Low	0
None	0

Table 5. Students’ Perceived Levels of Influence of Mass-Media on FL Acquisition

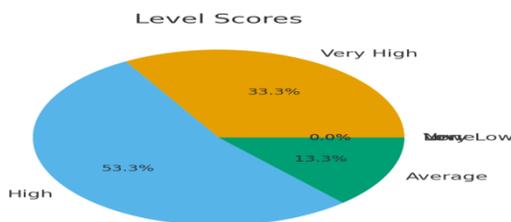


Figure 5. Perceived Levels of Mass-Media Influence on FL Acquisition

Comments.

The results indicate clearly that FL learners value to a great extent (Very High and High influence together indicate a score of 26 selections out of 30 possible) the positive impact of Mass-Media Discourse. Moreover, one can notice that even 4 respondents believe that Mass-Media Discourse represents an Average influence on FL learning. On the other hand, one can also observe that all of the respondents (30 students) do not advance that Mass-Media Discourse effect could be Low, Very Low or None which evidently dismisses any kind of drawbacks or negative aspects that would be due to Mass-Media Discourse.

Question Six: Are there any other aspects of the FL- apart from those indicated in the present questionnaire- that Mass-Media Discourse could possibly impact in FL acquisition?

Category	Score
Motivation	11
Target Culture	8
Language Variation	1
Psychological	5
Discursive Competence	5

Table 6. Aspects of FL Acquisition Potentially Impacted by Mass-Media Discourse

Figure 6. Distribution of Aspects of FL Acquisition Potentially Impacted by Mass-Media Discourse

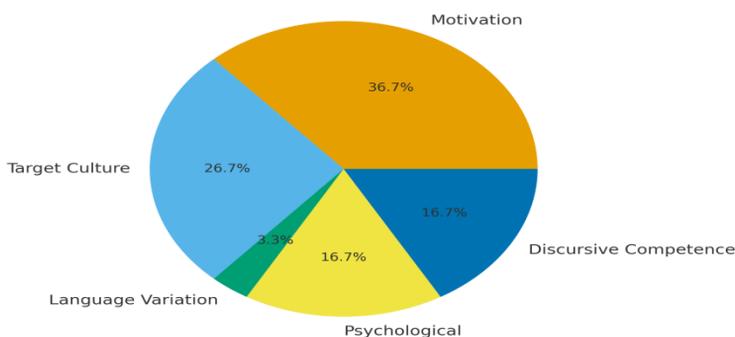


Figure 6. Distribution of Aspects of FL Acquisition Potentially Impacted by Mass-Media Discourse

Comments.

1. The possible change of learners' perception of the FL in the positive sense. This can result with an obvious increase of learners' motivation and, consequently, enhances students' proficiency in the FL.

2. Many other influential factors can be developed namely, communicative competence, critical thinking and better awareness of the target culture.
3. The positive impact equally concerns the probable linguistic insights into the FL formal or structural aspects such as the different dialects, variation of regional accents and registers.
4. The psychological aspects are also important in connection with certain categories of learners who face some problems due to their shyness and public talk inhibitions. As a matter of fact, these learners can be better motivated if the use of Mass-Media Discourse is provided in an informal setting because the teacher and classmates are not bodily present or part of the FL learning operation.
5. Additionally, the discursive phenomena can be improved through the better mastery of discursive strategies that concern conversation management such as how and when to interrupt or to take the floor or give it (turn-taking) or contextual interpretation of spoken discourse.

In conclusion, it is possible to put forward that two major aspects are obviously prominent in the results of the data analysis. First, all of the FL learners (a sample study of 30 students) strongly believe that Mass-Media Discourse greatly contribute in the improvement of FL acquisition. Second, many sociocultural and linguistic elements can be ameliorated, particularly, cultural awareness, discursive strategies, vocabulary expansion, native-like pronunciation and contextual discourse interpretation. Therefore, the encouragement and development of the use of Mass-Media Discourse in the foreign language class as an effective teaching/learning tool cannot be ignored or even neglected by the foreign language teacher.

5. Recommendations

1. Modern technological means of telecommunication, and most particularly Internet, have enabled those in possession of such means to transmit any kind of 'message'. As a result, the language teacher should be very cautious and selective concerning the mass media materials (discourse) she/he would use in classrooms.
2. In opposition, the influential impact of communication/information can also serve in the promotion of understanding among peoples and nations and the safeguard of peace in the world through global dialogue using the English language as a lingua franca.
3. Because man has always attached such importance to the role assumed or could be assumed by the mass media towards the elimination of prejudices (better awareness of target culture).

4. At a macro-level, FLL would make it possible to establish societies which would be more and more respectful to human rights and also the protection of the environment.
5. Indeed, many human communities which would be able to 'communicate' through the English language; would be more capable and keen with regard to the eradication of poverty, ignorance, diseases and famines.
6. Some readjustment measures and perspectives can be launched and put into application following the right path toward a free, balanced flow of information for the fulfilment of some necessary requirements as follows:
 - Avoidance of one-sided dissemination of news and the encouragement of a multidimensional flow of information with plural feedback.
 - Promotion of communication from a status of misapprehension to a decisive factor in mutual understanding between peoples through the development of multilateral exchange of information.
 - Elimination of obstacles to the free circulation of educational material and to the movement of persons.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the human society is now in the process towards what some people may term as 'the society of information', which is characterized by the enormous growth of the ability of man to broaden, retain, recognize, produce and spread information spontaneously. The flow of information and knowledge were always regarded as a major factor in the organization of human society as well as in inter-societal communication, hence, the revolutionary flow of information and science is already bound to entail far-reaching effects on the emancipation of human communities.

On the other hand, problems connected with placing communication media in the service of foreign language acquisition are closely linked with the speedy progress in the technological means of receiving, retaining, reproducing and transmitting signals and pictures. The use of computer in data processing and the use of modern technology in the transmission and distribution of news as well as modern means of reproduction; in addition to sound and audio-visual recordings are of great importance in the emancipation of foreign language education. Particularly, after the spread of such devices on a large scale among the people, have led to the modification of instructional institutions with regard to foreign language higher proficiency and influence in the creation of innovative methods of teaching. It is a fact that the distribution of information whether by cables or satellites has opened up new prospects, but at the same time, could also lead to major changes of the role assumed by the foreign language teacher.

As a matter of fact, technological developments in the area of communication and information have been taking place at a very rapid pace which requires a constant follow-up on the part of the foreign language instructor. However, this situation gives rise to increasing difficulties in the elaboration of sophisticated language teaching syllabi for the future, as well as decision-making in the selection of appropriate and relevant types of teaching material which is culturally adequate; particularly in relationship to countries of limited resources. Yet, globalized education and availability of competitive and financially accessible modern technology open new horizons and optimistic perspectives to the generalization world wide of new and effective methods of English language teaching.

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