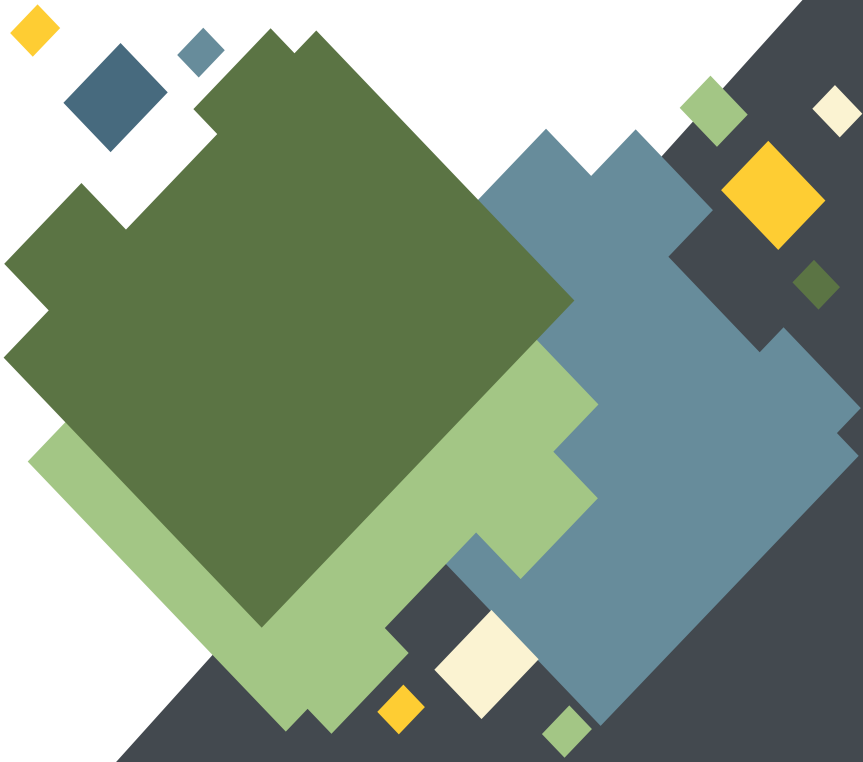


CHAPTER 6

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR EFL TEACHING



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Pre-reading Questions:

- How are language and culture interrelated?
- What does teaching of culture target at language classrooms?
- How can teachers develop learners' cross-cultural awareness in language classrooms?
- What is linguaculture learning?
- Is there a ready-made way of developing intercultural capabilities through language education?

Introduction

Is there a relationship between language and culture? If so, what is the role of culture in language classrooms? This chapter attempts to answer these questions. Obviously, there is a reciprocal relationship between language and culture. What is more, people's cultural background and behaviors shape the way they interpret the world around them. Apparently, being aware of one's own culture paves the way towards being aware of the new culture by developing a sense of cultural awareness. Therefore, communicating cross-culturally is regarded as an effective skill that can be developed through cross-cultural awareness (Gudynkunst & Kim, 2003). With these in mind, let us consider what lies behind the relationship between language and culture, and of course, how culture is integrated into language classes.

The organization of the chapter is designed as follows: firstly, the relationship between language and culture is described. Secondly, the state-of-the-art of culture pedagogy in terms of language teaching is introduced. Making the case for language and culture pedagogy, its implications are presented to which reference is made subsequently in order to deliver target culture with the priority of teaching English as a Foreign Language (hereafter: EFL). Conclusively, the last section remarks conclusions, and pedagogical implications for teaching target culture through teaching the target language.

Framing the relationship between language and culture

“All words have the ‘taste’ of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life.” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293)

Imagine that you were grown up in a different place by learning a different language. Would your perception of the world change? Would you then categorize objects and/or ideas differently? Would you have a different understanding of the words? What about raising up with no language! Would you then stop thinking since there was no language at all? Would you able to enroll in cultural activities meaningfully?

First of all, let us agree on the definition of culture since both terms, language and culture, do refer to one's place in a social group, or their relation with that group. Basically, culture is regarded as a repertoire of shared beliefs, experiences, practices and values that are used by a group of people in order to understand the world surrounding them (Nasir & Hand, 2006). Notably, it is important to clarify the distinction between objective and subjective culture (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The relatively visible and obvious elements of culture such as food preferences, dressing, and architecture are embedded within objective culture whereas subjective culture encompasses more hidden and invisible cultural elements such as values, beliefs, patterns of verbal and nonverbal communication (Hall, 1966). However in both, culture manifests arbitrariness in the sense that different patterns could be interpreted and recorded in different ways; therefore, the 'rights' and 'wrongs' may have a change.

Perhaps most obviously, culture is represented by language since culture is interpreted, mediated and recorded by means of a language (Kramsch, 1995). Language is not solely a means of communication, albeit a cumulation of socially embedded practices; thus, words live socially responsible lives. Quite similarly, social interactions do live linguistically responsible lives since language is the mediator of any social interaction so as to occur. The starting point is that language is inherently social by nature. Therefore, the language we use is affected by the social contexts in which we see, hear and experience even though we do things with words. Since language we use and the social contexts in which it occurs are mutually related, language should be treated "not only as a mode of thinking but, above all, as a cultural practice, that is, as a form of action that both presupposes and at the same time brings about ways of being in the world" (Duranti, 1997, p.1).

For much of the past century, to say nothing of the present one, culture had been a topic of research for the scholars in the field of sociolinguistics and cultural studies in terms of forming local and/or universal links

between language and culture. Its mediatory role, on the other hand, directs language teachers' interest towards two unleashed catchwords: 'intercultural' and 'multicultural'. Intercultural as a term has widely been used in the European world of education to label the acquisition of knowledge in relation with the customs and history of a society, which has later paved the way towards the development of intercultural sensitivity in teachers (Baumgratz-Gangl, 1992), and intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1993). In particular, multicultural education thrives to expand the traditional curriculum through the integration of issues such as social class, gender, identity, and the like in order to develop an understanding of unique and sensitive realities of history. In doing this, it is molded by de-emphasizing the national differences, and displaying the already existing social diversities, and therefore, cultural pluralism.

But what about language teaching? In practice, language teachers teach both language and culture, or culture as language, albeit not language as culture (Kramsch, 1995). Culture is employed to enrich language classes to reinforce language learning; however, it is not questioned whether this dialogic process of enunciation reveals codes for the conception of language and culture. What is more, native culture and target culture are embedded in this process in a cross-cultural way. Thus, when they encounter, some new and hybrid codes could emerge, which is named as a "third space that does not simply revise or invert the dualities, but revalues the ideological bases of division and difference" (Bhabha, 1992, p. 58). With these in mind, the section below spotlights the case for language and culture pedagogy with special concern upon EFL settings.

Making the case for language and culture pedagogy

Although culture was regarded as an integral part of teaching a language, it was somehow underrated, and cultural components were eliminated from learning materials (Stern, 1992). To mention, English language teaching in the 1970s was framed by Pulverness (1996) as:

"English was seen as a means of communication which should not be bound to culturally-specific conditions of use, but should be easily transferable to any cultural setting. Authenticity was a key quality, but only insofar as it provided reliable models of language in use. Content was important as a source of motivation, but it was seen as equally important to avoid material which might be regarded as 'culture bound'. Throughout the 1970s and much of the 1980s, syllabus design and materials writing were

driven by needs analysis, and culture was subordinated to performance objectives.” (p. 7)

Quite reasonably, there has recently been a consensus on integrating culture as an inseparable element in foreign language pedagogy (Byram, Bolubeva, Hui, & Wagner, 2017; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Such an evolution in foreign language pedagogy blossoms a rather new perspective and goals for learning culture in addition to language learning. To mention, ‘linguistic competence’ (Chomsky, 1965) was at the center to enhance language-related abilities of the learners. Seemingly inadequate, learning goals were then oriented around ‘communicative competence’ (Canale & Swain, 1980). Following these, however, the new learning goals are shaped by the context of globalization, and the term of ‘intercultural competence’ has arrived (Byram, 1997; Kramersch, 2015). The learning goals of intercultural communicative competence are now expanded with communicative competence, discourse competence, linguistic competence, and sociolinguistic competence (Byram & Parmenter, 2012). Thus, the multidimensional nature of intercultural abilities is described by the skills of interpreting, discovering, relating and interacting; knowledge of interaction and social groups in the society; attitudes of curiosity and openness; and critical cultural awareness, which is depicted as the ability to value different perspectives.

Moreover, with the adoption of communicative curriculum, language teaching has shifted from an initial focus on grammar, literature and translation studies towards more communicative approaches with the integration of culture into the language teaching practices. The growing body of research recognizes the probable set of learning goals which integrates culture into foreign language classroom (Diaz, 2012; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Risager, 2015). Perhaps not surprisingly, culture serves as the fifth skill broadening the scope of four basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Corbett, 2003). Correlatively, it is noted that an increased cultural awareness stimulates learners to develop an understanding of sensitivity, tolerance and empathy, all of which are beneficial for language learning (Tomlinson & Musuhara, 2004). Thus, serving as a hidden curriculum (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), culture teaching plays a significant role in language classrooms.

Putting this into practice, however, is arduous for language teachers. For instance, it is challenging for language teachers to develop cultural

awareness in English language classes under the constraints of time allowance, education system, even teacher's own cultural knowledge, and so forth (Ho, 2009). In a similar vein, learners with different cultural background learn in different ways (Hui, 2005). What is more, it is rather difficult to integrate culture and language-related practices in non-English-speaking countries since communicative norms to teach are not similar to that of English as a second language (hereafter: ESL) case (Sowden, 2007). That is, in EFL classes, the language instruction in the classroom is most probably the only exposure to target language, and EFL learners do not have the immediate reaction to show and face in their daily life practices since their surrounding is oriented with a non-English-speaking culture. Beyond question, it becomes more critical since language teachers are most generally non-native speakers of the target language, and it is then rather complex to decide on the specific cultural norms to integrate into language classes since EFL learners may not have the opportunity to engage in such a community in which target language is used. In this vein, developing cross-cultural awareness is regarded as a burden for language teachers to choose and integrate parts of English-speaking culture as an effective element of foreign language instruction.

Most simply, cultural learning is complex by nature since terms such as critical cultural awareness is abstract and ideal, which seems far from everyday language practice. What is more, there are three stumbling blocks that make it more complex for practical concerns: conceptual, developmental and relational (Diaz, 2013). The conceptual one refers to the limitations of the conceptualization of intercultural competence. The relational one refers to the lack of clarity in terms of relational elements that bring intercultural competence together. Lastly, the developmental one refers to the lack of a pure continuum of how intercultural competence is enhanced in time. As it seems, there is no doubt that intercultural competence has a significant role in language learning; however, defining the learning goals to put into practice remains as the nuts and bolts of language classrooms, where the target language itself requires a rather complex process to be acquired.

In terms of language learning, there is still no consensus on a single theory to explain how foreign languages are learnt; and thus, nascent theoretical orientations are yet to occur (Mitchell, Myles, & Marsden, 2013). As there is no single pedagogy declared as superior to the others (Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Richards & Rodgers, 2014), culture learning should first contend with the process of language learning as a complex

phenomenon. Recently, it is succinctly presupposed by the notion of developing pragmatic competence that is “possible to create opportunities for meaningful learning even with conventional materials such as coursebooks” by letting language learners to “analyze and reflect on their interactional experiences” (McConachy, 2018, p.9). Just as importantly, pragmatic competence permits language learners to establish the ability to use the target language appropriately in a social context by means of appropriate topics of conversation, nonverbal behaviors, and turn-taking patterns (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001), which is not a common case amidst language learners, especially intended messages are indirectly addressed by the speakers of the target language (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010).

Quite the contrary, there is an opposing view on the integration of culture in language classrooms that purports to localize the language learning materials (e.g., textbooks) to respond to the needs of non-English learners (Kachru, 1986; Canagarajah, 1999; Kirkpatrick, 2007). Accordingly, it is required to start with the familiar before moving to more unfamiliar elements so as to maintain target language. To put it plainly, the pedagogy behind it is that familiar local materials can help to teach a foreign language and culture better by eliminating language learners’ anxiety and ambivalence during the language learning process. Similarly, language learners are not likely to experience culture shock since local contextualization permits them to become more interactive with the target culture and language.

It is also worthwhile to reflect that that culture is a ‘muddied concept’ (Hall, 1981, p.20), albeit inextricably related to language. Within a specific culture, cows are regarded as sacred animals, or seeing a black cat is assumed to bring bad luck. Seemingly, the value judgments are culture-specific, and culture is not static. So to speak, cultural awareness is there to avoid stereotypes. In this sense, watching foreign movies may help to promote cultural awareness, and eliminate stereotypes (Cardon, 2010), but cross-cultural stereotypes may mushroom, though (Angelova & Zhao, 2014). Seemingly, there is “no ready-made, one-size-fits-all way of developing intercultural capabilities through language education” (Liddicoat, 2013, p. xii). Therefore, in an attempt to integrate culture into language teaching, language teachers need to employ culture-specific language use to prevent misconceptions to blossom (Shemshadsara, 2012). With these in mind, the section below highlights some practical concerns for language teachers and pedagogical implications to arrange EFL classrooms for effective culture teaching process.

Pedagogical implications and practical concerns for language teachers

At any rate, teaching culture while teaching the target language aims to develop language learners' cross-cultural awareness. In doing these, the teaching of culture targets to the followings as noted by Tomalin and Stempleski (1993):

- “To help students to develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviors;
- To help students to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave;
- To help students to become more aware of conventional behavior in common situations in the target culture;
- To help students to increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language;
- To help students to develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence;
- To help students to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture;
- To stimulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people.” (p. 7-8).

Obviously, language is enmeshed with culture; however, it is challenging to integrate culture into language teaching. One way to do this is to use culture-specific language in teaching culture from an intercultural perspective. In doing this, language teachers may apply some key tenets such as (a) active construction of both language and culture; (b) meaning-making through the reciprocal relationship between language and culture; (c) social interaction for the negotiation of meaning; (d) reflection as the recognition of culture as an inseparable element of the target language; (e) responsibility indicated by language learners' attitudes and values in order to develop cultural awareness; (f) noticing the differences to avoid stereotypes, and to respect varieties; (g) engagement of language learners through culture-specific language tasks to experience language, culture and the relationship between them.

Simply put, classroom practice should reflect the ideal learning outcomes by integrating language and culture. Reflecting this, language teachers can apply the notion of linguaculture, which has recently been

popular in foreign language education (Diaz, 2013; Risager, 2015). In the era of globalization, language and culture pedagogy has been primed by a sociolinguistic perspective. In this context, it is proposed that there are three dimensions in culture teaching: identity dimension, poetic dimension, and semantic and pragmatic dimension. This taxonomy provides a conceptualization of language and culture in a multidimensional and undivided way. The focus is on cultural differences that influence interactions; therefore, linguaculture learning provides a deep-seated procedure of constant modification and regulation of linguistic ability and intercultural awareness. However, in a single framework, it is the core dilemma to note how language and culture are addressed:

Translating the language and culture nexus, or in this case, linguaculture, into an incremental learning progression is challenging. The lack of developmental notions of linguaculture learning makes it difficult to map a coherent, progressive path from *ab initio*, beginning levels — the largest in most language programs — to advanced levels. (Diaz, 2013, p. 34)

Incorporating language and culture in a broader view of learning, dynamic skill theory may help language teachers to understand the complexity of culture teaching in language classrooms through the ‘Developmental Model of Linguaculture Learning’ (hereafter: DMLL). In doing this, simple elements are gathered together to frame the whole knowledge through self-organization and adjustment in a dynamic process. To elaborate, the levels of complexity are defined and mapped together for meaning-making. Therefore, cultural facts are encountered as the new data to be experimented through cultural rules and structures, and then, the bridge between language and cultural awareness is built by integrating self-expressions with cultural views (Schaules, 2019). For instance, you are playing chess. To become a good player, you need to express yourself in the medium of the play. You need to follow the other player’s moves, which emerge from the general knowledge of the rules in a cumulative process so as to play the game. The figure given below entails the overall process for DMLL:

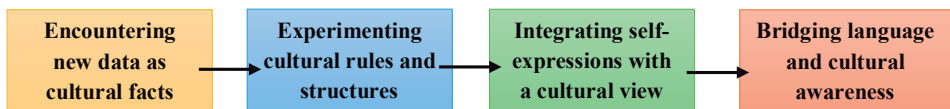


Figure 1. How culture is incorporated into language through DMLL

Quite the contrary, oral exchange or interaction is not sufficient for developing language learners' cross-cultural communication skills. In terms of writing, it appears as a burden on language teachers to reach good English writing since language learners may come from completely different rhetorical traditions, or perceptions of good writing (Kachru & Smith, 2008). To exemplify, an element in the native language may be regarded as grandiloquent when using it in English as a target language. Therefore, language learners are to develop their own logical reasoning in both language and culture by developing cross-cultural awareness while learning the target language simultaneously, which is labeled as experiential learning.

Experiential learning benefits from learners' active engagement and language practice in cultural context, albeit not purely the reception of the language. For instance, language learners in groups can be assigned to create a map of characteristics that are known as distinguishing elements of home and target cultures. These maps can include music, clothing, geography, architecture, and so forth. In this way, language teachers can identify any kind of stereotypical lapses that language learners may have. As a practical note, *critical incidents*, also known as *cultural capsules* (Singhal, 1998) or *culturgrams* (Peck, 1998), can be used as a way of practicing experiential learning in language classrooms. They are molded as the short anecdotes or descriptions of some distinctive situations that may create cross-cultural miscommunication. They provide language learners to identify the lacunae between cultures by analyzing the situations and avoiding stereotypes.

As importantly, *culture assimilators* and *culotoons* (Henrichsen, 1998) can be used as a method for integrating culture into language classrooms through experiential learning. Culture assimilators are constituted by the short descriptions of situations with four possible interpretations of the conversation between two people. Now, the case is that one person is from home culture, and the other person is from the target culture. Language learners are expected to read the definitions at first, and then come up with the correct interpretation of the already existing situations. On the other hand, culotoons are the visual forms of culture assimilators with a series of four pictures that elaborate possible signs of misinterpretations experienced by people in contact with the target culture. Now, language learners are expected to evaluate the reactions of the characters given in the pictures by analyzing their appropriateness with the target culture.

Cultural problem solving (Singhal, 1998) as another way to provide information on target culture can be used as a classroom activity to promote experiential learning. Herein, language learners are provided with information in which a cultural dilemma is embedded. For instance, they are given information on wedding ceremonies in different cultures, and then asked to assess manners and traditional customs by pinpointing appropriate and/or inappropriate behaviors. In doing this, they are expected to employ problem-solving skills; henceforth, they have the opportunity to develop empathy, so to speak.

Another insightful classroom activity is *role-playing*. Herein, language learners are given roles to act out in English in a short and straightforward way to conceptualize different cultural issues. Closely related, *simulations* are used to elaborate more complex cultural situations with the enrollment of more than two language learners. Both of them play a critical role in enhancing language learners' linguistic skills, pragmatic skills and cultural awareness by representing culture-specific situations.

If language learners have the opportunity to observe the behavioral patterns of and/or have an interaction with native speakers, *mini ethnographic observations* and *interviews* can help them to develop cultural understanding. For instance, language learners can be assigned to notice how people from a definite culture behave when ordering a meal from a restaurant. By the same token, they can be assigned to ask questions and take notes on a previously selected topic (e.g., greetings) in order to determine culture-specific behaviors through interviews. However, language learners may not have the opportunity to find a native speaker; herein, language teachers may help them to find someone available either in person, or online.

Indisputably, with the advents in technology, *media* has a more prominent role in language teaching. Therefore, incorporating media as an element to teach culture in language classrooms can help language teachers to promote cultural understanding, as well. Language teachers can use movies, advertisements, video clips, sitcoms and other web-based innovative materials by stimulating multimodal language learning environment so that language learners experience language and culture as unified elements.

Conclusion

It goes with the saying that culture and language are interrelated; therefore, it is beyond question to eliminate culture from language

learning. While developing a sense of otherness, culture teaching enables language learners to both observe and participate in language learning activities by means of culture-specific practices. Most importantly, the number of EFL learners has been growing dramatically, and it becomes increasingly clear that language learners will not only face language-related problems in educational environments but also in pursuit of professional opportunities. Therefore, having the ability to recognize and utilize culturally appropriate patterns will help language learners to have effective communication (either verbal or non-verbal) in real-life practices. It is hoped that this chapter has contrived to clarify language- and culture-related issues, and helped to contribute with a better understanding of the priority of culture in foreign language classrooms.

Post-reading Questions:

- What are the main problems faced by language teachers to teach culture in language classrooms?
- How do language teachers integrate culture into teaching?
- Do you think the concept of local-culture input for EFL teaching is beneficial for teaching target culture?

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