

THE RELEVANCE OF CULTURE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BEGINNER

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Abstract: The relevance of culture in Foreign Language teaching with special reference to beginners. Language and culture are inseparable. They are so close that they can be identified as similar (Scarcella, Oxford, 1992). We use language to communicate and express cultural thoughts, beliefs without realising the fact that culture is embedded in the language. Their relationship is such that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. For example, if a French language learner is proficient in language and he doesn't know what is 'La Marseillaise', his knowledge is incomplete vis-a-vis culture. Keeping in mind, the vacuum that arises out of language and culture gap, the universities should teach foreign languages. Therefore, 'Culture' is also known as fifth competence. This paper examines the relationship between Culture and FL at three different levels and proposes a sample model of cultural component for FL curriculum. The first level analyses why culture is important in FL learning. The second level describes FC teaching in FL education. The third level presents how the Culture and Foreign Language Learning/Teaching interact.

Keywords: Foreign Culture, Foreign Language, French Language, Second Language.

Introduction: Language and culture are inseparable. They are so close that they can be identified as similar (Scarcella, Oxford, 1992). We use language to communicate and express cultural thoughts, beliefs without realising the fact that culture is embedded in the language. Their relationship is such that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. For example, if a French language learner is proficient in language and he doesn't know what is 'La Marseillaise', his knowledge is incomplete vis-a-vis culture. Keeping in mind, the vacuum that arises out of language and culture gap, the universities should teach foreign languages. Therefore, 'Culture' is also known as fifth competence. This paper examines the relationship between Culture and FL at three different levels and proposes a sample model of cultural component for FL curriculum. The first level analyses why culture is important in FL learning. The second level describes FC teaching in FL education. The third level presents how the Culture and Foreign Language Learning/Teaching interact.

Why culture is important in FL learning?

- a) The main reason for learners to learn FL is to communicate with the target language users, native or those who use it as a second (SL) or foreign language. Foreign culture (FC) learning can contribute to acquire cultural background knowledge in order to communicate, and to increase their comprehension in the target language.
- b) FL learning should go beyond the level of acquiring grammatical rules and it should take place in a situational context (Neuner, 1997).
- c) The language-culture link is significant in FL education because learning a foreign language becomes a kind of enculturation, where one acquires new cultural frames of reference and a new world view, reflecting those of the target language culture and its speakers.

Literary Reviews:

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Rivers, Wilga M. (1981) Teaching Foreign language skills, University of Chicago Press.

Robinson, G. Stuart & Nocon, H. (1996) Second culture acquisition: Ethnography in the foreign language classroom, *Modern language journal*. Vol.80 No.4
Scarcella, R. C. & Oxford, R. L. (1992) *The Tapestry of Language Learning*, Boston, Heinle & Heinle Publishers

FC Teaching in FL Education: In this section, the characteristics of FC learning are presented followed by a FC in FL curriculum discussion. The way to teach culture depends on how one approaches culture. Characteristics of FC learning

- a) Culture learning is a process of interpretation. According to Kramsch (1993), teaching cultural facts or information has not enabled learners to understand foreign attitudes, values, and mindsets. He further elaborates that the purpose of culture teaching is, to make students understand, why the speakers of two different languages have a particular social behavior in either real or fictional situations, and what the consequences of these insights may mean for the learner (2003, p.32). It is a process of learners' interpretation and making sense of their inner and outside world.
- b) Cultural understanding is a constructive learning in the sense it is a shared process through which every individual builds their own cognitive meaning.
- c) The teaching of culture cannot be generalized as teachers do in grammar-translation method of teaching. It needs to focus on "exploration and description" by which the rules of creating meanings become dynamic (2003).
- d) One should be aware of issues of stereotype, bias and ethnocentrism in FC teaching. Stereotyping is unavoidable in culture teaching (Flewellling, 1994). For instance, the ethnocentrism in TESOL programs in NABA does not take international student's need into account; the training TESOL students get, cannot meet their needs in their later teaching in an EFL context.

Research Methodology:

The Interaction between Culture and Foreign Language Learning or Teaching: Although culture and language learning are analogous to each other, it is nonetheless an issue of debate as to what extent culture should be taught while teaching a foreign language.

Rivers (1981) claims that culture instruction should have at least seven goals. These include

- a) making students aware of the way people act;
- b) the effects of social variables such as age, sex, and social class on the way they speak;
- c) how people in the target culture conventionally act under different circumstances;
- d) culture in the most commonly used word and in phrases;
- e) being critical about the target language culture;
- f) developing skills necessary for locating and organizing materials about the target culture; and
- g) developing intellectual curiosity about the target culture and empathy towards its people.

Although these goals have been recognized by different researchers, whether culture can be taught in the language classroom is still a bone of contention.

Krashen (1982) argues that the classroom setting is not an appropriate place to acquire language and culture. In his view, classroom is only appropriate to teach language rules.

Robinson and Nocon (1996) highlight the importance of living in the target culture and opine that culture learning in the classroom is only "cognitive boundary crossing" which leaves learners' previous experiences unexamined and unchallenged. In other words, because the foreign language classroom underestimates what the learners already know and believe, it cannot become a suitable place for teaching culture.

Nonetheless, there are also views in support of teaching culture in the language classroom (Byram, 2008); the proper cultural context in Byram's terms includes the language patterns which particular people use when they come together at a particular time and place from different social situations. Teachers should find means of situational teaching method which can influence language use. Moreover, the classroom is often multicultural, and the teacher should pay close attention to these cultural variations within the language classroom

One model, I would like to propose for FL teachers is stage by stage intercultural induction model for FL teaching for beginners. Supposing that there are twelve lessons to be taught and one lesson is exclusively devoted to cultural component after every three lessons. In this scenario, there would be four cultural components in total. It is also necessary to note that every lesson may include some cultural elements but it's not made exclusive. For example- festivals of TL.

First component is based on geography of the target language. For example, 'France in Europe'. What FL learners learn is different names of countries, capitals and nationalities in target language. Here, the students learn about their country and neighbor countries also in target language.

Second component is based on gastronomy of the target language. For example, what are the food habits of the inhabitants? What are the famous local dishes? etc. Here, the learners compare their food habits with others.

Third component is based on sports. For example the learner would be taught how the natives of TL spend their free-time. Fourth component is based on cultural events. In this section they learn about the singers, poets, writers etc.

Conclusion: The relationship between culture and FL is being seen in a triple perspective and it becomes evident how they are indispensable to each other. This paper also presents 'a model' which manifests how much culture teaching is adequate in FL teaching at beginner's level and it can be followed by various universities in order to replace culture teaching with inter-culture teaching.

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