

Teaching Culture in Foreign Language Classes

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Stockwell, Esther. (2018). Teaching culture in foreign language classes. *Foreign Language Education Research*, 22, 11-23.

Even though many researchers emphasise the interrelatedness of language and culture and the significance of teaching culture in foreign language education, understanding how culture can be taught has proven to be a difficult undertaking in many respects. This problem is hardly new, and the problems of defining what culture is and how to teach it in language classes have been of concern to researchers for decades. Developments in technology have opened up access to cultural resources from all over the world, and to this end, methods of teaching culture using technology have started to appear more regularly in research associated with second language teaching and learning. A glance through the literature reveals, however, that where in the past many teachers focused on teaching a single culture within a language class, in recent years there has been a movement to try to broaden the focus to include general intercultural communication competence, but a systematic approach for methods of teaching culture have been still lacking. However, it is generally accepted that cross-cultural understanding is indeed a by-product of foreign language learning, and language should be taught as an explicit element of cultural practice. Therefore, it is necessary to consider issues about teaching culture in foreign language education such as what role culture plays in language teaching and how it is being taught. Based on current developments in technology, it is timely to think about effective teaching methodologies for integrating culture and language that prepare learners to communicate and collaborate effectively in the 21st century

Key Words: Teaching culture, Intercultural Communication Competence, Culture learning portfolios

I . Introduction

Over the past several years, many universities around the world aim to bring up their students to be globally aware, focusing heavily on foreign language education to achieve this goal (e.g., Rivers, 2010). Much of this language education, however, occurs quite independently from enhancing cultural awareness, despite the strong correlation between language acquisition and developing cultural awareness. Language and culture are closely interconnected, and students cannot have a comprehensive grasp of a language without understanding its culture. Because it is language in its cultural context that creates meaning, creating and interpreting meaning is done within a cultural framework.

For example, how to choose suitable words and behave appropriately in certain situations to communicate with native speakers and also one language does not simply translate to another language because they exist in different cultural contexts. It is also possible that sometimes linguistically correct sentences could cause misunderstanding or confusion when they are used in different cultural contexts. These are all related to knowledge of its culture.

II. History of teaching culture in a foreign language education

In the early stages of foreign language education, culture received little to no attention, where “...prior to the 1960s, the lines between language and culture were carefully drawn. The primary reason for second language study in the earlier part of this century was access to the great literary masterpieces of civilization” (Allen, 1985, p. 138). People generally learned a second or foreign language in order to read and study its literature, and communication was of far lesser importance, and it wasn’t until the 1960s and 1970s that cultural awareness had its real beginnings. Brooks (1968) advocated the importance of culture not in relation to the study of literature but in the means of foreign language learning, and his seminal work *Language and Language Learning* offered 64 topics regarding culture associated with human daily life in society such as greetings, town and country life, cafes, bars, restaurants, verbal taboos, patterns of politeness, and so forth. These topics are covered nowadays, and similar topics can be seen in most modern situational-functional EFL textbooks.

Researchers in the 1980s emphasized the studying the dynamics of culture and its impact on “successful” foreign language learning (e.g., Canale & Swain, 1980; Cargill, 1987; Byram, 1989). The interrelationship between language and culture was closely examined and the need to integrate linguistic and culture learning in foreign language education was suggested. During the 20th century, as the world became more globalized and/or internationalized, foreign language teaching began to cross national and ethnic boundaries and be viewed at in a “transnational and global context” (Risager, 2007, p. 1). English came to assume a role as an international language, which demanded changes in culture dimension of how it is taught (Wandel, 2002). One such change was the movement towards an intercultural approach in foreign language education that aimed to develop students’ intercultural sensitivity and awareness. Based on this evolution, the concept of intercultural communicative competence also has come challenged through such globalisation (Alptekin, 2002). For example, it is not unusual to see people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds using English to communicate in various settings such as travelling, academic study, or conferences. As English has come to be used as a proxy lingua franca, non-native speakers are engaging in specific intercultural

contexts so require strategies for interpreting cultures and languages when they communicate with native or/and other non-native speakers.

Movements of understanding teaching culture in foreign language education have shifted from:

- culture as distinct from language to culture as integral to language
- cultural absolutes to cultural variations within and across cultures
- cultural stereotypes to cultural generalizations
- culture-specific model to culture-general models of intercultural competence (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, & Colby, 2003; Talebinezhad & Akbari, 2004; Jalali, Sa'd, & Hatam, 2014; Stockwell, 2016)

Many studies on teaching culture have shown that language and culture are closely related and are best acquired together. Brown (2000), for example, describes this interrelatedness by stating, “a language is a part of a culture, and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture” (p.177).

Based on this understanding regarding teaching culture in language classes, we can think about the role of culture in education, and more specifically, how culture has been taught in language classrooms. Strasheim (1981) found that teachers spent approximately 10% of teaching time on culture. Lafayette (1988) noted that teachers spent the greatest amount of time and effort on teaching grammatical and lexical components of the language, leaving the culture as the weakest component in the curriculum. Over a decade later, the results of a study by Moore (1996) indicated that 26% of the respondents taught culture in all their lessons, and a follow-up study conducted ten years later by Moore (2006) found that at least 80% of the teachers surveyed indicated they were teaching culture in their class. As the results of studies suggest, the last 25 years have seen dramatic improvements in the amount of time dedicated to teaching culture in language classes.

Although teachers have begun to incorporate more culture in their lessons, the major concern is finding effective ways to integrate culture and language to prepare learners to communicate and collaborate effectively. There has been no shortage of methods and approaches for teaching culture, which include the use of authentic materials, cultural capsules, culture clusters, culture assimilators, incorporation of proverbs, music, songs, celebrations of festivals, and study-abroad programs. For example, Hughes (1986) proposed teaching strategies for cultural awareness that include the comparisons, culture assimilators, a “culture capsule,” dramas, newspapers, and the media. Krasner (1999) promoted observations of culture through movies, news broadcasts, maps, or menus and requiring students to visit ethnic sections of cities or restaurants.

However, in actual classroom settings, the methods of teaching culture have mainly

followed traditional ways. In Moore's 1996 study described above, 210 randomly selected foreign language teachers in New York were asked about whether or not they were teaching culture and if so, the methods they used. Of the 26% of teachers who did teach culture, more than half (54%) indicated that the most frequent activity for teaching culture was asking students to read the notes in the textbooks, followed by 46% of teachers who used lecture notes. Sources like textbooks and lecture notes that were widely used by teachers are predominantly limited to presenting basic facts about the target culture, and do not engage students in the process of deeper understanding of the target culture. A potential cause of this may be, according to Byrd (2014), that language teachers often struggle to identify cultural resources for their learners. The textbook becomes the most often used resource for teaching culture, and teachers rarely provide additional materials for culture teaching (Kahraman, 2016). Although this may in part be due to a lack of appropriate materials, anecdotal observations and experience also suggest that teachers have little freedom to choose their own teaching materials for administrative reasons, which may limit what they can do.

III. Teachers' attitudes towards the teaching culture

According to Yang and Chen (2014, 2016), there are three categories about teachers' attitudes towards teaching culture in their language courses; 1. Teaching culture is not important, 2. Teaching culture can be considered as a forerunner to precede the teaching of grammar, and 3. Teaching culture is part of a meaningful context. Language teachers in the first category do not seem to teach culture at all as part of their classes. Some language teachers simply do not recognise the significance of teaching culture in a foreign language course, and as such do not include any culture-related content in their students' assignments or assessment. Teachers in the second category view culture as an additional, or add-on component of teaching language. In this perspective, teachers describe culture as a dispensable component in language classes, where cultural knowledge is little more than an "appetizer" to the imparting of language knowledge as the main dish of a meal. Culture is used only as a way to add interest to a language class rather than as an integral part of learning the language, and is supplementary, not a major component in the classes. Some instructors in these studies, for example, believed that talking about cultural points in class would attract students to the target language but they rarely considered teaching culture to be one of the major objectives in class. One Spanish instructor cited in Yang and Chen's study (2016) showed this culture-as-appetizer approach when she shared her personal experiences from her time spent in Mexico to capture students' attention. She argued that sharing her personal cultural experiences when teaching grammar made it easier for her to organize the class and

make her class more interesting and popular. The third type of attitude considers culture as a wide-reaching and important foundation for language teaching. In other words, it sees culture as always surrounding a language and helping to determine its interpretation. Language necessarily exists in a cultural context, meaning that one language does not simply translate to another language because of the different cultural contexts. Successful teaching of culture in language classes starts from teachers' attitudes about teaching culture. It should be in teachers' minds even at the beginning levels of learning that teachers should not only introduce the mechanics and format of the language, but they also need to introduce students to the aspects of culture, if nothing else, raising their awareness to the interconnection between culture and language. The last several years have seen some changes in teacher attitudes towards teaching culture, where the importance of teaching culture is more widely accepted, and many teachers express enthusiasm to learn more about how to teach culture. Culture is featuring more centrally in conferences in the field of teaching foreign languages, and there has been a surge of interest in developing strategies and resources for teaching culture.

IV. Methods of teaching culture

Since the initial emergence of culture as an important element in language teaching, methods of teaching culture have continued to evolve. From students' perspective, methods of learning culture have shifted from a traditional information acquisition approach to a process-oriented constructivist approach (Shrum & Glisan, 2005). Approaches where learners are predominantly told about the target culture by their teacher have gradually been replaced by approaches where students' active participation is encouraged to construct their understanding of the target culture, while at the same time to reflect on their own culture. This transition has been in part facilitated by developments of information and communication technology (ICT), which has had an enormous impact on education that has also filtered down to the teaching of culture. The integration of digital media has not only made the use of movies and videos can become more accessible (Belz, 2003), but technology has also contributed to more student-centered approaches to learning culture, where learners can have first-hand contact with the target culture to suit their own learning needs. For example, students can use the Internet to find cultural information while engaging in a class task, or students can use email or other communication tools to interact with students from different cultural backgrounds. The past two decades have seen numerous research projects demonstrating and debating the effects of computer-mediated communication (CMC) on the development of learners' intercultural competences in addition to linguistic proficiency (Müller-Hartmann, 2000; Ware & Kramsch, 2005; Schneider & von der Emde, 2006;

Levy, 2007; Chun, 2011; Stockwell, 2016). International telecollaboration activities is that students use the Internet communication tools, such as email, chat blog and so on to develop their foreign language skills and intercultural competence through interacting with students from other country

It is important to investigate how cultural aspects can be incorporated into the language classroom. The reason is that many teachers who have used international telecollaboration activities in their language classes believe that exposing students to a different cultural environment is by itself sufficient to teach culture or intercultural ability. This tendency was discovered in a study by Stockwell (2018), which looked at the articles published in four major journals in the CALL research area—CALICO, CALL, LLT, and ReCALL—between 2004 and 2013. All the articles that dealt with Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) in foreign language classes that used telecollaboration activities were selected for analysis. According to this analysis, 70% of these classes didn't provide the students with any teaching, training, or discussion about cultural issues before, during, or after they were exposed to the target culture. In other words, at no point were these students given any lessons, trainings or discussion time about cultural issues. However, many of the studies that were analyzed described developing cultural awareness as one of their outcomes, based on student surveys. These were often the result of unplanned circumstances, however, such as participants' interaction with interlocutors or resources from different cultural backgrounds.

Many recent studies by researchers have revealed that merely communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds does not automatically lead to intercultural learning. This suggests that cognitive or ICC development may not be attained automatically through CMC interactions among peers (Liaw & Bunn-Le Master, 2010; Kitade, 2012). Many studies have claimed that their subjects developed intercultural competence by sharing information about certain cultures; however, though the term intercultural competence is related to some extent to specific cultural knowledge, it also refers to understanding the attitudes, beliefs, values, and interpersonal skills (both verbal and non-verbal) of people from different cultures. Therefore, acquiring cultural knowledge or cultural awareness and developing intercultural competence are not the same.

With this in mind, how can we help students in language classes develop intercultural competence, instead of just linguistic proficiency?

As Muller-Hartmann (2007) indicates, learners' critical reflection and self-assessment during intercultural discussion are key elements in cultural learning. First, it is very important for learners to recognize their present cognitive state toward their own culture and other cultures, e.g., their degrees of ethnocentrism, racism, prejudice, and so on. As shown in many studies, if learners hold stereotypical images of a target culture

before interacting with people from that culture, the interaction may confirm their stereotypical beliefs rather than eliminating them (Belz, 2003; O'Dowd, 2003). Therefore, it is important that learners have the opportunity to examine their current cognitive stage, including stereotypical images, biases, or prejudices towards the target culture, as well as if they have a strong sense of ethnocentrism. This self-assessment is one of the main ways to prevent negative results from learners' interactions with people from other cultures.

V. Learners' critical reflection and self-assessment: culture learning portfolios through Webquest

In order to ensure that learners practice critical reflection and self-assessment during intercultural discussion, making culture learning portfolios may be one useful alternative to traditional classroom achievement assessments. In fact, adopting culture learning portfolios to the foreign language class is not a "new" method. Regardless of the methods' age, however, the most important thing is that educators adopt and apply the methods best-suited to the students' learning, linguistic capacities and cognitive capacities.

I would like to share one example of a culture learning portfolio that I have used in my English class. I am also in the process of adopting the Webquest activities to make a culture learning portfolio. Webquests are inquiry-based activities available on the internet. One of the key points that separate WebQuests from simple Internet searches is that useful sites can be selected by the teacher based on their relevance, appropriateness, and, in some cases, linguistic difficulty. The reason for using the Webquest activities is that many students have English language limitations, and it is stressful for them to search and understand various types of information online.

This activity is for Japanese students to make a culture learning portfolio in their English language class. There are three sections: Introduction, Procedures, and Performance tasks. The introduction explains the purpose of making a culture learning portfolio, the procedures section explains how to make it, and the performance tasks explains tasks students must complete as homework. Students need to find information on the details of these performance tasks. Task 1 is for students to develop and demonstrate their awareness of general knowledge, such as geographic, historical, economic, social, religious, and political factors that can have an impact on cultural perspectives, products, and practices. In addition, it ensures that students are aware of not only the cultures of English-speaking countries but also their own (Japanese) culture. Here is one of example of Task 1.

- Task 1.1: Compare an English-speaking country (choose the U.S., U.K., or

Australia) with Japan in at least 10 of the following categories: geography, climate, population, population density, population composition (race, immigration status, age, etc.), family structure, languages, political system, life expectancy, economic system (GNP, imports, exports, etc.), religion(s), education system, important historical events, traditions, values, norms, customs, taboos, patterns of behavior, gender roles, and communication styles.

- Task 1.2: Using the information researched for Task 1.1, discuss at least five similarities or differences. Make sure the discussion includes how these similarities or differences could influence the two cultures being examined.

Task 2 is designed for the students to recognize the stereotypes and generalizations they hold toward the target country and Japan, and to evaluate them in terms of what supporting evidence there is for them. Below is one example of Task 2.

- Task 2.1: Find some general, fixed images of Japan and an English-speaking country, as well as the people of those countries. For the English-speaking country, choose the U.S., the U.K., or Australia.
- Task 2.2: Find out how these images (in the findings from Task 2.1) came into being. You can explain these images through the historical background, the social organizational structure, religions, language, the diverse cultural patterns and so on.

The students research information for these tasks, complete them outside class, and submit their culture learning portfolio at the end of semester. They also have about 10 minutes of group discussion time every two weeks in class to share the information they've found and their experiences with these tasks.

Culture learning portfolios can be used for various tasks with learners of practically any level. At lower levels, the majority of student responses will likely be in their native language. At intermediate and advanced levels, both the assigned tasks and the students' analyses and reactions will likely be in the target language. In order to produce effective results using a culture learning portfolio, students need considerable instructional time before, during and after the activity, as well as group and individual discussion with the teacher about their findings and conclusions. Portfolios are said to encourage students' critical reflection and self-evaluation, and at least in theory provide continuous formative instructor guidance and feedback. In addition, through WebQuests instructors are able to select information considering their students' cognitive capacities and linguistic abilities, which reduces the risk that students will miss the point of the task or lose their motivation because it is beyond their cognitive and linguistic abilities. Therefore, the

portfolios encourage discussion, collaboration, and revision in the subject of cultural learning, as well as the use of multiple sources.

Reflection and self-assessments are not automatically attained, however. In order to help learners think about their own culture and other cultures, they need general cultural education and ongoing training before, during and after their exposure to different cultures. Intercultural communication researchers have suggested that learners must first explore their own culture, in order to understand what it means to be a part of it. This can even be accomplished before they are ready to reflect on the values, expectations and traditions of others, by discussing the values, expectations, traditions, customs, and rituals that they unconsciously take part in (Neuliep, 2015; Samovar *et al.*, 2014).

Language teachers need to help learners recognize their own cultural factors and offer them opportunities to develop skills for investigating cultural complexity and promoting cultural curiosity. The teacher not only has to facilitate class but must also take an active role in establishing successful learning opportunities for learners. However, it may be very demanding for language teachers to teach culture or be knowledgeable about different cultures. One study shows that teachers are aware of the importance of the cultural dimension in language learning, but also aware of their own lack of knowledge related to the target language culture(s) (Atay, 2005). The result of a study by Kahraman (2016) also demonstrated that teachers devoted less time to teaching culture than to teaching language, though they express their willingness to teach culture in a foreign language classroom. There are many possible reasons why teachers can't devote more time to culture teaching, such as overloaded curriculums and curriculum limits, a lack of time, teaching to required examinations, and their own lack of familiarity with target language cultures.

For all these reasons, in the long term teachers must be educated about other cultures, and culture education and language education must be coordinated at an institutional level. As a preliminary step, teachers can provide learners with materials about their own culture and other cultures, as well as providing class or small group discussion time in class to deepen learners' understanding of their own culture and other cultures. This would help learners develop attitudes that would allow them to understand and accept other cultures.

VI. Conclusion

Byram (1994) emphasized that there are three broad and overlapping categories of location for acquiring intercultural competence: 1. the classroom, 2. pedagogically structured experiences outside the classroom and 3. independent experiences. Cultural learning in the classroom has the potential to offer opportunities to acquire skills under

the guidance of a teacher, even through small group discussion time. The teacher does not necessarily have to teach culture, but rather guide students to think and reflect on cultural issues. Outside the classroom, students can find cultural information through various resources under the teacher's guidance (e.g., Webquest). In other words, the classroom can provide opportunities to teach students to interpret and relate to the content of culture, and learners have a chance to find relations between concepts, such as "know that" and "know how." In addition, developments in technology have also opened up access to cultural resources from all over the world, and methods of teaching culture using technology have created a movement away from approaches where learners passively listen to the teacher talk about the target culture, and approaches to developing cultural awareness have started to focus on students' active participation in the construction of an understanding of the target culture, as well as reflecting on their own. This approach can also be adopted to suit some homogenous cultural environments (such as Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China, etc.).

Interest in cultural issues in foreign language classes will continue to deepen and widen. As a result, reviews about teaching culture in foreign language education are quite timely. It has been shown that cross-cultural understanding is indeed a byproduct of foreign language learning, and language should be taught explicitly as a cultural practice. It would be unrealistic to expect that the formal inclusion of cultural objectives in teaching and assessment can simply be tacked on to the traditional language-focused curriculum. However, teachers can start by systematically providing learners with opportunities to develop such understanding of their own cultures and target cultures. Therefore, it is necessary to balance the following factors in teaching culture in foreign language education: the teacher's attitude toward teaching culture, pedagogical development, the adoption of appropriate technologies, and the creation of a self-organized learning environment for learners.

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Received on 21 April 2018

Reviewed on 8 May 2018

Accepted on 30 May 2018