

INCORPORATING CULTURE IN TEACHERS' TRAINING

Gabriel Bărbuleț 

1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia, Romania

Abstract

The present paper addresses the question of how one should include culture in language teacher training to increase awareness of the target culture. Admittedly, language teachers are themselves learners, constantly improving their own cultural competence. Teachers must be made aware of the fact that there are no higher and lower cultures, and that there exist differences between groups within the target culture. This means that language does not only represent how we describe culture, it also mirrors cultural aspects. Thus, the culture associated with a particular language cannot be learned while referring to a few aspects about celebrations, customs or traditions of the zone in which a language is used. Culture is a much larger concept. This is inherently bound to countless linguistic aspects. The latter are to be introduced in second/foreign language education. Language teaching aids may not be enough for the target language culture teaching, so it ought to be the language teachers' responsibility to find practical solutions to this issue. Thus, language educators ought to find a way to assimilate culture into their teaching approaches. Moreover, it may not be realistic to consider that language learners will later be faced with cultural situations after they achieve mastery of the linguistic structures of the language. The imaginative classroom teacher can bring forward countless ideas about how to insert culture into his/her textbooks and classroom events. Some of the approaches I want to suggest are the use of movies, dialogues from genuine speakers of the target culture, talks with native speakers, video-taped materials of the target language community, and genuine readings and realia. In addition to this, it ought to be noted that the possible activities and approaches are countless, and that each teacher ought to evaluate his/her own context to assess the success of any potential activity. He/she should adapt any activity or material at his/her disposal to suit his/her students' needs.

Keywords: Culture; Teacher's training; Target culture; Language learner.

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1 Introduction

Language and culture are strongly related to one another. Claire Kramsch argues that there should be a clear connection between “the teaching of language and that of culture”, because cultural awareness enhances the acquisition of those skills that influence the students’ becoming language proficient (Kramsch 1991: 216, as cited in Hinkel 1999: 5). We, as teachers of English, are entitled to bring culture into the language classroom as

Language- learners who live in a new culture begin to absorb the new language by listening to it, practising it, and using it in real situations. When learners see how language and culture are fused together and reflect each other, they become more aware of their environment and can understand how it affects their second-language development (Wintergerst, & McVeigh 2011: 27).

Thus, it is a constant challenge for us to help students become acquainted with new methods, with new ways of thinking and with new codes of behaviour. According to Claire Kramsch, culture includes all the aspects of the learning process, that is “culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing. It is always in the background, right from day one” (Kramsch 1991: 1, as cited in Wintergerst, & McVeigh 2011: 4).

We begin our approach to demonstrating the necessity of teaching and learning language through cultural content with the premises that we, as language teachers of English, and they, as learners, are not able to teach and study a foreign language without involving a picture about the different opinions and outlooks of people in diverse cultures that may improve or even hinder communication.

2 Literature Review

According to Politzer (1959: 99-105, as cited in Thanasoulas 2001), even if students are well-grounded in the language content, they are at risk of being exposed to “...meaningless symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning...” The need for a culture-based curriculum is obvious, leading some researchers to create a theory “for culturally responsive teaching”, which would refer to the “knowledge, attitudes, skills needed”. (Gay 2002: 106) Speaking about cultural content, Byram and Morgan refer to four aspects of discussion, namely the instructional level of the cultural content “within the language teaching and the...curriculum”, the planning of cultural content according to the educational principles directly related to “other aspects of foreign language learning” with an emphasis on the idea that our knowledge skills are shaped by our cognitive and affective learning processes”, and the methods and techniques used by the teacher for students to gain awareness of the cultural content, as well as the cultural content testing techniques (Byram, & Morgan 1994: 3).

Nelson Brooks (1968) considers that it is obvious that language teachers are willing to teach culture. The reason why language teachers find it challenging to bring culture into the language classroom stems from the difficulty of defining the concept, discovering its relevance in the curriculum, and acknowledging

the way it can become significant and fruitful in a sequence of years of language study. Another challenge when it comes to bringing culture into the language classroom may be the lack or the shortage of materials especially prepared for the teaching of culture and for tests that will measure the learner's progress in acquiring information (Brooks 1968: 205).

Students, in their turn, consider language classrooms as an important opportunity for them to become informed about the target culture. Here, Brooks also states that language students discover that one language is superimposed upon another, generating a result similar to a double exposure in photography. In an ideal world, the original picture immediately fades as the second picture gradually gains in clarity and detail. Of all the components of the target culture, the most distinctive, unique, and challenging, however the most easily available, is the target language. Therefore, its authentic use from the very beginning is a most legitimate cultural objective. (Brooks 1968)

Brooks further adds that during the language classes, students may become aware that formulas of politeness, requests, directives are not a matter of language, but of language users. They are cultural elements and can give a cultural dimension to each language class. Students may also start to identify such details. Chastain (1971) declares that studying culture affords students a reason to examine the target language and this can be a good motivational instrument. One of the essential problems in language teaching is to empower students to think in the language they are learning. Providing insights into cultural aspect of a language, learning culture would assist learners in relating the abstract sounds and forms of a language to actual people and places. In order to achieve high motivation, cultural activities play a major role since learners like culturally-based activities such as role playing, singing, dancing, discussing about and doing research on foreign countries and people's customs, etc. The use of culturally-oriented activities in language education boosts learners' not only interest in and curiosity about target countries but also their motivation (Kitao 2000, as cited in Doganay 2013 and Doganay, & Yergaliyeva). Cultural content has a great influence on both language and pedagogy as it impacts the semantic, pragmatic and discourse levels of the language and moreover, it affects the choice of language materials, as the cultural content of the language as well as the cultural foundation of the teaching methodology need to be taken into consideration while deciding upon language materials (McKay 2003, as cited in Doganay 2013: 109).

The issue now is how to include culture in language teacher training to enhance awareness of the target culture. Admittedly, language teachers are themselves learners, constantly improving their own cultural competence. Teachers must acknowledge that there are no higher and lower cultures, and that there are

different ways groups behave within the target culture. Ellis (1992) states that teachers' role in the classroom is not to confirm the prejudices of their students or to challenge their genuinely held convictions. He adds that

the teachers' task is to stimulate students' interest in the target culture, and to help in establishing the foreign language classroom not so much as a place where the language is taught, but as one where opportunities for learning of various kinds are provided through the interactions that take place between the participants. (Ellis 1992: 71)

Thus, where does culture belong? In what discipline is it included? Several questions arise:

- Is there such an issue as a cultural syllabus or a cultural program? When should we start teaching culture in ELT? Whose culture are we supposed to teach and what items should we teach at a certain level?
- How do materials refer to culture as a distinct subject and how do we know if it is adequate?
- What are the most suitable audio materials, texts and visual aids when teaching culture?
- What type of methodology is appropriate to teaching different cultures at different stages?
- What kinds of activities are best for learning about and praising other cultures?

Culture has many origins and academic disciplines that have marked its evolution. One is linguistics, which has offered the concepts of language analysis that are the source of inter-cultural communication. Another is psychology, which has generated many of the notions we use to understand people's motivation and behaviour. Two other disciplines, sociology and anthropology, have both played an important role in our study of human behaviour and the influences that form social standards in different language communities.

3 Culture in the Curriculum

The moment when one has identified the origins of culture then one can look for its presence in the syllabus. The Common European Framework for Reference (CEFR) has no distinct section for culture, only some cultural references. In order to solve the communication difficulties in the target language in the EFL/ESL classes, students should have elements of the target culture in the curriculum. The teachers should be aware of the learner's needs so as not to determine them to weaken their motivation. In other words, a logical look at the original culture is as important as knowledge of the target

culture. Also, problems that come from the absence of cross-cultural consciousness are not limited to the oral aspect of communication. The paralinguistic features and suitable way of behaving are similarly important issues in the communicatively competent students' performance. The fact that culture-bound signals, postures, mimics, and other aspects of behaviour can also lead to miscommunication is almost always neglected.

The National Center for Cultural Competence describes culture as an "integrated pattern of human behaviour that includes thoughts, communications, languages, beliefs, values, customs, rituals, ethnic, religious or social group; and the ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations" (Goode et al. 2000: 312). This means that language not only explains the way we define culture, but it also reflects culture. Consequently, the culture connected with a language is difficult to acquire in some lessons about cultural elements of the region where the language is used.

Culture is a much larger concept that is fundamentally linked to many of the linguistic concepts used in second/foreign language classes. Moreover, Krasner (1999) states that mere linguistic competence is not sufficient for learners of a language to be proficient in that language. Language learners must acknowledge, for example, the culturally appropriate ways to talk to people, express thankfulness, make requests, and say "yes" or "no" to certain people. They should also be aware of the fact that behaviour and intonation models that are suitable in their language community may be understood differently by different members of the target language community. They have to admit the fact that for communication to be effective, language use must be related with other culturally accepted behaviours.

The question remains, what kind of content should be integrated into a foreign or second language syllabus?

Language teaching materials do not always include the target language culture and the teaching of it. Thus, it is the language teacher's responsibility to find practical solutions to insert culture into their teaching. It would not be realistic to assume that language students will later be exposed to cultural issues after they have mastered the linguistic features of the language. The efficient classroom teacher can offer numerous ideas regarding the way to integrate culture into the textbooks and classroom activities. Some of the approaches the author would like to suggest are the use of movies, audio-taped interviews, lectures from genuine speakers of the target culture, recorded observations of the target language community, and authentic reading materials. Moreover, it should be noted that the possible activities and strategies are numerous. Each teacher should evaluate their own context to assess the success of any potential activity. They should also change any activity or material at hand to suit their students' requirements in a better way.

Usually, using audio-visual materials raises involvement to interaction, encouraging students to use their imagination for a “real life experience”. In the meantime, the task-oriented actions give students an urge to talk. All possible flexibility and malleability of these activities are essential if the communicative requirements of learners are to be fulfilled. With the limited time available in class, it is necessary to follow open language involvements with more intensive structured circumstances, dialogues, and role-playing activities. These will offer students both the opportunity and the courage to use the language.

Second language teachers should categorize key cultural issues in every aspect of the language that they teach. Learners might be efficient in speaking a foreign/second language only if the topics related to culture represent an intrinsic part of the syllabus. Seelye (1974) brings forward a number of aims for language teachers to establish while teaching culture, which acts as a reference list in the process of selecting, collecting and assembling cultural materials to use in the classroom. According to Seelye, teachers ought to first raise interest and curiosity about the culture they refer to. Furthermore, they should make sure that their students acknowledge the fact that social aspects like age, social class, gender and ethnicity have a major influence on how people use a particular language. Moreover, teachers should aim to present to their students those cases when language use changes according to a given situation that requires an ordinary routine for people of the focused culture or is a rare and unforeseen situation (i.e., an emergency).

Hadley (2003) thinks that cultural activities and goals should be judiciously organised. They should also be incorporated into lesson plans to improve and inform the teaching material. Cultural information should be viewed in a non-judgmental way. This way ought to be one that does not put value or judgment on differences between the students’ own culture and the culture which is analysed in the classroom. Lafayette (1988) feels that the essential aspect in cross-cultural education is the degree to which the study of language and culture are combined. He makes several proposals for achieving this kind of integration:

1. Cultural lessons and activities need to be planned as carefully as Language activities and integrated into lesson plans.
2. Use cultural contexts for language-practice activities, including those that focus on particular grammatical forms.
3. Use a variety of techniques for teaching culture that involves speaking, listening, reading and writing.
4. Use probing questions to help students describe and analyse the cultural significance of photos and realia.
5. Use cultural information when teaching vocabulary.

6. Use small group techniques for cultural instruction.
7. Include experiential and process learning.
8. Use the target language to teach cultural content.
9. Test cultural understanding as carefully as language is tested.

A cultural sequence usually starts at the basic stage with a conversation about the daily life of the student group in another speech community: the families, the relations with their peers, their festivals, dating and marriage customs, etc. At intermediate and advanced stages, the teacher should pay more attention to geographical issues and their influence on daily life, transport, shopping, and the history of art, music and so on. These demonstrations should be accompanied by visual design in the form of charts, diagrams, maps, pictures and films.

It takes students away from the feeling that they learn and towards a sense of participation in the didactic act. It offers very valuable background information for the real mission of penetrating the foreign culture. This has a deep motivational value and reading in the new language about another country and another people offers an interesting activity at that stage.

4 Strategies and Techniques for Building Cultural Awareness

There are many opinions about what methods ought to be used in the classroom in order to grow cultural awareness in students. Byram and Planet (1999) consider the importance of student-centeredness in intercultural education and state that this principle should guarantee that a student's own culture is not dealt with as an abstract notion, but that the focus is put on a student's involvement in it. Students are encouraged to reflect on their culture from the perspective of their own experience. The fact that these studies are conducted in English and students use techniques which they would use to describe their own culture to people from other cultures constitute the difference from teaching culture in other disciplines. Byram and Planet advise not to provide students with ready-made data that they might want in their analysis but rather with data and sources they could use themselves. Although students were born into the culture and are acquainted with it, they need to gain a more distant and general outlook on their culture along with some data in these studies.

Making the topics about the target culture very interesting is crucial. The first strategy to involve students' interest is selecting attractive aspects of the target culture that they are supposed to deal with. The teacher should choose a presentation of all aspects of the culture. These should include readings, explanations, conversations and other graphic means. Personal research plans should also be considered in language lessons. Some useful

strategies for introducing culture in the classroom are presented in this section.

4.1 Authentic materials

Using authentic sources from the native language community supports the students in engaging in reliable cultural experiences. Sources can contain films, news, television shows, Web sites, photographs, magazines, newspapers, travel brochures and any other published materials. Teachers can adjust their use of authentic materials to fit the age and language proficiency level of the learners. For example, even beginner students can watch and listen to video clips extracted from a television show in the target language and concentrate on such cultural agreements as greetings. The teacher could offer students a thorough translation or give them a chart, diagram, or plan to fill in while they listen to a dialogue or watch a video. After the class has watched the appropriate segments, the teacher can involve the students in debates of the cultural rules represented in the segments and what these rules might say about the standards of the culture.

Discussion themes might include nonverbal behaviours (e.g., the physical remoteness between speakers, signals, eye contact, societal parts, and how people in different social roles interact with each other). Learners might describe the behaviours they observe and discuss which resemble their native culture and which do not and decide on strategies for effective communication in the target language. (Peterson, & Coltrane 2003).

4.2 Role playing and drama

Role play and drama are very effective techniques in teaching culture. In role play the learner assumes the role of another person. The environment and sometimes some ideas are offered in instructions. Role play is a widespread method for communicative use of language where learners are stimulated to use language ingeniously and creatively. As role playing is based on real life situations, it is always desirable in a role play to use authentic aids from English speaking communities (for example bus tickets, restaurant menus). Occasionally, it is suitable to record the role play activity on a video or audio CD for future reference. Drama is likewise useful for placing students in cross-cultural misunderstanding. In this technique the designated members act out, in a sequence of short scenes, a misinterpretation of something that takes place in the target culture and is explained in the final scene. Amid other techniques which may be used to teach culture we can mention the audio-motor unit or Total Physical Response, mainly designed as a listening

exercise. This uses a carefully designed list of oral commands to which students answer. These commands are set in such a way to cause students to act out a cultural experience.

4.3 Culture capsules

A culture capsule is a short description of the culture of a certain individual. Typically, it is structured as one or two paragraphs in length, and it contains one minimal difference between one's own culture and also a target-culture agreement. This is accompanied by explanatory photos, slides, or films. The learners are then in charge of finding data about the item in question, either through research or by being offered clues to examine. As an integrative activity, they can make a short summary or design an oral presentation for the class about the cultural implication of the item. These activities may also be a starting point from which teachers can continue to discuss broader cultural, historical, and linguistic issues that are linked with the discussion. This contextualization is, in fact, significant to the accomplishment of using culture capsules.

4.4 Culture clusters

Culture clusters are made of roughly four to five illustrated culture capsules. These capsules bring about related topics plus one 30-minute simulation. These assimilate the information in the capsules and play it up through a sketch or situational role play. Clusters introduce a tiny number of separate, ten-minute culture capsules into the class set-up. There are also teachers that practice mini dramas or mini sketches in order to teach culture.

4.5 Culture assimilators

Culture assimilators, established by social psychologists in order to facilitate adjustment to a far-off culture, are employed as a short description of a critical event of cross-cultural interaction that would undoubtedly be misunderstood by the learners. After the account of the event, the students are showed five likely explanations, from which they are asked to choose the correct one. If they select the wrong variant, they are asked to look for further information that would take them to the correct choice. Culture assimilators are considered to be a good method to encourage understanding of cultural aspects and emotional compassion.

4.6 Culture mini dramas

A mini drama may be built from three to five episodes. Here, a cultural conflicted situation or miscommunication takes place, as in culture assimilator. While each episode is practiced, students try to explain the source of miscommunication through class discussion, guided by the teacher. After each episode, more cultural aspects are offered.

4.7 Proverbs

Language itself, sayings, proverbs, metaphors, community superstitions, humour and sarcasm, offer interesting and challenging examples of the usage of language and illustrate the effect of culture on people's existence. Richmond (1987) shows that proverbs are a substantial part of cultural expression. They involve fundamental ideas and allusions and may offer fundamental visions into the peoples' way of life. It is also important to associate the target language proverbs to those found in the source language. Using proverbs as a method to discover culture also offers a way to examine the stereotypes about and confusions regarding a particular culture.

4.8 Literature

Studying culture by using literary texts can include popular fiction, ballads, folklore, and anything that can bring to light the behaviour and life experience in a given culture. When reading about the culture of the target language, the teacher might help the learners to understand what they might encounter in the country of the target language, and, consequently, they may be better prepared to experience it. Literary texts are often full of cultural information and induce unforgettable responses from students. Texts that are carefully chosen for a given group of learners, taking into consideration their benefits and the required level of language mastery, and with certain aims in mind, can be very useful in helping learners acquire awareness of a culture.

Authentic children's literature offers a wide resource for learning about culture, as it covers cultural information arranged by Ellis et al. 2002 into eight categories: Linguistic: e.g., conventions of politeness; Geographical: e.g., information on different countries, flags, capitals; Historical: e.g., information on dinosaurs; Festivals: e.g., information on Easter; Illustrations: e.g., information conveyed through illustrations; Everyday life: information on shops and shopping, meal times; Citizenship-related issues: e.g., tolerance; Songs, music and rhymes: many traditional

songs and rhymes easily relate to stories and offer authentic examples of children's lore.

4.9 Films

Film and television clips offer students a chance to witness behaviours that are not understandable in texts. Films often represent one of the more up-to-date and complete way to capture the outlook, atmosphere, and music of a culture. Film also introduces students to language and cultural aspects simultaneously, such as portraying conversational timing and conversation turn-taking. Students achieved significant gains in overall cultural knowledge after watching selected videos from the target culture in the language classroom (Herron et al. 1999). Those films which are illustrative of aspects of life that are found in the culture might be chosen, and it is not advisable for the language educator to use subtitles while playing the movies.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, when we discuss teaching students' cultural awareness skills as contrasting to teaching cultural information, we have to take into account a number of aspects, such as the syllabus, the materials and the teaching methodology. The challenge is to start a debate on what and how to teach to help our children develop as global citizens of the world, using English and any other languages as their own native languages.

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