

# How Do Teachers Establish A Culture And Communication In Language Learning?

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**Abstract:** Most of the time people learn foreign languages for communication – to be able to speak and understand. In the early stages of the teaching of any foreign language, teachers introduce language etiquette of the studied language for better understanding and appreciation of aspects of the culture. This is partly due to the fact in many cases language learning starts from “Hello”, or “My name is...” etc., and also there are major differences between the studied and native languages which describe these languages and their speakers. This indicates that language etiquette should be a part of any language teaching and learning process. The learning of foreign languages at any level is characterized by the interplay of many factors such as mother tongue, culture, educational background, psychological factors, among others. A difficult task that faces an instructor is the development of the socio-cultural competence in teaching a foreign language.

**Keywords:** language etiquette, foreign languages, language teaching, culture, politeness, intercultural communication, socio-cultural competence, the target culture, cultural knowledge, effectively cross culturally, studied behaviors, recognize, human values, collaboration, tolerance, activity, responsibility, participate, community.

## Introduction

Technology and globalization of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has opened up the world. Today, within a few minutes one can be in a country and chat with others in other countries using media such as internet, wireless, fixed phones and mobile phones. Furthermore, in a few hours, one can travel from one country to another. All these have helped change the basic objectives of learning a language. Whilst in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the main aim of learning languages was to be able to read and write and to understand written forms of a language, in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries people are learning foreign languages for communication – to be able to speak and understand (Lessard-Clouston, 1997).

As Lessard–Clouston said while studying foreign language you improve your communication skills, also when you learn a second language, you become better at communicating in your mother tongue as well. This is because you learn to analyze your first language from different angles, as you discover differences and similarities with the new language.

These days there are many ways and conditions of teaching and learning a foreign language. These among others include individual or group learning with or without an instructor. Irrespective of the method one uses during the teaching and learning process in a second language, the cultural aspect of the language and studies of the cultures that use the language should be included. Through these, learners can understand that there are different people, languages and cultures in the world and may better appreciate those differences.

This article attempts to provide information on the importance of developing the socio-cultural competence in teaching a foreign language and assesses language etiquette in language teaching and learning. for the beginning gives a situational analysis of the Culture in Foreign Language Teaching; Than discusses etiquette and language etiquette.

Communication between two persons communicate in the English language is an intercultural event. Thus, participants have to show respect to their interlocutor and to their cultural background by demonstrating that they know who they are and where they come from.

They also have to respect each other's identity which is a totality of name, date of birth, marital status, social class or ethnic group and nationality (Camilleri 24). Moreover, speakers have to adapt to the cultural context in which they are found. Therefore, a certain level of ICC is needed for successful communication.

The concept of "sociocultural competence" involves the ability to use specific information about nation, speech etiquette knowledge and communication technology in order to achieve mutual understanding with other culture bearers.

What is cultural competence in English?

Cultural competence is defined as a set of values, behaviors, attitudes, and practices within a system, organization, program or among individuals and which enables them to work effectively cross culturally.

The Uzbek National Curriculum focuses on listening, speaking, reading, writing and intercultural activity. It emphasizes the importance of culture in language teaching and includes the following learning outcomes. Due to the incorporation of culture in the Uzbek National Curriculum, learners will be able to:

1. deduce, through listening, speaking, reading and writing, facts about the country or countries of the foreign language in question, and compare them with their own life and surroundings;
2. acquire habits of courteous communication in a foreign language;
3. respect their own and target culture;
4. recognise universal human values such as friendship, collaboration, altruism, and tolerance, and want to actively and responsibly participate in the issues relevant to the community.

To make an intercultural activity successful, students must acquire appropriate strategies, knowledge and skills. According to the learning outcomes with regard to intercultural communication students are expected to:

1. use known information about their own, target and other cultures, to relate them to new situations and context, to think critically;
2. use the acquired knowledge of the culture characteristics and intercultural communication and to interpret target culture without prejudices;
3. apply appropriate behavior in familiar situations and to try new behavior patterns in unfamiliar situations;

4. demonstrate curiosity and empathy towards foreign and unintelligible information, behaviour and situations.

These points represent general outcomes of teaching culture in the EFL classroom. Furthermore, it is evident, as our conducted questionnaire will later show, that teachers do not emphasize cultural outcomes as much as they should. The learning outcomes related to individual cultural topics of a grammar school operational plan based on Solutions Advanced 2nd Edition state that students will be able to:

- understand a long speech and a television programme and recognize the main parts and details;
- recognize the social, political or historical context of a literary work;
- actively participate in a conversation on a topic of common interest.

Outcomes such as understanding and recognition rely on the cognitive domain of Bloom's taxonomy, while active participation relies on the affective domain. The cognitive domain represents the type of knowledge that includes mental skills and the affective domain includes attitude and emotions. The outcomes of studying culture are more appropriately distinguished by the affective domain because teaching culture broadens students' minds and lets them have their own attitude towards cultural otherness. The outcomes given in the previously mentioned operational plan rely more on the cognitive than on the affective domain. This shows vagueness of cultural outcomes in school practice.

Thus sociocultural competence is an ability to communicate in a language appropriately, situationally and culturally. It is the knowledge of customs, rules, beliefs and principles of a given society. ... Rather, English also is the most frequently used language for communication between two non-native speakers.

Teachers are under the influence of mainstream educational policy, which is generally monocultural and associates teaching additional languages with their national culture. It remains to be seen if English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers can become aware of the importance of a common intercultural ground, which can be provided by teaching English as a lingua franca combined with teaching ELF users' cultures.

There are numerous sources for integrating culture in the classroom, among others, books, poetry, newspapers, magazines,

radio clips, television shows and movies (Frank 10). Using such materials can provoke many questions about how and where people live, how they spend their time, how they dress, what and how they eat and many other items of interest. Students can work in groups and make a presentation on the material they have collected. They can also compare their own culture to the target culture.

There is much one can learn about the target culture while reading a work of fiction. Even though sometimes various stereotypes are presented, literature is a good source of cultural information. David Lodge's novel *How Far Can You Go?*, which is among the required reading for the Contemporary British Literature course at the University of Osijek, is an example of an excellent source of cultural knowledge. The novel focuses on young British Catholics growing up in the 1950s. The reader is made familiar with the kind of clothes they wear, what they think about religion, how they perceive love and friendship, etc. The novel presents the characters in a satirical manner and offers a great overview of customs and beliefs within several decades of the 20th century that can apply not only to Great Britain, but also to most European countries.

Furthermore, "more than any other text, it is said, the piece of literary prose or poetry appeals to the students' emotions, grabs their interest, remains in their memory and makes them partake in the memory of another speech community" (Kramsch, *Context and Culture in Language Teaching* 130). Although some teachers think that students do not enjoy poetry, it should be included in EFL teaching because it offers learners a great opportunity to express their opinions and feelings. Poetry can trigger a variety of emotions and because of its ambiguity it can provoke brainstorming. In addition, it can serve as a vocabulary exercise.

Another good way of incorporating culture in the EFL classroom is the inclusion of electronic media. Various videos, movies, TV-shows, and songs can offer an abundance of useful and interesting information. Students definitely enjoy seeing a movie or a video that is related to their topic. A movie can hold their attention and offer an opportunity to discuss relevant issues and express their personal opinion. The teacher can come up with numerous tasks related to the movie and include culture, vocabulary and grammar at once. Not only do movies contribute to the versatility of the class, but they can also include interesting tasks that can

serve as reading, writing, speaking and even listening exercises.

Culture has been defined by different people in different ways. According to Richenkova (2008:411) culture can be defined as "the qualitative characteristic that enables people to get over their unsophisticated usual biological nature in order to give preference to their second one – the social nature". Therefore Richenkova draws a parallel between the natural and studied behaviors.

In Thanasoulas (2001:10) definition the accent is on the heritage. He noted "culture is our social legacy as contrasted with our organic heredity. It regulates our lives at every turn."

Cooke (2008:187) combines the modern life of people in his definition: "Culture is the composite of economic, industrial, social and spiritual achievements. It is the high level of development achieved; a skill; mastery".

Henrichsen (1997:1) brings different definitions of culture depending on the discipline which defines it. In the humanities and fine arts it applies to the "enlightenment or excellence in taste which has been acquired by exposure to training in the arts". So a person is "being "cultured" if he or she appreciates opera, ballet, "good" art, literature and music." This is the culture with "big C". For anthropologists and sociologists culture applies to "behaviors and beliefs which seem typical of a group or class." This definition may include typical food, clothing, values, activities, manners, practices, etc. of a group. This is the culture with "little C".

From all these discussions, culture can be considered as a 'video' which portrays the visible and audible life of groups of people. There, one can see the natural and learnt behaviors; the heritage, which is brought from generation to generation, the modern life of people, the taste and their beliefs are all part of that tape. However, in spite of the fact that culture is "fixed", it is changing from time to time.

There is a fundamental connection between culture and communication. Communication is creating and maintaining culture. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (1996:3) described the way of teaching and learning a foreign language as "Knowing how, when, and why to say what to whom". This means that not only the grammar of the language – how – and its vocabulary – what – are important in the teaching and learning

process but the culture, the way of communication, the etiquette – when, why, whom – should be also included. “So, while grammar and vocabulary are essential tools for communication, it is the acquisition of the ability to communicate in meaningful and appropriate ways with users of other languages that is the ultimate goal of today’s foreign language classroom.” (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1996:3)

There is a set of spectrums of the functions of language communication.

These spectrums help to establish the contact between the speakers; attract the attention of the listener; help to show respect; help to define the status of the communication (formal, informal etc.); form an auspicious environment for the communication, etc. Philips (1983) called the culture of everyday etiquette and culture and its expressions of right and duties through norms and communications as “invisible culture”.

Those, who study foreign languages, should be aware of the socio-rules and demands of the target language. They should know, how to use the meta communication tools, and how those tools can affect the communication. Without this awareness, the students will not be able to communicate in the foreign language as expected

Culture and communication are inseparable. In communication, culture speaks, decides who talks to whom, about what, and how. “It also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted... Culture...is the foundation of communication.” (Samovar & Porter & Jain, 1981:24)

That verbal communication is different for different cultures is clear. But there are many different non-verbal communication signs which in different cultures have opposite meanings. Many of us know that in most parts of

Europe if one bows his or her head then the person wants to communicate counteractive meanings: “Yes”. But the same nod means “No” in Bulgaria. Something similar can be seen with some examples of gestures in Ghana and Russia or Hungary. The waving gesticulation in Europe means “bye-bye”, while in Ghana it means the opposite “come”. These really demonstrate that foreign language teaching should have components of cultural teaching, because no communication can be done without culture

The view that in foreign language teaching the culture of the nation whose language is being taught should also be studied is not new. In spite of that Politzer in 1959 (100-101) expressed that “if we teach language without at the same time teaching the culture in which it operates, we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning...”, teaching culture took place in the language teaching process in different parts of the world only in the 1980s (Thanasoulas, 2001).

In Russia, the cultural aspect of language teaching in practical course of foreign language teaching and theoretical course of methodology of teaching Russian as foreign language was introduced around 1980 by Vereschagin and Kostomarov (1983). In their interpretation, the cultural aspects of language teaching is a didactic analog of socio-linguistics, which is developing the theory and concept necessary to link foreign language teaching and studies of the social and cultural life of native speakers. We can just agree with their opinion: two different national cultures will never coincide absolutely, because both of them are made up of national and international elements. Azimov and Schukin (1999) noted that in the 1980s, the cultural aspect of foreign language teaching was just a new field of methodics, while in the 1990s it has become a methodical discipline, which brought a new practice in foreign language teaching such as the introduction of the national-cultural specifics of communication in the teaching process.

A basic requirement for including cultural teaching in the teaching of foreign languages is the cultural competence. Thanasoulas (2001:3) defines cultural competence as “the knowledge of the conventions, customs, beliefs, and systems of meaning of another country”. One cannot teach or learn a foreign language without the culture of the speakers of that language. However, it is essential to notice that, “teaching culture” does not only mean to give information about the culture of the native speakers of the studied language. It is also very important but not enough for the appreciation of the target language. Henrichsen (1997) proposes three areas which can help to improve the communicative competence of learners, 1) conventional behavior in common situations; 2) the ways language and social variables interact and 3) the cultural connotations of words. These areas could be applied in the development of the cultural competence of the learners. Since all human behavior is culturally based, teachers and learners of a foreign language should pay

attention to the needs of language learning together with the culture of the native speakers. Such needs should link the four skills of language teaching. We agree with Kramersch (1993) who noted that the teaching of culture is not the fifth skill in the language teaching and learning process in addition to speaking, listening, reading and writing, but culture is part of those four skills. The following are some examples of how Kramersch proposed idea could be built in those four skills.

- Culture of speaking in a specific language. For example, in some languages like Spanish and Russian the tempo of speaking is faster than in other languages and therefore teaching culture in speaking should address this issues.
- Culture of listening. For example, in some cultures like in Ghana it is acceptable for a child to only listen and not interrupt when an elderly person is talking; but in other cultures like in many parts of Europe a child is required to listen but may interrupt at any time.
- Culture of writing. In Russian for example, the written form of letters should be joined but in many other cultures, for example, in the United Kingdom printed forms are used.
- Linked to the culture of reading is the intonation aspect of the language that is differences in different cultures. For example, reading poems is quite different in different cultures.

Therefore one can agree with Thanasoulas (2001) who argues that foreign language learning is foreign culture learning. Otherwise one can be in a strange situation: the students will be surrounded by people whom they do not understand and who do not understand them even after spending several years on learning a foreign language. That is simply because what is considered normal for one cultural group may be strange to another as a result of intercultural communication barriers. In a gist cultural competence should also be considered in the teaching of foreign languages.

In spite of the fact that many linguists argue that language and culture of native speakers are inseparable, Dobrenov-Major (2008:35) in her research revealed that Samoans view cultural and linguistic identity as separate categories.

Foreign culture learning process has many different areas such as verbal and non-verbal communication, traditions, every day habits, history, literature, etc. It shows how the language can and should be used, for example,

in persuading, motivating, constructing an argument, problem solving, decision making, negotiating and resolving conflicts. It is important that learners are familiar with the communication norms, rituals and taboos of the culture of native speakers because each culture has specific communication practices and behavior. The practical use of the intercultural communication can be applied in business, education, health care, diplomacy, the arts, etc. Kramersch (1993, cited in Thanasoulas, 2001:6) proposes that culture classes should be “interpersonal”. Teachers should help students to accept and understand the foreign culture, which is better than to give cultural facts. As Genc and Bada (2005:75) noted, culture classes have a humanizing and a motivating effect on the language learner and the learning process. In learning a foreign civilization, students compare the home and target culture. It is unquestioned that foreign language teachers should be foreign culture teachers, having the ability to experience and analyze both the home and target cultures (Byram & Morgan et al., 1994:73).

The teaching of culture should be introduced right from the beginning. This enables students to understand the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1996:4).

Teachers can use different ways to teach culture. Those ways depend on the age and proficiency level of the students. For young students in any proficiency level one can use songs, pictures, cartoons or “things” which are used in the target culture. For others teachers can use songs and cultural items for beginners and movies at the advanced levels (Csajbok-Twerefou, 2010). In any level and for all age groups, teachers may use special texts or narratives with cultural information on the target language about the target culture

Conclusively, it is common that topics in the textbooks are mostly related to the American and British cultures. Teachers must follow their National Curriculum but that does not mean that they cannot make their classes more versatile. Their teaching methods can make classes more dynamic and make the inclusion of other cultures possible. The students’ culture is certainly unavoidable since it opens them up to cultural awareness and offers the possibility of comparison of different cultures. Various media can be a great source for teaching culture and

contribute to the versatility of the EFL class. Of course, we should be careful about the selection of media and consider the topics, the students' age and their knowledge level. Culturally-related topics that are covered in the teaching process have to be in accordance with the National Curriculum.

### Conclusion

Culture being an important and integral part of human society deals with the communication of language by the individuals in a variety of situations and circumstances. They tend to learn more than one language for a number of reasons including academic and professional purposes of life.

Research in the field of intercultural communication highlights the importance of cultural awareness in English language teaching programmes. The strategies provide learners an equal amount of opportunities to practice language as the communicative process. It also promotes cultural behaviour and attitude of learners as per the demands of communicating English as a foreign language. Moreover, the use of communicative strategies develop social skills by demonstrating behaviour in cross-cultural communication. Finally, the students in interactive classroom activities can communicate meaning, build up vocabulary, enhance grammatical accuracy, and develop communicative competence.

A shift from a traditional to intercultural stance in EFL enhances students' awareness of the inextricable and interdependent relationship

between language and culture and teaching culture as an integral component of language teaching. It also helps to develop teachers' intercultural perspectives that may have an impact on their language teaching methodology and syllabus design. This shift is a challenge that EFL teachers and learners have to deal with to meet the goals of foreign language education in our modern world.

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