

EFL: Foreign OR Native Culture

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Abstract:

Plenty of differences can be found in the cultures of different nations. The realization of a linguistic expression demands knowing what the expression means for the native speaker. To gain a growing comprehension of cultural meanings one has to undertake wide readings where words are met in a variety of contexts. The importance of culture is emphasized for language learning. Culture includes all the social practices that bond a group of people together and distinguish them from others. It is the accepted and patterned ways of behaviour of a given people. It includes ways of thinking, feeling, acting and doing things in certain ways. The aim of the work is to study the relationship between language and culture. The study attempts to incorporate culture into classroom by means of considering some techniques. What is said or accepted in a particular situation may not be said or accepted in a similar situation in a different culture. The stages of learning cultural context are identified. Differences in cultural meanings and semantic changes are also discussed. The ideal setting for teaching a language is the country where it is spoken. The teaching of culture should be an integral part of the foreign language instruction. A knowledge of behaviour of other people is important if the student is to communicate fully in the target language. Without the study of foreign culture, foreign language instruction is inaccurate and incomplete. Finally, the research provided some conclusions and recommendations for students and language teachers.

اللغة الإنكليزية لغير الناطقين بها : ثقافة وطنية ام اجنبية

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ملخص البحث :

توجد كثير من الاختلافات في ثقافات الامم المختلفة وأن معرفة عبارة لغوية معينة يحتاج الى معرفة ما تعنيه تلك العبارة لمتكلم اللغة الأصلي ولكي نفهم المعاني الثقافية بشكل جيد فأن علينا القيام بقراءات واسعة حيث تستخدم الكلمات في سياقات مختلفة. لذلك فأن الثقافة ضرورية لتعلم اللغة وتشمل جميع المهارات الاجتماعية التي تربط مجموعة من الناس سوية وتميزهم عن غيرهم، انها الطرق المقبولة وانماط السلوك لشعب معين، وتشمل طرق التفكير والشعور والتصرف وعمل الأشياء بطرق معينة. لذلك فأن البحث الحالي يهدف الى دراسة العلاقة بين اللغة والثقافة وتحاول ادخال ثقافة اللغة الأجنبية الى صفوف تلك اللغة باستخدام طرق معينة حيث ان مايقال او يقبل في حالة معينة قد لايقال أو يقبل في حالة مماثلة في ثقافة مختلفة اخرى. وقد تم تشخيص مراحل تعلم السياق الثقافي وتمت مناقشة الاختلافات في المعاني الثقافية والتغيرات المعنوية حيث ان المكان المثالي لتدريس اللغة هو البلد الناطق بها أصلا، لذلك فأن تدريس الثقافة يعتبر جزءا لايتجزأ من تدريس اللغة الأجنبية وأن معرفة سلوك الناس يعتبر مهما اذا أردنا الطالب أن يتواصل بشكل تام في اللغة الأجنبية، وبدون دراسة الثقافة الأجنبية فان تدريس اللغة يكون غير دقيق وغير كامل. وأخيرا، قدم البحث بعض الاستنتاجات والتوصيات لطلبة ومدرسي اللغة

1. Introduction:

Language is part of the culture of people and the chief means by which the members of a society communicate. A language, therefore, is both a component of culture and a central network through which the other components are expressed (Lado:1964).

In spite of all the commonness in the life of different nations and races, plenty of differences can be observed in their cultures. Language, being an expression of culture, gets in some areas highly particularized in the content. For example, many idioms and phrases reflect quite closely the cultural patterns. In other words, the full realization of a linguistic expression demands knowing what the expression has for the native speaker. So, Wilga Rivers (1965) makes the following assumption: The

meanings which the words of a language have for the native speaker can be learned only in a matrix of allusions to the cultures of people who speak that language. A corollary to this assumption: In order to use a foreign language effectively the student must learn to use categories in the same way as the native speaker if he is to avoid false impressions and frequent misunderstanding. This aspect is dealt with in detail by Robert Lado in his *Linguistics Across Cultures* (1957). But, it is worth noting that a matrix of allusions to another culture cannot help the student to comprehend the content of language unless their selection and presentation are most carefully analyzed in the light of meanings which will be imposed by the culture of the learners. To gain a growing comprehension of and a deep apprehension of cultural meanings one has to undertake wide readings where words are met in a variety of contexts. This wide reading is imperative for teachers of foreign languages (Prakasam, 1993:91). Steel (1989:155) emphasized the importance of culture not for the study of literature but also for language learning. Greetings, personal possessions, cosmetics, tobacco and smoking, verbal taboos, cafes, bars and restaurants, town and country life, patterns of politeness, art, music, literature, politics, behavioral patterns and styles of everyday life, beliefs, assumptions and attitudes, values and thought patterns are all aspects of culture. Savignon (1972:9) suggests the value of training in communicative skills from the very beginning of the FL program. Canale and Swain (1980:31) claimed that a more natural integration of language and culture takes place through a more communicative approach than through a more grammatically based approach.

2. Definitions:

Montgomery and Reid-Thomas (1994:5) define culture as "the whole way of life of a people or group. In this context, culture includes all the social practices that bond a group of people together and distinguish them from others. "Duranti (1997:24) sees culture as "something learned, transmitted, passed down from one generation to the next, through human actions, often in the form of face-to-face interaction, and of course, through linguistic communication. "Culture, therefore, is all the accepted and patterned ways of behavior of a given people. It is a part of learned behavior shared with others which includes ways of thinking, feeling and acting, patterns of doing certain things in certain ways.

3. Aims

The aim of the present work is to study the relationship between language and culture and to see why the teaching of culture should constitute an integral part of the ELT curriculum. The work tries to increase students awareness towards the target culture and their own, helping them to make comparisons among cultures. The study is an attempt to incorporate culture into classroom by means of considering some techniques.

4. Cultural Orientation

Cultural orientation means learning about the foreign language culture. It does not aim to superimpose one culture upon another, it aims to do two things:

1. Help students of a foreign language understand the language better by connecting its features with the significant cultural features of the

native speaker of that language and to

2. Promote international and intercultural understanding, which is one of the most idealistic aims of foreign language teaching and learning.

What people say, act or react in different situations are to a very large extent determined by the people's cultural background; this background includes people's heritage, customs, traditions, ways of thinking and behavioral mannerisms, what is said or accepted in a particular situation in a particular culture may not be said or accepted in a similar situation in a different culture. It is customary, for example, in the Arab world to invite any friend or acquaintance to whatever meal the host is having if he drops at meal time. Not to do this would be taken by the friend as a very impolite or inconsiderate act of omission if not as an insult while in a European culture the friend may not accept the invitation and he would not accept it unless the host has insisted.

The process of becoming adapted to a new culture is called acculturation. It is seen as an important aspect of foreign language acquisition because language is one of the most observable expressions of culture and because in foreign language settings the acquisition of a new language is seen as tied to the way in which the learner's community and the target language community view each other. The central premise of the acculturation model is: "...second language acquisition is just one aspect of acculturation and the degree to which a learner acculturates to the target language group will control the degree to which he acquires the second language" (Schumann, 1987c:34). Acculturation is also determined by the degree of social and psychological distance between the learner and the target language culture. It involves developing an understanding of the systems of thought, beliefs and emotions of communication. Acculturation is an important concept for understanding SLA because it has been hypothesized that successful language learning

is more likely when learners succeed in acculturating (Rod Ellis, 1999:292). The learner, therefore, experiences disorientation, stress and fear as a result of differences between his or her own culture and that of the target language community.

5. Stages of Learning Cultural Context

Ellis (1999:109) identifies four stages of acculturation:

1. Initial excitement and euphoria
2. Culture shock, leading to feelings of estrangement and hostility towards the target culture.
3. Culture stress, involving a gradual and vacillating recovery and
4. Assimilation or adaptation to the new culture.

Young children are less culture-bound than adults. They move through the stages of acculturation more quickly and so acquire L2 more quickly. The major problem with Brown's theory is the false assumption that children are more rapid learners (Ellis:1999:109).

The student's control of the target language is obviously inadequate in the early stages for any attempt at systematic treatment of cultural content through it. At this stage, one attempts to clarify specific cultural items and patterns as they occur in learning the basic structure of the language.

Once some control of the language has been achieved, cultural content may be learned through the target language in systematic and more comprehensive assignments. The degree of control of the language acquired for shifting to the second stage is a matter of opinion. The shift should be gradual rather than abrupt. The areas of cultural content can be selected to present the easier ones first. (Lado:1965:31)

6. Differences in Cultural Meanings (Semantic Change)

Differences in cultural meanings across languages are a problem in learning the target language. The Arabs, for example, have many different words for “lion”. These words express differences which are not observed by English speakers but an English speaker learning Arabic must learn what those words mean. Specific words and phrases are attached to the most important cultural meanings. The Arab culture shows patterns of behaviour that reflect the social categories. Words, idioms and proverbs differ from culture to culture and from language to language. In Spanish 'leg' is pata for an animal and pierna for a person. "tumara" is you for a child in Hindi and "apka" for an adult. Southern Iraqis have also various names for dates represent different elementary meaning units in the Iraqi culture. Understanding these units is necessary for communication with the natives. A foreign culture, therefore, can be understood through its own language rather than through translation. No one-to-one translation can render "tumara" and "apka" into English. Syrian "kabab" is a kind of meat balls made of minced meat, but for a vegetarian Hindu it evokes a different meaning. The expression "It is on me" is used in the Arab culture when you have to pay on your friend on a bus or in a coffee shop, but an English friend will not feel insulted if you do not pay on him. The expression "sever the bonds of kinship" has different implications to people in different cultures depending on the strength of social relations in that culture. The questions "How old are you? How much is your salary? What is your religion?" should be avoided in most European cultures but can be freely asked in some other cultures. The word "cunningness" might be seen as cleverness or skillfulness by some individuals in some other societies. A cow is a sacred mother for Hindus, but is seen as an ordinary animal in other cultures. On the other hand, the word "countryside" evokes different meanings for both British and Iraqi

people depending on the type of countryside they have in mind. "breakfast" is a heavy meal in some societies while it is a light meal in others. This has cultural implications for people of that society.

In Japan, it is not customary to say *sumimasen* "excuse me" when stepping on people's toes in the subway; on the contrary, apologizing for such a social blunder would make people suppose that one indeed had evil intentions (Jacob, L. Mey, 1993). Inter-cultural misunderstandings are, therefore due to the presence of a non-acknowledged, and hence not shared, pragmatic presupposition.

However, there is no reason to expect a foreign language to be the same as our mother tongue in pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary. There will always be some similarities between different languages. There are also major differences and these have to be studied and learned, not ignored. To see Arabic through English may confuse the issue and makes the task more difficult.

7. Teaching the Cultural Aspect

Individuals within a culture may follow, support and approve some or all of its patterns or may resist them if they want to assert their individuality.

Students learn the target culture with the experience, meanings and habits of his native culture influencing him at every step. The native culture experience will facilitate learning those patterns that are sufficiently similar to function satisfactorily when transferred. The native culture experiences will also interfere with those cultural patterns and meanings that are not equitable with similar ones or that are partly similar but function differently in the target culture (Lado:1964:30). " Learning cultural content through the target language will give the student freedom

to extend his understanding of the target culture independently according to his interests. All experiences and practices should be provided by the class and the teacher. The ideal setting for teaching a language is the country where it is spoken natively. By living in that community and being forced to use the language for communication, the full impact of a language as the means of communication in a culture is brought out. The teacher can also create the atmosphere of the foreign language culture through proper decoration of the class. The teacher and students can agree to speak only the foreign language. A good film in the target language seems best even though the students do not understand what they hear or see. Good music from the target culture increases the desire to get into the language of the people.

8. Conclusion

The teaching of culture should be an integral part of foreign language instruction. Culture should be our message to students and language our medium. It should begin on the very first day of class and should continue every day after that. This does not imply that linguistic constructs will be ignored. Many elements of culture are imbedded within the language itself. Dialogue should be based on authentic situations. Using pictures as much as possible. Teachers should concentrate on active learning and should give students more hands-on experiences so that they can feel, touch, smell and see. These kinds of activities will keep students motivated and will result in positive attitudes, greater awareness, and academic success .

Culture also shapes our view of the world, and language is the most important element in any culture. Any behaviour, tradition or pattern can only be understood in the light of its meaning to the people who practice

it. A knowledge of behaviour of other people is important if the student is to communicate fully in the target language. "Without the study of culture, foreign language instruction is inaccurate and incomplete. For foreign language students, language study seems senseless if they know nothing of the people who speak it or the country in which it is spoken. (Deborah Peck:1998:1). Language learning is more than the manipulation of syntax and lexicon. The study of culture helps to open students eyes to the similarities and differences in the life of various cultural groups. The study of culture should begin on the first day of class and should continue every day thereafter. Patterns of living should receive the major emphasis in the classroom specially in the early phase of language instruction. The most useful way of looking at culture is to see what it does. The focus should be on the behavioural patterns of life styles of the people. Language teachers need to go beyond monitoring linguistic production in the classroom and become aware of the complex and numerous processes of intercultural mediation that any foreign language learner undergoes.

Culture and communication are inseparable because culture not only dictates who talks to whom, about also what, and how the communication proceeds, it also helps to determine how people encode messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed or interpreted.

9. Recommendations

1. It is important to encourage learners to speculate on the significance of various styles of clothing, the symbolic meanings of colors, gestures, facial expressions, and the physical distance people put between each other and to show in what ways these non-verbal cues are similar to, or different from those of their culture. We must, therefore, not neglect

non-verbal communication especially gesture because it conveys the feel of the language to the student. It makes language study more interesting. The use of gesture is useful in presenting dialogues and cuing students responses. The teacher can show foreign films to students to have them focus on body movements (Peck, 1984:4)

2. Students can compare and contrast the foreign culture customs and traditions with their own.
3. Basic sounds, vocabulary and syntax of the target language should be taught. However, the attitudinal factors are clear predictors of success in second language learning. This requires planned programs which integrate cultural and linguistic units as a means to cross-cultural understanding
4. Celebrating foreign festivals is a favorite activity of many students. They can also learn some folksongs.
5. Culture can be illustrated by role playing and students can compare and contrast the foreign customs with their own.
6. Grammatical structures can be taught through proverbs. The knowledge of the grammatical system of a language has to be complemented by understanding of culture specific meanings (Byram, Morgan et al, 1994:4)
7. Students can use an atlas to trace, include borders, rivers, mountains and the capital city.
8. It is a good way to study language through its literature. Contact with some of the great literary and other achievements of the target culture is an important objective in language learning.
9. Pictures made in the setting of the target culture provide a powerful medium for giving the student experience in cultural meanings.
10. Specially written dialogues for language learning can be used.
11. The provision of English names and settings in English texts for

foreign students is recommended.

12. Recordings by native speakers can be added to the available resources.
13. The teacher can supply an introduction of the culture and its people in the native language. However, this will weaken the identification of the teacher with the target language. The teacher can introduce the cultural content as needed to the language meaningfully.
14. Meanings of words and expressions can be written on board in the native language and students read them to themselves. This preserves the foreign nlanguage atmosphere in the class.
15. Pictures, slides and films may help to provide cultural content for observation by students. The teacher can explain the cultural content of the material presented.
16. Food holidays, heroes and customs may be taken up as the context in the target language.
17. Sections from leading newspapers and magazines provide some cultural content of the target culture.
18. Full experience is impossible without living in that society for at least a year. Teachers of English and the best ten students in the class can be sent to English speaking countries to attained training courses.

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