

# Learning and Teaching Culture of a Second Language

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## Abstract

The paper concerns with the contribution and integration of culture in the second or foreign language education. More specifically, some consideration will be given to the why and how to teach culture. Furthermore, cultural competence enhances communicative competence; and it can lead to understanding and appreciating different cultures as well. Consequently, cross-cultural awareness seems a very noble innovative goal for many nations to pick another language and its culture, especially for us as an African groping our way in the age of globalization.

## Introduction

Abundant available studies tackle effective approaches to teach the second language culture, curriculum development, or making materials. The relationship between culture and classroom learning and teaching has become something of a hot potato in recent times. It is an apt and crucial act that the second/foreign language teachers in Africa talk about the utilization of culture in second or foreign language. Culture is a fundamental element of foreign language education, and many teachers have seen it as their goal to include the teaching of culture into the foreign language syllabus.

## Defining Culture

The National Center for Cultural Competence defines culture as an "integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting and roles, relationships and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group; and the ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations" (Goode, Sockalingam, Brown, & Jones, 2000).

## Aspiration of cultural teaching

the teaching of culture has the following goals and is of and in itself a means of accomplishing them:

- to help students to develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviors.
- to help students to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence influence the ways in which people speak and behave.
- to help students to become more aware of conventional behavior in common situations in the target culture.
- to help students to increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language.
- to help students to develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence.
- to help students to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture.
- to stimulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people.

## The Teacher's Role

By and large, teachers, with well designed materials and analyzed situational factors, first initiate appreciating and incorporating culture into the second language classroom by analyzing students' needs and their own needs at the same time. Through getting familiar with the aspects relating to products (e.g., foods, games, literature and laws), practices (e.g., customs, patterns of social interactions) and perspectives (e.g., beliefs, values and ideas), they can provide a better second language situation. Also, if the teachers keep themselves up-to-date with the cultural change(s), as a result of political, economic and social impact, they can represent the community whose language they are teaching.

Teachers in general and second language teachers in particular can make a difference in the second language learners. Teachers must be culturally aware of the language they are teaching and they must be aware of cultural diversity in multicultural and multilingual societies. Furthermore they must bear in mind while dealing with cultural contents that English is an international language and its culture acts as an aid for motivation.

## The Learners' role

To get culturally aware in the second language classroom, learners should:

1. Work with authentic materials derived from the communities, who use the language,
2. be able to contact with the native speakers of the language,
3. from these contacts and materials appreciate the similarities and differences between their own and the second culture,
4. get a quasi identity with the people of the second culture,
5. Use this knowledge to develop a more objective view of their own customs and ways of thinking (cited in Byram, M. & Fleming, M., 1998).
6. Make the second language teachers promise to take more dependable role in presenting culture.
7. Identify the subtle differences in their own culture when compared to the culture of the second language they are learning and behavioral modification exercises can be given in the class.

## Sources and Techniques for Cultural Content

Jordan (1997, p. 105) lists sources of cultural information:

- Newspapers: these are a good source of cultural information: local papers will give more of a flavour of everyday life in towns.
- Video: a number of published ELT video tapes are a good visual source of cultural information. (Today, we have CD/DVD versions of these video tapes.)
- Talks/discussions: some topics may be suitable for giving information to students in a plenary session.
- Role-plays/dramatizations: these can be used to set off discussion and introspection.
- Culture quizzes/tests.

## Useful Techniques for Teaching Language and Culture

The following are some useful techniques for presenting culture in the classroom:

- ✓ **Genuine Materials**
- ✓ **Films**
- ✓ **Role Play**
- ✓ **Proverbs**
- ✓ **Volunteers Cultural Resources**
- ✓ **Interviews**
- ✓ **Literature**
- ✓ **Newspapers**
- ✓ **The Study Abroad**