The Importance of Culture in Language Learning

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Abstract

The last three decades have been growing attention directed to the issue of teaching culture as part of foreign language learning. This emphasis on the importance of culture has come hand in hand with contemporary views of the communicative nature of language.

The purpose of this study is to provide a review of related literature on a definition of culture, cultural bumps, cultural variation, cross-cultural communication, multicultural awareness/sensitivity interaction, cultural teaching, and incorporating culture into the foreign language classroom.

EFL teachers should teach students the knowledge of the convention, customs, beliefs, taboos, non-verbal communication, and systems of meaning of another country. English teachers also should adjust their cultural approaches to meet what learners' need. The accommodation will help learners create better classroom atmosphere.

Keywords: Teaching English as Foreign Language (EFL), taboo, non-verbal communication.

INTRODUCTION

The last three decades have been growing attention directed to the issue of teaching culture as part of foreign language learning. This emphasis on the importance of culture has come hand in hand with contemporary views of the communicative nature of language. The attainment of communicative competence requires a diversity of cultural understanding and current theory recognizes the intrinsic role culture plays in second and foreign language development (Savignon, 1972; Canale& Swain, 1980). The understanding of the culture as part of language curricula has not resulted in increased practical implementation of meaningful cultural components in foreign language instruction. As a result, many foreign language learners demonstrate very limited knowledge about the culture whose language they study (Sadow, 1987).

According to Anderson and Powell (1991), "At no time in history has such a culturally diverse population of students participated in our educational system. Each of these students brings culturally based rules and expectations about education and classroom behavior"(p. 208). Irving (1984), Cargill (1987), and Evans (1987) specifically stated that it is frequently cultural differences, rather than linguistic difficulties, which cause a breakdown in teacher-student rapport. The philosophy that international students must, as part of their second language study, learn about and become familiar with features of the dominant mainstream American culture surrounding them is a point stressed in TESL literature through the past four decades (Anderson, 1992). Irving (1984) elaborated: Learning to communicate in a new culture means learning

> what to say...who to say it to...how to say it...why you say it...when you say it...and where you say it. We learn to do all these things in our native language without thinking about the complexity of the issues involved. (p. 141)

While ESL teachers are aware of their own culture, to the extent that they have an understanding of their culture's implications, meanings, and social rules, and while they stress dominant North American culture in the classroom, they are, according to Morain (1977), untrained in the varying respective social themes, assumptions, and value systems which determines the life patterns of their culturally diverse students. As Met (1992) affirmed, culture, in language teaching, is now the" fifth skill," after the four traditional ESL skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Specifically, Met proclaimed, "culture provides the play field'' for language rather than serving as an appendage to language" (p. 259). Anderson (1992) added, "the student's culture...must be valued as much as... the culture he wishes to learn. Making a

serious effort to understand the culture of students can only serve to harmonize the classroom" (p. 6). Anderson stressed the importance of multicultural understanding as an essential variable in the teaching of target culture; Euroamerican culture in the field of TESL.

According to Bailey and Celce- Murcia (1979), "what the teacher says and does is so significant in establishing classroom atmosphere that it can outweigh the effects of materials, methods, and educational facilities" (p. 316). All foreign language teachers must be aware of the areas where there is a discrepancy in cultural fit. Cargill (1987), Lusting and Koester (1993), and Samovar and Porter (1991) agreed that to be effective in the classroom, ESL teachers require knowledge concerning culture; not only knowledge pertaining to the culture of the larger host society, but knowledge pertaining to the differing cultures of ESL students as well.

McGroarty (1993) stated that social environment in which students learn a language is one of the most important factors in the language learning experience. Theory concerning second language acquisition stressed the importance of teacher cultural awareness in establishing and maintaining desired social climate for language learning. Foreign language learning is composed of several components, including grammatical competence, communicative competence, language proficiency, as well as a change in attitudes towards one's own or another culture. Cultural competence, i.e., the knowledge of the conventions, customs, beliefs, and systems of meaning of another country, is indisputably an integral part of foreign language learning, and many teachers have seen it as their goal to incorporate the teaching of culture into the foreign language curriculum. It could be maintained that the notion of communicative competence, which, in the past decade or so, has blazed a trail, so to speak, in foreign language teaching, emphasizing the role of context and the circumstances under which language can be used accurately and appropriately, fall [s] short of the mark when it comes to actually equipping students with the cognitive skills they need in a second culture environment (Straub, 1999:2).

If lack of proper training or proper analysis is not the case, perhaps ESL teachers do not place importance on exhibiting cultural awareness in regard to their students. Anderson (1992) posed one aspect of the issue in the following questions:

> ...why, when a good teacher would never consider entering the classroom without first
> knowing the students' linguistic needs, backgrounds, and proficiency, would she fail to

recognize the urgency of developing a beginning knowledge and awareness of their cultural needs, backgrounds, and their degree of proficiency with other culture? (p. 9)

We cannot go about teaching a foreign language without at least offering some insights into its speakers' culture. By the same token, we cannot go about fostering

"communicative competence" without taking into account the different views and perspectives of people in different cultures which may enhance or even inhibit communication. After all, communication requires understanding, and understanding requires stepping into shoes of the foreigner and sifting her cultural baggage, while always putting the target culture in relation with one's own (Kramsch, 1993).

Moreover, we should be cognizant of the fact that if we teach language without teaching at the same time the culture in which it operates, we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning...'(Politzer, 1959).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A Definition of Culture

Hoebel and Frost (1976) perceived culture as an "integrated system of learned behavior patterns which are characteristic of the members of a society and which are not the result of biological inheritance" (p. 6). Cole and Scribner (1974) took a similar stand when they defined culture:

> Perception, memory, and thinking all develop as part of the general socialization of a child and are inseparably bound up with the patterns of activity, communication, and social relations into which he enters...his every experience has been shaped by the culture of which he is a member and is infused with socially defined meanings and emotions. (p.8)

Hofstede (1984) offered the view that "culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another..."(p. 51); whereas Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) proposed:

> Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of

traditional ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action. (p. 181)

Samovar and Porter (1991) defined culture as:

... the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religions, notions of time, roles, special relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving. (p. 51)

Argyle (1988) established "rules" as arising in culture to "regulate behavior so that goals can be attained and needs satisfied" (p. 35). His catalogue of rules included points such as bribery, nepotism, gifts, buying and

Selling, eating and drinking, and rules concerning time. These points are the interactive and social points of behavior which other theorists such as Barnlund (1988) categorized under the heading of "norms." Norms, defined by Barnlund (1988), are "codes that are unconsciously acquired and automatically employed" (p. 13).

Lusting and Koester (1993) affirmed norms as "the outward manifestation of beliefs and values... which are socially shared expectations of appropriate behaviors" (p. 109). Norms are defined not only as behaviors one must follow; they are also defined as behaviors one must not follow. Sarbaugh (1979) emphasized that "taboos are norms of the very strong 'must not do' type"(p. 37). He defined various types of taboos:

a. Behaviors which are neither talk about nor done (e.g., sex relations with one's partners).

b. Those which are talked about but not done (e.g., eating of some foods such as snakes or ants in some cultures).

c. Those which may be done but not talked about (e. g., sex relations between marital parents)

d. Those which may be talked about in one setting, but not in another (e.g., your physician may talk with you in his office about your urination problems, but not a party)

e. Those which may be done in some settings but not in others (e.g.,in the USA it is permissible for a male to be in a room nude with his wife or his brother, but not with both present). (p. 38)

As implied, many taboos are associated with sexual behaviors or other biological functions Also, taboos are not culture bound; what is an acceptable or a common practice in one culture may be a taboo in another.

Lusting and Koester (1993) defined a belief as "an idea that people assume to be true about the world" (p. 105). In 1993, they also defined values as "what a culture regards as good or bad...fair or unfair, just, beautiful or ugly, clean or dirty, valuable or worthless, appropriate or inappropriate, and kind or cruel" (p. 107). Samovar and Porter (1991) added that cultural values also "define what is worthwhile to die for, what is worth protecting, what frightens people... land what] guides both perception and behavior" (p. 83). It appears that while theorists generally agree that culture can be defined by rules, perceptions/concepts, beliefs, values, and norms, theorists cannot agree exactly how to separate such broad headings from one another.

Cultural Bumps

"Human beings draw close to one another by common nature, but habits and customs keep them apart" (p. 113) is a Confucian saying quoted by Lusting and Koester (1993). Gallois, Franklyn-Stokes, Giles and Coupland (1988) elaborated:

When two people from different cultural groups come together, sometimes the encounter is smooth as silk...At other times, though, this sort of encounter can seem a series of obstacles and incompatibilities and can end in misunderstanding, hostility and an increase in prejudice. For many years, researchers in intergroup encounters have been aware that more contact between cultural groups is not enough to reduce prejudice. (p. 157)

Gudykunst (1991), Korzenny (1991), and Samovar and Porter (1991), offered the following:

When a person of one culture observes another culture, he unwittingly tends to interpret what he observes as having the same purse and significance as in his native patterns of behavior. When the two cultures differ in manner or in the significance of actions, the outsider misunderstands. Furthermore, since his patterns of action and their association with particular significances are mostly matters of habits that operate below the threshold of awareness, he is apt to persist in his misunderstanding...(p.28) All misinterpreted message and misunderstood

communications add to and reinforce the idea of culture bumps, whether they occur specifically inside a classroom or within the domain of a new host culture. The best way to learn about culture, one's own culture or the culture of others, is through experiencing culture, despite the culture bumps which may occur. The best way to experience culture, the theorists proclaimed, is through intercultural encounters. Kim (1988) stated, "Intercultural encounters provide... situations of deviation from the familiar, assumed, and taken-for-granted, as individuals are faced with things that do not follow their unconscious cultural program" (p.52)

In the same vein, Hall (1976) affirmed that when "used properly, intercultural experiences can be a tremendous eye opener, providing a view of one's self seldom seen under normal conditions at home" (p. 185). Still, Hall warned, that similar to all opportunities for increasing self-knowledge, the thought and pursuit of intercultural experience can be frightening, or in the least, intimidating. Gudykunst (1991) offered four reasons as to why intercultural experiences are charged with negative expectation. First, people fear that interacting with those outside of their culture will result in a negative self-concept, that they will feel, in the words of Stephan & Stephan (1985), "incompetent, confused, and not in control...due to the awkwardness of intergroup actions" (p. 159). Second, Gudykunst stated, people fear that perhaps negative behavioral results will stem from interaction with those outside of their culture. They feel that those "strangers" will try to take advantage of them or seek to exploit them. This point also includes the fear of verbal altercation, or worse: physical conflict. Third, Gudykunst proposed, "We fear negative evaluations of strangers" (p.65); that is, people fear being stereotyped negatively by members of others cultures. or fear being ridiculed by them. Finally, Gudykunst suggested that people fear being negatively evaluated by members of their own culture may reject them as punishment for associating with "the outgroup."

  Stephan & Stephan (1985) admitted that the previous list of negative expectations "often has a basis in reality... [because people] sometimes do make embarrassing mistakes, are taken advantage of, and are rejected by ingroup and outgroup members" (p. 160). Feelings of fear and intimidation as well as negative experiences resulting from intercultural experience have much to do with aspects of cultural variation which, in itself, may cause varying expectations and problems.

Cultural Variation

Many of the misunderstandings, many of the culture bumps, occur because of varying cultural expectations. Members of specific cultures have varying ideas concerning how one should behave in a specific situation. Jackson (1964) put this concept in these words: "People who interact develop expectations about each other's behavior, not only in the sense that they are able to predict the regularities, but also in the sense that they develop preferences about how others should behave under certain circumstance" (p. 224). To gain insight into how cultures vary from one another, it is important to study differing cultural scripts pertaining to rules, perceptions/concepts, beliefs, values, and norms, for in such is formed the heart of the culture bump.

Focusing on cultural variation, Smart (1988) ascertained that "Religion is probably the least acknowledged but the most powerful complication [of interaction] between persons of different cultures" (p. 62). Smart believed this to be true for, as noted earlier, religious rites are a fundamental portion of cultural norms. Anderson and Powell(1991) provided another example of cultural religious influence when they said, "Cultures reflecting a Buddhist tradition hold that knowledge, truth, and wisdom come to those whose quiet silence allows the spirit to enter" (p. 211). As a result of this philosophy, it has been reported that Americans teaching in China have found the silence of the classrooms to be absolutely unnerving.

Lado (1964) believed that we cannot hope to understand who another people are unless we know those "whom they call their heroes, what these people have fought for...what accomplishments they prize..." (p. 152). What Lado referred to is history. Lusting and Koester (1993) provided the following in regard to history:

The unique experiences that have become part of a culture's collective wisdom constitute its history. Wars, inheritance rules, religious practices, economic consequences, prior events, legislative acts, and the allocation of power to specific individuals are all historical developments that contribute to cultural differences. (p. 85)

Prosser (1978) declared that "all study of culture is a study of history, [and that] history, if it is anything, is the study of cultural pluralism and change" (p. 158).

A discussion of cultural variation must also include those matters Anderson (1991) proclaimed as being the five primary dimensions of cultural variation, namely: "immediacy, individualism, masculinity, power distance, and high and low context" Culture which display a high level of immediacy or interpersonal closeness expressed by frequent smiling, touching, eye contact, and close personal distance, scholars have named expressive or contact cultures (Andersen, 1991). Individualism is the perception of "self" as opposed to collectivism. Samovar and Porter (1991) advised people in Euroamerican culture to "listen to...conversations and...notice the word I appearing with great regularity" (pp. 90-91). Many cultures do not share or accept this view of importance of the self. Anderson (1991) maintained that "Masculinity is a neglected dimension of culture" (p. 291). Power distance, as defined by Anderson (1991), is a cultural variation which has to do with "the degree to which power, prestige, and wealth are unequally distributed in a culture" (p. 292). Verbal messages are more important in low-context cultures in which the cultural members do not "read" one another for information. People in high-context cultures speak less to one another for they more readily perceive unarticulated forms of communication from one another.

All Concerning age equality, Carmichael (1991) stated that "cross-cultural comparisons show us that the United States may have one of the worst records for integrating the aging population into the mainstream of its culture" (p. 134). Valdes (1986) elaborated further:

All experienced ESL teachers are acquainted with the revulsion expressed by students from almost any other culture toward the way in which Americans treat the elderly...they see the placement of elderly persons in nursing homes as away to get rid of them... Those who come from extended family dwelling cannot understand why so many older Americans live alone instead of with their children and grandchildren. They see Americans as callous toward the elderly. (p. 50)

Western cultures such as Euroamerican and German, consistently maintain both private and public self-images. Collectivistic cultures, Eastern cultures such as Chinese, Korean, and Japanese, base self-concept on situations and relations. Self-image, in this sense, is face and is defined accordingly. Therefore, in Eastern cultures, because face is given or taken by situation or relationships, the maintaining of face is of vast importance (Argyle, 1988). How people look

beyond culture to develop multiple interaction skills leads to a field of study known as intercultural or cross-cultural communication.

Cross-Cultural Communication

A number of language and culture theorists advocated the premise that culture and communication are so linked that the two terms are essentially synonymous. Samovar and Porter (1976) proclaimed that

Language and culture are inseparable. To be an effective intercultural communicator requires that we be aware of the relationship between culture and language. It further requires that we learn and know about the culture of the person with whom we communicate so that we can better understand how his language represents him. (p. 146)

Okabe (1983) provided additional information in the following viewpoint: …cultural assumptions in interdependence and harmony require that Japanese speakers limit themselves to implicit and even ambiguous use of words. In order to avoid leaving an assertive impression, they like to depend more frequently on qualifiers such as "maybe," "perhaps," "possibly," and "somewhat" (p. 34)

Euroamericans, however, prefer explicit words, categorical words such as absolutely, certainly, or positively, words which often tend to overstate or exaggerate or even oversimplify. Euroamericans like superlatives: the greatest, or the biggest, or the longest. Consider the old American truism "bigger is better" By logical extension then, "biggest is best!"

In Asian languages the emphasis in communication is placed upon the receiver the listening and the interpreting is what is most essential (Yum, 1991). The difficulties with culture and language variation become so complex that even simple yes/no communication is misinterpreted. Barna (1988) provided a humorous but frustrating example of yes/no confusion between Eastern and western cultures:

When a Japanese hears, "Won't you have some tea?" he or she listens to the literal meaning of the sentence and answers, "No," meaning that he or she wants some. "Yes, I won't" would be a better reply because this tips off the host or hostess that there may be a misunderstanding. (p. 326)

Similarly, the question, "Don't you have any younger brothers or sisters?" asked to a Chinese or Japanese individual generally gets the response "Yes," meaning "Right, I don't" or the response "No" meaning "Wrong, I do." It is confusing for both people attempting the cross-cultural communication experience. Why there are problems in cross-cultural communication becomes easy to understand when it is noted that even simple communication through basic conversation by no means ensures successful communication.

Morain (1986) explained that there are three aspects of nonverbal communication.She defined these three aspects or classes as such:

1. Body language, comprising movement, gesture, posture, facial expression, gaze, touch, and distancing ;

2. Object language, including the use of signs, designs, realia, artifacts, clothing, and personal adornment to communicate with others;"

3. Environmental language, made up of those aspects of color, lighting architecture, space, direction, and natural surroundings which speak to man about his nature. (p. 66)

Lustig and Koester (1993) added the catalogue of four code systems which further define nonverbal communication.

1. Chemical Code System: includes natural body odor, tears, sweat, gas, household smells and such similar phenomenon. In further example, the foods various cultures at contribute to their varying body odors.

2. Dermal Code System: includes blushing, blanching, and goose-pimpled flesh; any short-term changes apparent on the skin

3. Physical Code System: includes factors such as weight, body shape, facial features, skin and eye color, hair, and age/gender characteristics. Cultural standards for beauty are associated with this system.

4. Artificial Code System: includes all creations that individuals devise to adorn their bodies, to use in their work or play, or to dwell in. Tools, clothing, buildings, furniture, jewelry, cosmetics...are part of this system. (p. 206)

Concerned with wanting to decrease chances of misinterpreted messages in cross-cultural communication, whether verbal or nonverbal, Beck (1988) outlined five principles useful in illustrating how misinterpretations occur:

1. We can never know the state of mind - -the attitudes, thoughts, and feelings-of other people.

2. We depend on signals, which are frequently ambiguous, to inform us about the attitudes and wishes of other people.

3. We use our own coding system, which may be defective, to decipher these signals.

4. Depending on our own state of mind at a particular time, we may be biased in our method of interpreting other people's behavior, that is, how we decode.

5. The degree to which we believe that we are correct in diving another person's motives and attitudes is not related to the actual accuracy of our belief. (p. 18)

Varonis and Gass(1985) stressed the importance of "negotiating meaning" with the other person, seeking clarification immediately, in the middle of the conversation, when we understand that communication is occurring. Another technique is "repairs;" a method which simply involves asking the other person to repeat what was said when we do not understand. Such communication processes are positive steps toward greater multicultural understanding.

Multicultural Awareness/Sensitivity/Interaction

Synthesizing and perhaps transcending all cross-cultural communication and communication understanding techniques, Robinson (1987) stated, "Multicultural understanding takes place as individuals become multicultural to some degree--that is when individuals have multiple ways of interpreting things and possess multiple interaction styles that correspond to different cultural styles" (p. 142). This idea of multiple interaction styles is what Gudykunst (1991) labeled "behavioral flexibility." His premise is that in order to achieve successful interactions with differing groups of peoples, one must be able to adapt to and accommodate to their varying behaviors. Along with this, too, is the notion that one must be able to tolerate ambiguity, have an ability to deal successfully with situations even though more information is needed to understand the situation completely (Gudykunst, 1991). The greater one's tolerance for ambiguity, the greater one's ability to interact with those who are different, hopefully to learn from them (McPherson, 1983).

In addition to tolerance for ambiguity, people involved in cross-cultural communication and interaction need to exhibit sympathy and empathy (Lustig& Koester, 1993) "Sympathy" refers to the ability to imaginatively place oneself in another's position; whereas "empathy" refers to imaginatively, intellectually, and emotionally taking part in another person's experience

(Bennett, 1979). Sarbaugh (1979) defined empathy as "... the capacity to put yourself in the 'other's shoes'...'(p.127). Gudykunst (1991) further advised: "The greater our cultural and linguisticknowledge, and the more our beliefs overlap with the strangers with whom we communicate, the less the likelihood there will be misunderstandings" (p. 25) In agreement, Boyer (1990) stated that we "should become familiar with other languages and cultures so that [we] will be better able to live, with confidence, in an increasing interdependent world" (p. 34). Pertaining to the concept of increased cultural knowledge furthering cultural understanding, Valdes (1986) offered the following: "At the base of intercultural understanding is a recognition of the ways in which two cultures resemblance usually surface through an examination of differences" (p. 49). Even to learn the differences, members of varying cultures need to communicate. Individuals must take control of their own lives if they seek to improve their relationships with others.

Cultural Teaching

Since the 1930s, people's perceptions of the language teacher's role have changed. No longer viewed as individuals who exclusively hold and transmit language, language teachers are now seen as people who assist learners in developing a natural capacity for communication in language other than their native language (Yalden, 1987). This holds true in the area of ESL, a language teaching area, Yalden stated, which did not begin to emerge until the 1950s. Lessard(1997) noted that people learned a foreign language to study its literature, and this was the main medium of culture. It was through reading that students learned of the civilization associated with the target language. In the 1960s and 1970s, such eminent scholars as Hall (1959),Nostrand(1974),Seelye(1984), and Brooks (1975) made an endeavor to base foreign language learning on a universal ground of emotional and physical needs, so that 'the foreign culture would appear less threatening and more accessible to the language learner (Kramsch, 1993). By making the distinction between "Culture with a capital C"-art, music, literature, politics and so on-and "culture with a small c"-the behavioral patterns and lifestyles of everyday people-he helped dispel the myth that culture (Byram, 1994). In the 1970s, an emphasis on sociolinguistics led to greater emphasis on the situational context of the foreign language.

Cross-cultural theorists stated the vast importance of ESL teachers knowing the cultural educational beliefs, values, and norm of their students (Costello, 1993; Field &Aebersold, 1990;Holdzkom, 1990;Lustig& Koester, 19930). In U. S. institutions of higher education,

students are expected to participate through classroom discussion and questions when the material becomes unclear. But students from Asian cultures have been taught that it is wrong to call attention to oneself, wrong to disrupt the harmony of the total group. Further, these students may fear losing face if a question they ask is considered a "stupid question" by their peers; or they may fear that the teacher will lose
 face if the teacher cannot answer the question; or they may fear the teacher cannot answer the question; or they may fear the teacher will regard the question as a challenge (Costello, 1993;Lustig&Koster, 1993).

Along with cultural awareness and sensitivity, ESL teachers require skills in cross-cultural interaction and observation, and in collecting cultural information from their students. In this way, teachers develop sensitivity to various taboos and restrictions which apply to varying cultures (Saville &Troike, 1977). Oster (1985) maintained that cultural sensitivity includes knowing what questions should not be asked and what behaviors should not be expected of ESL students. Evans (1987) stated that ESL teachers need to perform a "cultural diagnose" of their students' ethnic origins, backgrounds, and past experiences. This information, in turn, can be utilized in the classroom to help make students aware of who they are. Evans explained:

Helping the students to know and appreciate themselves and their own culture not only builds self-esteem, but also opens students up to the excitement of learning about the cultures of their classmates, as well as the American culture. (p. 13)
Byrness(1991) added that teaching for cross-cultural interaction may have to do primarily with teaching learners to put aside value judgments subtly dictated by culture unknowingly. Rivers (1987) summarized:

To promote interaction in another language, we must maintain a lively attention and active participation among our students. ...more is necessary than a set of techniques or devotion to a particular approach. There must be cultivated relationships that encourage initiation of interactive activities from either side, because interaction is not just a matter of words. Students need to participate in activities that engage their interest and attention, so that the interaction becomes natural and desirable and words slip out, or pour out, to accompany it. (p. 324)

Also, the teacher is no longer exactly a "teacher" in the traditional sense; perhaps the teacher is not even a "facilitator," but rather what Terdal and Brown (1992) referred to as "a gatekeeper between culture" (p. 7).

According to Tomalin &Stempleski(1993), the teaching of culture has following goals and is of and in itself a means of accomplishing them :

1. To help students to develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviors

2. To help students to develop an understanding that social variables such as age, sex, social class, and place of residence the ways in which people speak and behave.

3. To help students to become more aware of conventional behavior in common situations in the target culture.

4. To help students to increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in the target language.

5. To help students to develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence.

6. To help students to develop the necessary skills to locate and organize information about the target culture.

7. To stimulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, and to encourage empathy towards its people.

The aim of teaching culture is to increase students' awareness and to develop their curiosity towards the target culture and their own, helping them to make comparisons among cultures (Tavares &Cavalcanti, 1996).

Incorporating culture into the foreign language classroom

According to Straub (1999), what educators should always have in mind when teaching culture is the need to raise their students' awareness of their own culture, to provide them with some kind of metalanguage in order to talk about cultural and 'to cultivate a degree of intellectual objectivity essential in cross-cultural analyses' (ibid.:).

Lessard(1997) provided some guidelines for culture teaching:

1. Culture teaching must be commensurate with the dynamic aspects of culture. Learners need to master some skills in culturally appropriate communication and behavior for the target

culture.

2. It is important to eschew what "a laissez-faire approach' is, when it comes to teaching methodology, and deal with culture teaching in a systematic and structured way.

3. Evaluation of culture learning is a necessary component of the "foreign culture curriculum," providing students with feedback and keeping teachers accountable in their teaching.

At any rate, the foreign language classroom should become a 'cultural island (Kramsch, 1993;Singhal, 1998; Peck, 1998), where the accent will be on 'cultural experience' rather than 'cultural awareness' (Byram, Morgan et al., 1994). According to Peck (1998), an effective and stimulating activity is to send students on "cultural errands"-to supermarkets and department stores-and have them write down the names of imported goods. Moreover, teachers can also invite guest speakers, who will talk about their experiences of the foreign country. In this way, it becomes easier for teachers and students to identify any "stereotypical lapses" and preconceived ideas that they need to disabuse themselves of. Besides, the way language and social variable interpenetrate should inform culture teaching in the foreign language classroom.

Singhal(1998)stated that cultural problem solving is yet another way to provide cultural information.

Learners are presented with some information but they are on the horns of a dilemma. In a TV conversation or reading a narrative on marriage ceremonies, they are expected to assess manners and customs, or appropriate or inappropriate behavior, and to employ various problem solving techniques. For instance, in the USA or the United Kingdom, it is uncommon for a student who is late for class to knock on the door and apologize to the teacher. Rather, this behavior is most likely to be frowned upon and have the opposite effect, even though it is common behavior in the culture many students come from.

According to Wierzbicka(1999), alongside linguistic knowledge, students also familiarize themselves with various forms of non-verbal communication, such as gesture and facial expression, typical in the target culture, Straub (1999)believed that it is important to encourage learners to 'speculate on the significant of various styles of clothing, the symbolic meanings of colors, gestures, facial expressions, and the physical distance people unconsciously put between each other' (ibid.), and to show in what ways these nonverbal cues are similar to, or at variance with, those of their culture. Knowing a second or foreign language should open windows on the target culture as well as on the world at large. After all, as regards language

teachers. We cannot teach an understanding of the foreign as long as the familiar has not become foreign to us in many respects' (Kramsch, 1993).

RECOMMENDATION

Dunnett,Dubin, and Lezberg(1986) provide the following recommendation to strengthen intercultural perspective:

1. Hire teachers with a strong background in comparative analysis and /or comparative cultures and/or training in intercultural communication.

2. All other qualifications being equal, give preference to [ESL] teachers with overseas training experience.

3. Provide in-service training opportunities inintercultural communication for teachers currently on staff.

4. Integrate intercultural education with language instruction through carefully designed syllabi.

5. Select [ESL] materials which encourage an intercultural point of view.

6. Develop specific strategies course for teaching culture in the English program.

7. Establish a specific course to focus on culture related topics.

8. Provide students with a comprehensive program of extracurricular activities

Such as excursions, tours, lectures, films, conversation groups led by Americans. (p. 159)

The view of culture in language learning is complex, as Valdes (1986) proclaimed, and "filled with a multiplicity of ideas, convictions, notions, and presented" (p. 15) in the ESL classroom. While many linguists and psycholinguists appear uninterested in specific individual differences in language learners (Ferguson, 1989), it is the responsibility of ESL teachers to recognize the cultural trauma of their students, on a personal basis, and assist them through that trauma, making culture an aid to language rather than a matter of further hindrance. Through knowing that each individual's behavior is unique, greatly determined by the cultural background of that individual, students and teachers alike may be able to share more with one another. In this way, too, perhaps students and teachers can become '"cultural guests" of one another and welcome one another into the sphere of each individual's cultural make-up.

CONCLUSION

The world is getting smaller and smaller. Improvement in transportation technology, developments in communication technology and globalization of the economy have made

intercultural communication more important than ever. Language learning is therefore an important element for intercultural communication. Language and culture are connected; cultural norms decide appropriateness of language usage. Also, cultural norms affect communication among people from different cultural groups. Culture learning is important for English education, but the proportion of culture learning in one class should vary depending on learners' needs, age, educational level and English level.

According to Singhal(1998), language teachers ought to receive both experiential and academic training, with the aim of becoming "mediators in culture teaching' (ibid.). Culture teaching should aim to foster 'empathy with increased 1992, the cultural norms of the target language community' and an awareness of one's own 'cultural logic' in relation others' (Willem cited in Byram, Morgan et al, 1994). Culture teaching should also allow learners to increase their knowledge of the target culture in terms of people's way of life, values, attitudes, and beliefs, and how these manifest themselves or are couched in linguistic categories and forms. Learners should aware of speech acts, connotations, etiquette, that is, appropriate or inappropriate behavior, as well as the opportunity to act out being a member of the target culture.

It goes without saying that foreign language teachers should be foreign culture teachers, having the ability to experience and analyse both the home and target cultures (Byram, Morgan et al., 1994). Culture often interferes with smooth communication and efficient language learning. Language teachers should make learners aware of the difference between their native culture and the target culture. By doing so, learners realize that they may cause misunderstanding if they employ their own culture norms all the time. English teachers should adjust their cultural approaches to what learners' need. The accommodation will help learners create better classroom atmosphere.

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