Teaching English Culture in the EFL Classroom: Goals, Principles and Techniques

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Abstract

Language and culture are intrinsically tied: they cannot be separated without the loss of their nature and significance. Language is a means of interaction that exists within a given sociocultural framework .Without language, interaction would be very limited; without culture, there would be no interaction at all .A key implication is that one cannot be learned without the other .This article is intended to discuss prominent issues in teaching culture to second and foreign language students. The concepts of language and culture will be defined, respectively. The relationship between language and culture will also be pointed out. Besides, various views on culture in language learning will be explored. Next; the selective goals for teaching culture will be presented. In addition this paper is to shed light on the principles of teaching culture in the foreign language class, drawing on seminal works in the field of language and culture teaching / learning. Adopting a convincing stance towards this issue is, no doubt, a prerequisite for effective teaching / learning. In addition, commonly techniques used in teaching language and culture including authentic material ,culture capsules, culture assimilators ,role play, literature, micrologue, research kinesics and body language will be discussed, compared and contrasted. Moreover, facts about the role of both teachers and learners that have an impact on the success and failure of teaching and learning of culture in second or foreign language classrooms will be examined. Finally, some discussion and conclusion will be made.

Keywords: Language and culture, culture teaching, language teaching, intercultural communicative competence, culture in EFL Classroom.

1. Introduction

To begin with, language and culture are firmly interrelated with foreign language teaching. Previously culture was associated with the way of life and everyday behaviours of members of speech communities. Nowadays culture used to be seen as the highly literate component of language study. It becomes embroiled in the controversies associated with language study (Kramsch, 2006). Many individuals who are parts of foreign language teaching have the strong conviction that language and culture are inseparable. Jiang (2000) stated that both are intricately interwoven in such a way one cannot be separated from the other without losing its meaning. From one perspective, language is a social anthropology organization; it may impact and, being impacted by the general public where it is utilized. And it is not an independent paradigm that survives in a vacuity (Fairclough, 2001).Then again; culture is acknowledged inside humanitarian societies and shows itself in various distinctive manners. It is only one tool amongst others via which culture shows itself (Avruch, 2004). This strong relationship is incisively portrayed by Genc and Bada (2005) where he stated that learning a language is to be nurtured or apprenticed into the life-world of individual host people and communities. Language is not apart from the way of life (culture) that it

supports and relies on, nor is it isolated from the actual actions of the people, nor from their particular interpersonal relationships (Michael, 2015).

1.1 selecting cultural goals in language teaching

As the primary objective of foreign language teaching is to develop the students` ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various situations, great significance has been attached to the teaching of the target culture in EFL classrooms. The inclusion of the cultural component serves many goals. According to Mao (2009), the ultimate goal of teaching culture is to develop students` intercultural communication and understanding. This includes raising students` awareness of their own culture, to enable them to interpret and understand others` culture appropriately. In so doing, learners` intercultural communication would be facilitated. Ariza (2007) classifies the goals of teaching culture in five categories: cultural awareness, command of etiquette, understanding of daily life, understanding of cultural values, and analysis of the target culture.

More specifically, teaching culture renders the language learning experience more real, more purposeful and more authentic (MacDonald, Badger, & Dasli, 2006). It allows students to`` feel, touch, smell, and see the foreign people and not just hear their language`` (Fleet 2006). Culture teaching helps learners achieve autonomy, learners will be able to take charge of their own learning by evaluating and questioning the wider context within which the Target Language (TL) is embedded (Nakata, 2011). It also helps in arousing the learners` curiosity towards the target culture (TC) as well as their own, leading them to develop cultural awareness (Balçıkanlı, 2010).

Genc and Bada (2005) add that studying culture gives students a reason for study the TL, and sense to the learning of the language. He goes on to say, that the study of culture helps not only in arousing students` curiosity and interest in the TC, but also in highly motivating them. He further argues that students prefer culture -based classes to the traditional ones. They like to be engaged in cultural activities such as dancing, singing, role-playing, doing research on people and countries, and this in turn, enhances the learning process and helps students to achieve better.

Genc and Bada (2005) estimate that culture classes enable students observe similarities and differences among cultures. They hold that if students are not exposed to the TC, they become culture-bound individuals who tend to pass inappropriate value judgments on others` as well as their own culture. This can lead them to consider people of the TC as eccentric, exotic and even ill-mannered, which may serve as a demotivating factor in their learning process. Cakir (2006) stresses this view by stating that both teachers and learners need to understand cultural differences , and to be cognizant of the fact that people are not the same, and that ``everyone in the world is not just like me`` .

Cultural comparison is significant in that it enables students to have access to new values and meanings and to interpret them in relation to their own culture. Besides, when learning a FL students are not only exposed to a new way of viewing and understanding the world , but also to a reconsideration of their own world-view , and in this way culture learning can be said to be intercultural (Clouet,2006). At any rate , culture teaching should aim to foster empathy , to help dispel stereotypes and ethnocentric views (Shemshadsara, 2012) .

Furthermore , the teaching of culture should make students aware of speech acts, connotations, etiquette , that is appropriate or inappropriate behaviours , as well increase their knowledge of the TC in terms of its peoples` way of life , attitudes and beliefs, and how these are connected to the linguistic forms and

categories (Locke & Bailey, 2013). Tomalin and Stempleski (2013) have modified Seelye`s seven goals of cultural instruction. According to them, the teaching of culture should help students:

- To develop an understanding of the fact that all people exhibit culturally-conditioned behaviours.
- 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 become more aware of the conventional behavior in common situations in the target culture.
- To increase their awareness of the cultural connotations of words and phrases in their target language.
- To develop the ability to evaluate and refine generalizations about the target culture, in terms of supporting evidence.
- 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.

Despite the differences in terminology , nearly all goals set by different authors stress the view that learning a foreign culture (FC) should help students gain knowledge of the TC, and the learners` own culture.

2. Principles of culture teaching

Often times, teachers and methodologists wonder how to teach culture. Culture has been dealt with as a side-effect of language teaching. It has always been in the background. However, nowadays, more and more scholars consider it as important as the other aspects of language, and that it should have its right place in language teaching (Devrim & Bayyurt, 2010).

First , the aim of language teaching needs to be clear-cut and unambiguous from the very beginning , so that learning is not complicated and hampered by the confusion about what is required (Ellis,2009). Another point to be considered is that language teaching needs to be as realistic as possible, and this can be achieved by encouraging students` contact with environments in which the TL is used, including their first language contexts (Risager, 2007).

Thanasoulas (2001) has suggested some guidelines for culture teaching. According to him, culture should be dealt within a systematic and structured way. Meaning that it should not be incidental to the enterprise of culture teaching, nor should it be treated as a sidelight of language teaching, that is incorporated only periodically. Kramsch (2010) connects her argument to this idea by stating: Culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them.

Moreover, culture teaching should not be looked at as the mere transmission of knowledge or cultural facts about the TC. Cultural awareness is necessary for students to gain a deep understanding of both their native and the Target Culture (Nugent & Catalano, 2015). Kransch (2014) goes in the same vein when she warns against a simple transfer of information about the target community and its people`s attitudes and worldviews. She suggests what she calls `` new ways of looking at the teaching of language and culture.'' These include:

- *Establishing a `sphere of interculturality`* this means that the FC and one`s own should be placed together in order for learners to understand a FC. Learners are required to make their own meanings rather than having teachers simply transfer information about people and their culture.
- *Teaching culture as an interpersonal process*, this means going beyond the teaching of facts and moving towards a process of understanding otherness and foreignness.
- *Teaching culture as difference*, meaning that cultures should not be looked at as monolithic. The multi-culturality and multiethnicity of societies should be considered while looking at factors like age, gender, regional origin, ethnic background, and social class.
- *Crossing disciplinary boundaries*, this means relating the teaching of culture to other disciplines like anthropology, sociology, and semiology. Teachers need to broaden their readings to include, besides literature, studies by social scientists and sociolinguists on both their society and the society they are teaching its language.

Kramsch ends her account by stating that these ways or `lines of thought` furnish a deeper understanding more than can be envisaged by the majority of teachers. In a like manner , Cakir (2006) stresses the view that teaching culture has to be cultural awareness teaching , since as Broady (2004) puts it " understanding culture is a process of learning rather than an external knowledge to be acquired".Again, Baker (2012) holds that cultural knowledge is providing fixed information , facts concerning the TC, which is likely to be external , static ,and stereotypical. In other words, it is a knowledge that is passed to the learner from someone else, and although this knowledge may be useful, it can be misleading. However, culture awareness does not emphasize cultural knowledge, but rather students` abilities and skills in exploring, reflecting on, and understanding similarities and differences between the TC and their own.

In addition to the mentioned guidelines, there are other aspects that should be considered while teaching culture. Teachers should not avoid cultural assessment. The evaluation of cultural learning is necessary, since providing students with feedback causes them to learn more (Thanasoulas, 2001). Peterson and Coltrane (2003) add that the teaching of culture should be objective. The teacher should deal with cultural information in a non-judgment way. The teacher should create a tolerant atmosphere where students are cajoled into constant comparisons of the TC with their own, the thing which increases their cultural knowledge, understanding, acceptance as well as appreciation of cultural diversity (Liu, 2005).

3. Techniques for Culture Teaching

In order to assist the teaching of culture in EFL classrooms, different techniques and strategies have been suggested. Some of them are as follows

3.1 Authentic Materials

Using authentic materials from the TL community helps students acquire authentic cultural experience. Sources can include films, news broadcasts, television shows, newspapers, magazines, and other printed materials. Teachers can adapt materials to ages and proficiency levels of students (Fleet, 2006).

3.2 Culture Capsules

A culture capsule is a brief description of one aspect of the TC, followed by contrasting information from the learners` native culture. The discussion of the differences or the talk can be given by the teacher or a

student who prepared the culture capsule at home. The capsule is often combined with visuals, all of which should be able to be put in a shoe box (capsule) for later use (Trinh, 2015).

3. 3 Culture Assimilators

A culture assimilator is a short (usually written) description of an intercultural encounter that creates confusion between parties **,** at least one of them is from the TC , involved in a critical incident. The students, then, are asked to choose between four probable explanations of why the difference arose, and are finally given the right answer. This technique   is also useful for self-study (Rodliyah & Muniroh, 2012).

3.4 Role-Play

A frequently adopted classroom item, in which students role-play a situation in which   a miscommunication occurs such as in greetings, telephone talk etc. The other students observe and try to identify the reason for miscommunication. Then, they role-play the same situation using a culturally appropriate way. This technique does not only help students   understand cultural differences and experience foreign cultures, but also provides opportunities for oral communication and arouse students` interest in classrooms interaction (Er,2017).

3.5 Literature

Literary contents are often filling with cultural information and evoke unforgettable reactions for readers. Texts that are carefully selected with a previous goal in mind can be very helpful for students to gain insights into the TC (Dema & Moeller, 2012).

3.6 Micrologue

A technique where the teacher reads aloud a cultural passage , the students listen ,talk about it and answer questions, give an oral summary and finally write it as a dictation exercise . The advantage of this technique is that the teacher does not need to have any cultural expertise, and it takes a short amount of time (Rogalo, 2017).

3.7 Research

Students` research is one of the efficient tools that can be used. Students are asked to search any aspect of the TC which interests them in the library of the internet. Then, when they come to the classroom they explain it for the other students and answer their questions. This can lead to poster-sessions or longer projects or even to a longue term interest for some learners in the TC (Cullen & Sato, 2000).

3.8 Kinesics and Body Language

Students` need to understand that gestures though learned   are unconscious cultural phenomena and may be easily misunderstood .Thus ,such activities as using pictures , role plays ,and dialogues allow students to have a closer look at how body language might be interpreted by other people (Sarigul & Ashton-Hay, 2005).

The given list of techniques is not assumed to be exhaustive. There are other methods and activities that can be employed like the internet, films, stories, songs, drama proverbs…etc. However, what is important is the knowledge that the choice of the method or technique depends on many factors. Hence, teachers

might find it useful to consider Brown`s checklist for culturally appropriate techniques. Brown (2000) suggests for teachers when selecting a suitable technique to consider the following:

- Does the technique recognize the value and belief systems that are presumed to be a part of the culture(s) of the students?
- Does the technique refrain from any demeaning stereotypes of any culture, including the culture(s) of your students?
- Does the technique refrain from any possible devaluing of the students` native language(s)?
- Does the technique recognize varying degrees of willingness of students to participate openly due to factors of collectivism/ individualism and power distance?
- If the technique requires students to go beyond the comfort zone of un certainty avoidance in their cultures (s), does it do so empathetically and tactfully?
- Is the technique sensitive to the perceived roles of males and females in the culture(s) of your students?
- Does the technique sufficiently connect specific language features e.g., grammatical categories, lexicon, discourse, to cultural way of thinking, feelings, and acting?
- Does the technique in some way draw on the potentially rich background experiences of the students including their own experiences in other cultures?

To keep it short, a great variety of techniques ranging from short activities to more time-consuming ones can aid teachers approach culture almost in every EFL classroom. Moreover, it is equally important that students' cultural awareness may be fostered outside the classroom by using authentic materials, since not everything can be covered by the teacher given the broadness of the field of culture.

4. The Role of the Teacher

The teacher is often the only language model that students encounter in their language learning process. For this reason, the teacher has a significance role to play in aiding students acquire both linguistic and intercultural competence (Crandall, 2000). The role of the teacher is significance particularly at the early stages of the students` language learning process. It is primarily his responsibility to provide materials for the tasks, to suggest and show how they may be used as well as to provide feedback (Corbett, 2003).

Moreover, the foreign language teacher is often referred to as `mediator (Clouet, 2006). He intervenes in transmitting cultural information, mediates and interprets the values, beliefs, and norms of both cultures. The teacher should help students find their own third position between their native and the foreign culture. He should raise students` awareness to both cultures so that they are able to accept that each culture has its own norms and standards and only ten learners will learn to be objective , less biased and prejudiced to both cultures (Zarate,2004).

It is also the teacher`s task to arouse the students` interest in culture learning by exposing them to English practice as much as possible (Rotgans & Schmidt,2011). Creating a good classroom atmosphere is another important teachers` role. Teachers must make classroom environment more comfortable, so that students can interact and speak out actively (Van Tartwijk, den Brok, Veldman, & Wubbels, 2009).

Merrouche (2006) states that the effective culture teacher is the one who involves all members of the class to ponder on cultural issues in the activities and tasks provided to them, to report how they would react in the different situations , and to analyse situations for themselves, and then exchange results and opinions with the other students and with the teacher as well. However , it should be remembered that students should not depend completely on the teacher .They should take charge of their own learning

since that the teacher is just a guider rather than the only source of knowledge and authority (Goodyear & Dudley, 2015).

5. The Role of the Learner

Learners also have a basic role to play in the process of culture learning. According to Corbett (2003), the role of the learner varies from activity to activity and from stage to stage. He maintains that at the early stages learners need the teachers` support. S/he is to provide them with guidelines and lead them through tasks. Later, when they grow more confident, they will take charge of their own learning. They may suggest tasks, activities and contribute actively in the language classroom as well.

Moreover, learners should do more outside the classroom. They can listen to or watch English program, read novels and stories, communicate or correspond with people in the English speaking countries (Kirstein & Kunz, 2015). Learners should increase their awareness of both cultures. They should follow the norms of intercultural speakers. Their role is to function as mediators or a go between their native and the foreign culture having to interpret constantly instead of acquiring rigid stereotypical notions (Clouet, 2006).

6. Conclusion

Throughout this paper it has been argued that language and culture are inseparable in so much that one cannot survive without the other , and therefore culture is relevant to teaching and learning of a foreign language. It is out of the question to teach /learn a language without its culture. It takes more than linguistic competence to be competent in a foreign language, cultural competence is also needed. Besides, knowledge of the target culture alone is not enough; language learners should be fostering cultural awareness. Students need to understand others` values, beliefs and attitude in the light of their own culture**,** in this sense culture learning can be said to be intercultural. Moreover, foreign language teachers should know what cultural content to include as well as select appropriate techniques and strategies, if students are to achieve intercultural communication and understanding. Hence, it can be concluded that language reflects culture, intentionally or unintentionally, it cannot be avoided. Yet, in the foreign language classroom incorporating culture should be intentional. Students can be successful in mastering a foreign language only if cultural issues are at the heart of the curriculum.

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