

**The Importance of Incorporating Cultural  
Components into Foreign Language Teaching**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between language and culture and to explain why it is more effective to teach both; why culture teaching is inevitably a motivating and engaging component of language teaching and learning. Through a review of the related literature, the importance of integrating target cultural components into target language teaching becomes more evident, when students are taught about the target culture while simultaneously acquiring the language; the language learning experience becomes more real, more purposeful and more authentic for them. Since culture is embedded within every aspect of society, in order to be successful in real life situations, culture teaching would help the learners to employ the social rules of that target culture in learning its language. Furthermore, culture teaching also piques the interest of students and acts as a motivator, so that culture teaching will motivate the learners to learn languages and improve their intercultural awareness and sensitivity. Therefore, teaching culture as part of the language syllabus is instrumental in enhancing communicative competence.

# **The Importance of Incorporating Cultural Components into Foreign Language Teaching**

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Gleason stated that “Language is not only the product of culture, but also is the symbol of culture.”(as cited in Ming-Mu, Kuo & Cheng-Chieh, Lai, 2002). Only after cultural issues become an inherent part of the language teaching, can students be most successful in their target language learning. Therefore, teaching culture plays an important part in foreign language teaching; understanding culture reduces some possible misunderstanding in communication. Furthermore, learning a foreign language means mastering it on a cultural level and using language as the main medium through which culture is expressed and learned. It is critical to discuss the inseparable relation between culture and language and the importance of incorporating cultural components into foreign language teaching. As Kramsch once said “Language, as code, reflects cultural preoccupations and constrains the way people think” (p.14).

It’s clear that language is a reflection of culture, and culture is a reflection of language, because culture influences languages by way of symbols and rules, as well as people’s perceptions of their surroundings. Therefore, if a language learner wants to communicate in another language, it is important for him or her to know not only the symbols or words of that language, but also the rules for using them. For example, the word ‘ rubber’ in British English means ‘eraser’ while in American English means ‘condom’; many Chinese students were taught that word in school, so one time when one of my best American friends helped me with grammar exercises, I made a mistake on my book so I asked him to lend me a rubber, that is why he told me that in

American English that word means condom. I am very thankful for my friend patiently explained to me what was the appropriate word to use. In short, it is impossible to separate one's use of language from his or her culture.

More importantly, incorporating cultural components into foreign language teaching is indispensable when it comes to teaching foreign languages to people who are involved in the area of intercultural communication and cooperation. In terms of intercultural communication, teaching culture can help language learners have the ability to enter other cultures and communicate effectively and appropriately, establish and maintain relationships, and carry out tasks more effectively with people of these cultures. Therefore, learning culture can be viewed as a process, what people go through as they think, do, and feel in order to successfully communicate across cultures. Needless to say, teaching culture has many benefits for language learners. As Peck stated, teaching language and culture allows students to “feel, touch, smell, and see the foreign peoples and not just hear their language”(as cited in Fleet, 2006, p.9).

According to Hendon “In order for communication to be successful, language use must be associated with other culturally appropriate behavior or else students will only utterances and not the cultural appropriateness connected to these utterances” (as cited in Fleet, 2006, p.7). Hendon's belief is that “unless culture is a central focus in language teaching, students will not communicate to the fullest extent” (as cited in Fleet, 2006, p.7). Often times, speakers of different languages do not understand one another. It is not because their languages can not be mutually translated into one another, but it is because they view and interpret things differently due to the culture

in which they were brought up; the culture can be some common beliefs, attitudes and values most people share in a country, or in a big community or even in a family.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem is addressed in the following three questions: What is the relationship between culture and language? What is the relationship between cultural learning and foreign language teaching? What is the relationship between cultural background knowledge and second language (L2) proficiency?

### **Definition of Terms**

Culture generally refers to patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activities significance and importance. Cultures can be "understood as systems of symbols and meanings that even their creators contest, that lack fixed boundaries, that are constantly in flux, and that interact and compete with one another"(Wikipedia, 2009).

Culture can be defined as all the ways of life including arts, beliefs, and institutions of a population that is passed down from generation to generation. Culture has been called "the way of life for an entire society." As such, it includes codes of manners, dress, language, religion, rituals, games, norms of behavior such as law and morality, and systems of belief as well as the art (Wikipedia, 2009).

Cultural anthropologists most commonly use the term "culture" to refer to the universal human capacity and activities to classify, codify and communicate their

experiences materially and symbolically. Scholars have long viewed this capacity as a defining feature of humans (although some primatologists have identified aspects of culture such as learned tool making and use among humankind's closest relatives in the animal kingdom) (Wikipedia, 2009).

As cited in Cakir (2006), Trinovitch (1980) defines culture as "...an all-inclusive system which incorporates the biological and technical behavior of human beings with their verbal and nonverbal systems of expressive behavior starting from birth, and this 'all-inclusive system' is acquired as the native culture" (p.550). Every child would go through the process of socialization as they are constantly exposed to the linguistically and non-linguistically accepted patterns of society in which they live.

Language: A language is a dynamic set of sensory symbols of communication and the elements used to manipulate them. Language can also refer to the use of such systems as a general phenomenon. Strictly speaking, language is considered to be an exclusively human mode of communication. Although other animals make use of quite sophisticated communicative systems, sometimes casually referred to as animal language, none of these are known to make use of all of the properties that linguists use to define language (Wikipedia, 2009).

In Western Philosophy, language has long been closely associated with reason, which is also a uniquely human way of using symbols. In Ancient Greek philosophical terminology, the same word, *logos*, was used as a term for both language or speech and reason, and the philosopher Thomas Hobbes used the English

word "speech" so that it similarly could refer to reason, as will be discussed below.

More commonly though, the English word "language", derived ultimately from *lingua*, Latin for tongue, typically refers only to expressions of reason which can be understood by other people, most obviously by speaking (Wikipedia, 2009).

### **Delimitations of the Research**

The research will be conducted within the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, during the spring 2010 semester. Searches will be conducted via the Internet through EBSCO with Academic Search Elite, ERIC and Wilson Index as the primary sources. Key search topics include "culture" "language" "cultural teaching" and "foreign language teaching".

### **Method**

A brief review of literature on the studies of "the importance of incorporating cultural components into foreign language teaching" will be conducted. The findings will be summarized and recommendations will be made about how to more effectively teach foreign languages. As far as helping the professor to teach the students foreign language, there should be emphasis on learning culture as well.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature**

### **The Definitions of Culture**

Chastain (1998) argues that, as cited in Cakir (2006), culture may mean different things to different people. While a working definition of culture needs to be determined as the term culture itself can be confusing or very broad. Because culture is so multifaceted and complex, and there is no consensus on what culture is. Therefore, culture has been, and continues to be, defined in many ways.

According to Cakir, “In the anthropologic sense culture is defined as the way people live” (p.302). As cited in Cakir (2006), Trinovitch (1980) defines culture as “...an all-inclusive system which incorporates the biological and technical behavior of human beings with their verbal and nonverbal systems of expressive behavior starting from birth, and this ‘all-inclusive system’ is acquired as the native culture” (p.550). Every child would go through the process of socialization as they are constantly exposed to the linguistically and non-linguistically accepted patterns of society in which they live.

According to Brown (1994), as cited in Cakir (2006), “culture is deeply ingrained part of the very fiber of our being, but language—the means for communication among members of a culture- is the most visible and available expression of that culture” (p.170). Similarly, Tang (1999), as cited in Cakir (2006), “propounds the view that culture is language and language is culture. In a word, culture is a way of life” (p.163).

Furthermore, as cited in Fleet (2006), Peck (1998) has described culture as, “the accepted and patterned ways of behavior of a given people” (p.1) and “as membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings” (p.10). It is defined by Sysoyev as, “a system of symbols, meanings, and

norms passed from one generation to the next, which differentiates groups of people united by certain characteristics such as origin, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic class, or political views” (Sysoyev as cited in Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002, p. 513). Hammerly (1982) stated very simply that culture is, “the total way of life of a people” (p.513). To me, culture is a way of life consisting of shared beliefs, values, practices of persons within specific community, say a country, a city or even a family.

As cited in Moran (2004), Halverson states that “culture is viewed as civilization, the great achievements of a people as reflected in their history, social institutions, works of art, architecture, music, and literature—commonly referred to as ‘big C’ culture. Culture is also viewed as the customs, traditions, or practices that people carry out as part of their everyday lives—‘small c’ culture. Both views are culture-specific and, broadly speaking, use the nation as the frame of reference for culture. Thus, there are references to French culture, Moroccan culture, Mexican culture, Brazilian culture, or the culture of any nation in the world”(p.4). According to Halverson, ‘big C’ is what people (a certain group) have left behind, while “small c” refers to daily reactions within a certain group.

### **The Relationships between Culture and Language**

“Language and culture are inextricably linked and one will affect the other. Language and culture have a deep and symbolic relationship. Language stands for the whole culture because language represents culture in the minds of its speakers” (Ming-Mu Kuo, Cheng-Chieh Lai, 2006). As to me, to fully understand culture, we must examine the language, because language is the product of culture while it plays a distinct role at the same time.

Language and culture are global characteristics because they enable human communities to determine their boundaries, to organize space in terms of rules to be respected by the members of the groups, to give them a means of common ground, to preserve the memory of the community in creating traditions, customs and habits that can be passed down from one generation to another as a means of initiation, or in more modern terms ‘socialization’ of the members of the group and production of individual and group identity. That is to say, people of a culture have to create a language to carry out their cultural perspectives and practices.

Baumgrats (1995) also indicated that “language and culture are products of the historical struggle of humanity to dominate, exploit and transform nature to serve its survival interests. Because in the past the communities were small and isolated, they produced their own languages and cultures in close interaction with the geographical characteristics of their territory and their level of development. Therefore historical languages reflect the way the community pictured its own state of development: time and space bound concrete imagery linked with agriculture, for example, undergoes a process of gradual abstraction, which increases the adaptability of language to changing environments and stages of development but at the same time creates ambiguity and therefore a need for interpretation” (p.437). Thus, culture liberates by investing nature with meaning and order, and it constrains by imposing a structure on nature. By learning both language and culture, people are able to move to different areas and be able to understand the custom and culture of the people in that area.

According to Moran, “culture is a dynamic, living phenomenon practiced daily by real

people, together or alone, as they go about their shared way of life, living and creating their history or civilization. When you cross the border from your way of life into theirs, your challenges are centered around communication, building relationships, and accomplishing tasks in their language while using their set of rules. To achieve these ends you have to manage your language, actions, emotions, beliefs, and values through trial and error—through experience.” Thus, learning a foreign language is not simply an exercise to learn a set of techniques to use, but also to learn how to more effectively adapt yourself to the culture of that language.

### **It is Essential to Integrating Cultural Components into Foreign Language Teaching**

From the previous introduction of what culture is and the relationships between them, it is easier to see the importance of incorporating cultural components into foreign language teaching. Because teaching culture plays an important part in foreign language teaching; understanding culture prevents some possible misunderstanding in communication. Learning a foreign language means mastering it on a cultural level, and using culture and language as the main medium through which culture is expressed. Furthermore, culture teaching can facilitate language learners’ communicative goals. The language learning experience becomes more real, more purposeful and more authentic for learners when they are taught the culture contexts of the language itself. The following discussions are retrieved from different articles related to this topic and there are some similarities and differences with respect to integrating culture teaching into foreign language teaching.

As cited in Moran, Robert Kucer, a high school teacher of Spanish and English, said

“Language is a way for people to get a sense of the humanity of other people who use that language. And when you have a sense of the humanity of other people, it’s very hard to hurt them” (p.7). Furthermore, Milton Bennett (cited in Moran, 2004) lays out that “ethnocentrism is the natural state for peoples of the world. Our instinctive reaction is to assume that our culture, our way of life, is the right one, and that all others are not. Whether we simply tolerate these other ways of life or treat them as enemies, our attitude toward them is essentially the same—ethnocentric.” As we try to find the cause of wars and aggression, ethnocentrism gets the blame, because of ethnocentrism Hitler started to slaughter more than 6 million Jews and Japanese massacred more than 35 million Chinese people during their eight years of aggression in China. When people learn a foreign language as well as learn its culture, they will have a better understanding of that culture and have the knowledge of the cultural differences, and also realize that people are more similar than they are different. Thus, teaching culture while teaching foreign language can bridge the gap between people and increase the success of the intercultural communication by broadening people’s minds and horizons.

### **Teaching Culture Plays an Important Part in Foreign Language Teaching and Using Language as the Main Medium through Which Culture is Expressed.**

“Culture teaching in foreign language education provides information about daily life and routines; it develops attitudes of openness and tolerance towards other people and cultures; it provides information about history, geography and political conditions of the foreign cultures; it provides experiences with a rich variety of cultural expressions (literature, music, theater, film, etc.). This also promotes the ability to handle intercultural

contact situations, promotes reflection on cultural differences, provides information about shared values and beliefs, promotes the ability to sympathize with people living in other cultures, and promotes increased understanding of students' own Culture" ( Sercu , 2004). Thus, one of the language teachers' major goals is to help the students gain an open mind and a positive disposition towards unfamiliar cultures.

As cited in Turkan & Celik (2007), Alptekin (2002) implies that learning a foreign language changes people's perspectives and helps them adapt themselves well in the new culture. Similarly, applied linguists such as Halliday (1975) has suggested that learners should acquire knowledge about how to use the language in order to function successfully in social-cultural contexts. Since acquisition of target language communicative competence entails the integration of both language and its culture, learners should become familiar with the "experience of another language, and a different way of coping with reality" ( Alptekin, 2002, p.59). Similarly, as Risager (1991) implies, successfully communicating with a native speaker is not simply knowing the grammar and words, but more importantly is to know how to cope the real life situations. Thus, it is important for the learners to be involved in communicative acts, as well as in the reality of the target culture, so that they can understand the cultural differences and views that the native speakers of the particular target culture possess.

Integration of culture into language teaching is, by no doubt, a requirement to pass on general humanistic knowledge. When students are able to get along well in the foreign country they temporarily live in, they will be able to easily use the language alongside cultural norms that they come into contact with. That's why in many countries, the

curriculum of teaching foreign language also includes culture teaching, for example the Spanish National Curriculum (1990) states that “the foreign language learning objectives are oriented towards the development of communicative strategies and interaction among individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds”(p.97).

As Moran puts it, “In the culture, the language is literally everywhere. Anyone immersed in the culture and hears the language all around. In this context, language and culture are clearly fused; one reflects the other. Language-and –culture conveys both unification and separation. It acknowledges that we can deal with each separately and with both together” (p.32). Obviously, culture can only be learned through language.

According to Moran, “language embodies the products, practices, perspectives, communities, and persons of a culture. To fully reveal the culture, we must examine the language. Language is a product of the culture, as any other, but it also plays a distinct role. Members of the culture have created the language to carry out all their cultural practices, to identify and organize all their cultural products, and to name the underlying cultural perspectives in all the various communities that comprise their culture. The words of the language, its expressions, structures, sounds, and scripts reflect the culture, just as the cultural products and practices reflect the language. Language, therefore, is a window to the culture” (p.32). That’s to say that learning a foreign language is also the process of learning its culture, and learning to use the right language in the right way according to the expectations of the members of that foreign culture.

Therefore, the teaching of the target culture has to serve the development of cross-cultural communication. A language is learned and used within a context, drawing

from the cultural distinctive meanings and functions which must be assimilated by language learners if they are to control the language as native speakers control it. However, when we learn a foreign language and its culture, we should also take into consideration the difference of the same language used by different people, say the old, the young, the educated and the illiterate, and people who grow up in different families. For example, my roommate was raised in a military family and her father swears a lot, so she uses a lot of negative words in her daily dialogue. To me, English is my second language, so it is hard for me to figure out which words are appropriate to use as I subconsciously pick up some negative words by being around my roommate and her friends. Only when I said something that shocked native English speakers did I realize that I used a bad word or phrase.

### **Understanding Culture Helps Reduce Possible Misunderstanding in Communication**

A behavior that is perceived as authentic in one culture may not be perceived so in another. For instance, standing or speaking up for oneself is considered authentic in one culture, but it may be seen as egotistical or shameful in another. This example is showing traditional Chinese values emphasizing humility and altruistic behavior. As the two famous Chinese sayings go “a hero is silent about his glories” and “a good wine is known in all corners” (meaning that if it’s a good deed, it will eventually be recognized).

Therefore, when Chinese speak up for themselves in an argumentative manner, people would think they are egotistical or shameful. On the contrary, the American culture values the courage and ability when they speak up for themselves or to share different ideas to make them stand out. Another example is in Chinese classrooms, consumption of

food and drink is considered disrespectful to the teachers and other students, whereas in the America it is considered appropriate.

Holding back one's own thoughts to avoid temporary conflict or for the benefit of a community is considered gracious and altruistic in one culture, but cowardly or even deceitful in another. Another example is Chinese children are taught to put the common good first and self second, thus there is an emphasis on respecting other people, especially elders and teachers and their opinions. Whenever a conflict arises, it is one's responsibility to listen to others' perspectives and modify one's own view to reach a balanced resolution to the conflict. That's why there is a strong emphasis on taking the middle path, assuming a position of balance and peace, while not dwelling on who is right or wrong, or who is better. In contrast, the American culture places emphasis on individualism, competition, and commercialization. It is safe to come to the conclusion that the subtle clues of our intentions and actions are sometimes misinterpreted because the variety of customs, beliefs, and cultures lead to misunderstanding (Lin, 2006).

In my own personal experience, in both Chinese and American education, challenging teachers' authority of intellect is completely opposite in each culture. In America, this is considered a positive gesture because it starts a discussion in the classroom among teachers and students and helps synthesize ideas. However, in China, this is looked at as being egotistical and rude; while if the students show respect to their teachers, and ask questions only for the sake of expanding knowledge not to show off how smart they are, they are always very welcome to ask questions in the classroom in China.

According to Geisler (2006) many individuals who teach foreign language say that

learning a language helps with intercultural comprehension. When individuals understand how a foreign language comes into being, then it is easier for them to understand how people think and behave in that foreign culture. I strongly believe that teaching both foreign languages and cultures can definitely help countries to develop strong and constructive relations in the long-term. Studying other peoples' languages and cultures will be very beneficial for not only individuals but also for countries regardless of what people think learning a foreign language should do. As most people have experienced the culture shock when they first live in a foreign country, without the awareness of the culture differences, they would feel they are not welcomed in that culture, thus have wrong perspectives or even prejudice against people in that country, which finally leads to the failing communications on a daily basis.

In America, public discussion of people's weight is looked on as negative stigma, whereas in China colleagues, friends and family members can openly speak about somebody's weight. They are not afraid to give advice to the over-weight person that they should lose some weight. This is acceptable in China when talking to friends, colleagues and family members, but not to strangers.

I have also witnessed some Americans who taught in China felt so offended when they were given advice that they should eat healthy food and do more exercise. Because in China, Chinese people are most likely to give advice to those whom they care and love a lot. For example, when someone is sick, people who know that individual would always tell him that he should drink hot water, eat soup, get more sleep or try some new medicine, whereas Americans who live in China feel so offended by all this advice. I personally

know an American guy who once taught English in a Chinese college. One time when he had a cold, his students overwhelmed him by giving too much advice on how he should take care of himself, so he felt his students were trying to be his mother for giving him instructions, and this bothered him. Another example, one of my best American friends who has been living in China with a baby, would often be told by some Chinese parents and grandparents who live in his community that the baby needs to wear more clothes in winter and chilly weather, and he should not give the baby cold drinks because they think it would be bad to the baby's health. He felt so offended because he thinks he can be a decent parent on his own. It is clearly a lack of cultural awareness that may cause offenses to native speakers of that foreign language.

In regard to possible misunderstandings in intercultural communication, here is a good example, most Asians respond negatively to white flowers because white is associated with death. For Americans, a "V" sign made with two fingers usually represents victory, while Australians equate this gesture with a rude American gesture usually made with the middle finger. Furthermore, whether we feel delighted or ill at the thought of eating the meat of a cow, fish, dog, or snake depends on what our culture has taught us about consuming food. Whether we are repulsed at the sight of a bull being jabbed with sharp swords and long steel stakes, or we believe it is a poetic sport, really depends on our culture. This does not mean, of course, that everyone in a particular culture has exactly the same perspective. Yet, without the knowledge of the target culture, the language learners would most likely cause cultural misunderstandings, which in real life would cause the speakers in the target culture to become confused, angry or even

offended.

### **Learning a Foreign Language Means Mastering It on a Cultural Level**

As cited in Fleet (2006), the relevance of teaching culture with language is based on the belief that language and culture are interconnected (Cruz, Bonissone & Baff, 1995; Heileman & Kaplan, 1985; Lessard-Clouston, 1997; Kramsch, 1998; Peck, 1998; Savigon & Sysoyev, 2002; Sellami, 2000; Singhal, 1997; Stern, 1983; Thanasoulas, 2001). The predominant view is that culture cannot be taught without language and similarly, that language cannot be taught without culture. In Peck's (1998) words "Without the study of culture, foreign language instruction is inaccurate and incomplete" (p.1), or it is what Sellami (2000) refers to as "a lifeless endeavor" (p.4). According to Lessard-Clouston (1997), language teaching is culture teaching. Peterson and Coltrane (2003) assert that "in order for communication to be successful, language use must be associated with other culturally appropriate behavior" (p.2) or else students will not be able to use that foreign language appropriately in the culture in which it is connected (Hendon, 1980 as stated in Fleet, p.7). For example, if a Chinese student gets a job in the student super market on an American campus but with little knowledge of the cultural difference, he or she may accidentally offend the American staff or students. In China, the cashier always puts the change for the customer on the counter while in America the cashier puts the change in the customer's hand. Although it is just such a small incident, this may cause the misunderstanding to the American students or teachers that the Chinese student did not like them.

Nowadays, teachers are expected not only to teach the foreign linguistic code, but also

to contextualize that code against the sociocultural background associated with the foreign language and to promote the acquisition of intercultural communicative competence. As cited in Castro (2004), Meyer stated that “within the field of foreign language learning, intercultural competence is defined as: the ability of a person to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures” (p.92). This definition adds to the notion of communicative competence as a capacity to ‘stabilize one’s self-identity in the process of cross-cultural mediation, and of helping other people to stabilize their self-identity’”

As Byram also stated in Castro(2004), “the success of interaction implies not only an effective interchange of information, as was the goal of communicative language teaching, but also ‘the ability to decentre and take up the other’s perspective on their own culture, anticipating, and where possible, resolving dysfunctions in communication and behavior’. The foreign language learner is now viewed as an ‘intercultural speaker’, someone who ‘crosses frontiers, and who is to some extent a specialist in the transit of cultural property and symbolic values’” (p.92). In short, for language learners, one of their ultimate goals of studying a new language is to be able to learn about and understand different cultures and to better understand their own language and culture within a global context.

It is posited that teaching culture as part of the language syllabus is instrumental in enhancing communicative competence. As cited in Fleet, Hendon’s (1980) belief that unless culture is a central focus in language teaching, students will not communicate to “the fullest extent” (p.198). Because the major goal of learning a foreign language is to

communicate, if the foreign language learners master the foreign language on a cultural level, it would be very easy for them to have successful communication whether it is for business or personal friendship. That's to say that only when language learners possess the knowledge of both the linguistic code and culture can they successfully master the foreign language as the native speakers master it. In addition, they will also be able to reflect better on their first language and culture when they have experienced those of the second language. Therefore, the combination of linguistic ability and knowledge about foreign cultures will also give the language learners the ability to engage in comparisons and contrasts with their own. By doing the comparisons and contrasts, the language learner will acquire global perspectives and intercultural awareness.

### **Chapter Three: Conclusions and Recommendations**

As both an English language learner and practicing teacher, I posit that the significance of culture teaching is to enrich the language learners' cultural understanding and to help them build an international awareness and socio-cultural competence. Without clear understanding, recognition, and execution of this wakefulness and knowledge in their practice of learning and use of language, knowing when to say what, to whom, where and how, becomes difficult, and this, needless to say, hinders successful communication in the foreign language. What's more important, integration of culture into language teaching is, by no doubt, a requirement to pass on general humanistic knowledge. If successful integration takes place, the foreign language learner of any language will be able to act flexibly and sensibly along the lines of cultural norms that they encounter within the target language culture.

According to Moran, "culture is often referred to as if it were a subject matter like any other—geography, mathematics, science, or linguistics. Describing it this way engenders a strong inclination to view culture only as a body of knowledge, a compendium of facts, data, or other information. There is much truth to this viewpoint, especially when culture is seen as civilization or history" (p.7). However, integrating the target culture into language teaching does not inherently provide a clear-cut framework for teachers to employ. The reason why this process is so fuzzy basically stems from the complex and vast nature of culture. Although teachers know the importance of incorporating cultural components into foreign language teaching, it is

not easy to achieve the goal.

Although it is difficult to achieve the goal of incorporating cultural components into foreign language teaching, more and more scholars have become strongly in favor of this proposal. According to Scarino, “Being an accomplished teacher of languages and cultures means being a person who knows, uses and teaches language and culture in an ethical and reflective way. It involves continuous engagement with and commitment to learning, both as a teacher and as a life-long learner. It means more than teaching knowledge of languages and cultures and includes teaching learners to value, respect and engage with languages and cultures in their own lives and to interact with others across linguistic and cultural borders. It means creating a culture of learning which approaches language, culture and learning with respect, empathy, commitment, enthusiasm and personal responsibility” (p.4). With the development of the foreign language education, more and more foreign language teachers clearly consider it the responsibility of the language teacher to also teach about the foreign culture.

Nowadays, in foreign language education, new professional demands are made on teachers. Foreign language teaching can no longer be regarded mainly as a linguistic task. Teachers are now required to teach intercultural communicative competence. Therefore, foreign language teachers themselves must make an effort to improve their own intercultural communication competence in order to function successfully in socio-cultural contexts, and equip themselves with the knowledge of the target culture, so that the students can gain access to educational or economic

opportunities within the target setting. Furthermore, incorporating cultural components into foreign language teaching can not only help teachers to teach more effectively, but also help students to learn foreign language more effectively. As Alptekin lays out, if foreign language learners want to acquire the target language communicative competence, they should not only learn the words but also should learn the culture related to them, by doing so, learners would truly experience the language and its culture, and would know how to cope the real life in the society of that target language.

Furthermore, I strongly believe that when language teachers try to achieve the ultimate goal of incorporating cultural components into foreign language teaching, they will also reveal a keen interest in promoting reflection on cultural differences, and helping students experience a rich variety of cultural expressions, say through movies, novels, music and paintings, etc. However, in terms of helping students achieve high foreign language proficiency for practical purposes, it is not easy for the language teacher to wisely design the curriculum that not only meet the foremost goal, but also help learners gain cultural awareness and sensitivity to the people's needs in the targeted culture. In spite of all the difficulties, most language teachers are willing to prioritize the promotion of students' familiarity with the cultural differences with an open mind, and help the students to be real successful language learners.

As an English teacher and foreign language learner myself who is blessed with an opportunity to live in America and to experience American culture in person, I think it is important that language teachers should first be the learners of foreign culture

themselves before they teach culture to their students, because only when they go through the cultural experience, can they really understand the cultural differences; only when they have a better understanding and an open mind to those differences, can they really help their students to understand them. As what Moran proposes about teaching culture, “as learners move through each of these stages of the experiential learning cycle they develop cultural behaviors (knowing how), acquire cultural information (knowing about), discover cultural explanations (knowing why), articulate personal responses (knowing oneself), and by repeatedly employing this process, build skills as culture learners (personal competence)” (p.134). Therefore, when language teachers have gone through all these stages of culture learning, their class will be more authentic and beneficial to their students.

However, not every language teacher would have an opportunity to experience the target culture personally, but there are still many good resources that are available to most of the teachers; for example, there are movies, books, TV shows, newspapers, internet, advertisements, music, and art, etc. Not only can teachers provide cultural information for the students by using these resources, but the students also can have access to them. Furthermore, the teachers can expect the students to participate, describe, and interpret the cultural differences they have found when they look over these resources. By discussing and comparing the differences between their own culture and the target culture, the culture learning becomes more authentic, helpful and meaningful to the students.

Because the time is so limited in the class and each student's culture learning is so unique, teachers can ask students to write a journal entry about the contrast and comparison between their own culture and the target culture, and also journal the characteristics they have found in their own language and the target language that interest them. By doing so, the students can be more motivated and stimulated to bring out more ideas to the class, not only to enrich one another's understanding of the culture and language learning, but to broaden the teachers' as well.

The last aspect I want to talk about is that cultural taboos should also be included in the culture teaching, with the knowledge of them, students can avoid causing unnecessary misunderstanding or offenses to the native speakers, thus have a more successful and pleasant communication experience. Overall, incorporating cultural components into foreign language teaching has many benefits for the students as opposed to just teaching the language alone.

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