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## TEACHING CULTURE AS A FIFTH LANGUAGE SKILL

Fatma ÖZÜORÇUN\*

### Abstract

Many researchers like Wang (2008:3) believe that language teaching is culture teaching and foreign language teachers are actually foreign culture teachers. The main reason behind the idea of teaching the culture together with the language is that in many situations it is difficult to simply translate one language into another language especially when either of the languages lack these words or expressions. The foreign language lacks these words simply because the people do not have them in their own cultures. The paper includes examples of words that appear in Turkish and English because of the cultural importance of what they refer to. The present paper also includes reasons and recommendations for language teachers to indicate how important it is to include culture in their teaching.

**Keywords:** Fifth Language Skill, Culture, Language Teaching, Misunderstanding, Sociolinguistics.

### Introduction

Farnia and Raja (2009: 242) claim that language is a way of communication and it carries the culture. They state that one cannot think of a language without the culture. The researchers go even further in claiming that a specific language is a mirror of a specific culture. Brown (2000:189) also supports this idea by indicating that language is a part of culture and a culture is a part of language; the two are inside each other and they cannot be separated from each other without losing the significance of either language or culture. The above mentioned authors are just few among many who support the idea that language and culture go together and that languages should be taught together with its culture. Therefore this paper provides crucial information to support these ideas.

### Culture

Culture contains the commonly held traditions, values, and ways of behaving in a specific community. The things that people think are important, like family, hospitality, and fairness all deal with cultural values. The knowledge of daily routines and behavior are all linked to cultural behavior. On the other hand the development of intercultural sensitivity and awareness, using the language are linked to cultural skills (Tomalin & Hurn, 2013: 196).

Sarigül and Ashton (2005:2) claim that culture is represented through body language, gestures, concepts of time, hospitality, customs, and even expressions of friendliness. Hinkel (as cited in Sarigül & Ashton, 2005:2) indicates that two cultures exist; one is visible which is more readily apparent and includes style of dress, cuisine, festivals, customs, and other traditions where as the invisible culture is believed to be shown through socio-cultural norms, world views, beliefs, assumptions, and values. Visible culture can be explained easily but on the other hand invisible culture is obtained while socializing and it is tied to an individual's identity.

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\* Lefke Avrupa Üniversitesi Gemikonağı - Lefke

### **Misunderstandings in cross-cultural situations**

Simple behaviors are likely to result in misunderstandings, miscommunication or confusion in cross-cultural situations. An interesting example that Sarigül and Ashton (2005:2) provide to clarify their point is when the Turkish people raise their eye brows with a slightly upward tilt to represent "no" but on the other hand the Americans use the same gestures and body movements to indicate a surprise or pleasure. The researchers suggest the language teachers to be aware of these cross-cultural differences and provide the students with sufficient input where possible. They also believe that the language cannot be simply translated to other languages as words might intend to express certain things related to culture so it is difficult to translate those words or expressions which the culture of the target language lacks, it might lead to serious misunderstandings and the people from diverse cultures might even be offended by such expressions (Sarigül & Ashton, 2005:2).

Sarigül and Ashton (2005:3) provide important aspects for the teachers to be aware of when teaching a language;

- A speaker cannot translate a native language word by word into a target language or vice versa.
- Meaning is carried through the tone of voice of the speaker of a language.
- Meaning is also conveyed through gestures and body movements.
- There are taboo words and topics in all the cultures.
- It is likely that addressing people in different cultures vary considerably.

### **Examples of cultural words and expressions**

Sarigül and Ashton (2005:3-4) provide some examples of words in American English and Turkish to show that sometimes words cannot be simply translated to the other language when the other language does not have them.

#### **American words related to their culture**

Prom: Graduation party especially for high school or college.

Pot luck dinners: a meal where all the guests are expected to bring a dish.

Doggy bag: the bag that is prepared for the customer to take home all the leftovers of a meal in a restaurant mainly for the pet.

Hot dog: a hot sausage served in a long sliced bun.

Baptism: a Christian ceremony to name a child.

Apple pie: Pastry with baked apples in it.

Going Dutch: a term used when everybody in a group pays for their own meal.

#### **Turkish words related to their culture**

Ayran: a kind of cold drink made with yoghurt water and salt, mainly served with kebabs.

Iftar: when people start to eat after fasting.

Elti: a term used for the wives of two brothers.

Kına gecesi: henna night

Abla: a word used by the siblings to refer to the older sister, sometimes used for relatives or other females to show intimacy.

Tesbih: the beads that Muslims hold when they pray.

Ağabey: a word used by the siblings to refer to the older brother, sometimes used for relatives or other males to show intimacy.

The vocabulary people choose to name things represent their culture and the importance of the things to them. For example; the Eskimos categorize "snow" and give it different names according to the different types of snow. Some of the words or expressions for snow are; "falling snow", "snow on the ground", "fluffy snow", and "wet snow". Other cultures also have various words to represent one thing according to its occurrence. Like; The Urdu language has different words for the word "rice" that appears to be a single word in English. For example; "Chaval" (uncooked rice), "bhat" (boiled rice), "biryani" (rice cooked with meat), and "zardo" (dish of sweet rice) (Sarigül & Ashton, 2005:4).

Hong (2008:2) is also among the researchers who support that teaching culture should be the fifth skill to be taught while teaching a language. The researcher believes that misinterpretation due to different cultures will be prevented if students are taught the culture along with the language. The example that Hong (2008:5) gave to clarify his point was when the target language learners (native speakers of English who were learning Hindi/Urdu) encountered the term "mother" (mommy, amma) used for different people. The target language learners were confused to see two types of "mother" inside the literature text that they were given to comprehend. The person in the reading text was using "mommy" to refer to his own mother and "amma" to refer to his friend's mother. Hong explains that the variety of these words do not only appear with parental terms but also with other familial terminology. This can indeed be confusing for a learner that is not aware of the variety of the words in the target culture which they lack in their own native language.

#### **Reasons why language should be taught with the culture:**

Tomalin (2008:1) gives the English language as an example to show why he thinks it is important to learn the culture when learning the language. He believes that there are two reasons why ELT teachers should include culture in their teaching which are the international role of the English language and globalization. The fifth language skill culture teaches students the techniques to adapt their English to learn about, understand and appreciate the values, ways of doing things and unique specialties of other cultures. This will lead them to succeed when interacting with native people of that language in social contexts. Learning culture will teach the students to accept differences and to be flexible to tolerate ways of doing things that are obviously different in their culture.

Regmi (2011:1) indicates an important issue and says that English is a global language and many people from different cultures learn English as their native language. Therefore, sometimes it might be difficult to teach the culture of English as it might be different in different local contexts. An example that is provided here is the word "pavement" which British use and the word "sidewalk" which the Americans use. Another example is the word "mate" which is used for a friend in Australia but for a spouse in England. Providing students with these examples will make them aware of the cultural differences that affect the same language. Regmi (2011:1) claims that the students who are provided with such input about the culture and the language will be more motivated to learn different cultural situations and therefore, understand that learning the linguistic structures of a language might not be enough to be competent in using the language in its original setting.

Hong (2008:4) points out to something important about this matter by indicating that the students think that everything in the target culture can be translated into the native language, or everything in the target language has an equivalent in the native language, this is when breakdowns mostly occur.

### **Teacher's role in teaching the language with the culture**

The language teacher's aim is to make the students both linguistically and communicatively competent in learning a second language because having the linguistic competence alone will not be enough for a person to be fully competent in the actual culture where the language is being used by native speakers of the language (Sarigül & Ashton, 2005:6).

Hong (2008: 8) raises importance to this issue by stating that, when teaching a language the aim is to develop both linguistic and cultural competence, which in other words is referred to as "inter cultural communicative competence", this way the speaker can succeed in using the language appropriately.

### **Recommendations for language teachers**

Hong (2008:4) suggests teaching any extra information tied to the culture even when teaching a word. For example, some animals are regarded as special or holy in some cultures for some reasons. The target language speakers obviously have no idea about this matter so it is a good idea for the language teacher to give information or to also teach why these animals are considered to be special or holy in the target culture. Another example given by Hong to support this idea is the word "owl" which is regarded as being wise in America or generally in the western culture but, it is regarded as being stupid or a fool in Hindi/Urdu. As a result it is a good idea to elaborate on things that have some kind of cultural information associated with them.

Hong (2008:5) indicates that texts related to literature can be used as a tool to introduce culture because they naturally contain information about the culture of the target language. When the students are not taught the culture, this could be misleading as they will not interpret the information correctly from the literature. A good example that is given here to clarify the claim are kinship terms of languages, which mostly vary in different cultures. The word "uncle" has several different terms in Hindi/Urdu depending on the paternal side or maternal side, whether the person is older or younger than your mother or father (Hong, 2008:5). Obviously the target language learners will be confused as they only have a single representation to all those words.

It is essential to understand and work with people from different cultures and linguistic backgrounds to develop cultural awareness and intercultural skills. She supports the idea that speakers of a second language have to understand and accept cultural implications of language and learn these systems in order to be successful in that language. Moreover adopting these cultural differences is a requirement to survive and take part in today's economic and social world. The traditional and structured environments in second language teaching should be transformed into places that are open to diversity to achieve the combination of cultural norms with the second language (Rappel, 2011: 1).

A crucial problem that ELT teachers face in a multi cultural classroom when teaching the language is that the ELT teachers are trained to achieve goals that focus on linguistic aspects rather than integrating cultural aspects of the language (Rappel, 2011:2).

Teachers should be trained to support the learning environment which includes contextual information about the second language learning. When teachers provide comprehensible contextual situations then the students will have the opportunity to recognize cultural differences in their interactions in relation to the target language. Encouraging and leading students to discuss different cultural behaviors will make them aware of the link between language and culture. The students will recognize the role of language in culture and society when being exposed to real life situations which reflect reality outside the classroom (Rappel, 2011: 4) .

Rappel (2011: 3) states that "appreciating a plural linguistic environment encourages respect and tolerance for cultural diversity both inside and outside the classroom". She also indicates that it is better for the language teacher to teach students how to navigate and negotiate meaning other than focusing on learners achieving native-like proficiency.

Rappel (2011: 4) identifies the requirements to facilitate intercultural learning which are; attitudes of open-mindedness, recognizing consequences, and whole heartedness which she indicates are the key to develop new ways of thinking. When a person has the cultural information of a target language, it will be easier to adapt to the new country if one had to live there for some reasons like immigration or education.

Sarıgül and Ashton (2005:7-8) provide some strategies for teaching culture; culture capsules, proverbs, authentic materials, role plays, native speakers as cultural resources, kinesthetic and body language. Culture capsules are short descriptions which a cultural difference is illustrated together with photos, slides or realia. Proverbs can also be used to teach the culture of the target language as they foster the values of the culture. On the other hand authentic materials enable the students to see how language appears and is used in real life contexts. Therefore, the student's awareness will be raised by being exposed to these authentic materials like; films, television shows, photographs, magazines, newspapers, menus, travel brochures etc. Using role plays in teaching culture is another effective and useful way because the students can use the target language together by acting it out. Students can encounter miscommunications or misinterpretations during these role plays and the teacher can provide them with the sufficient information of why and how such a misunderstanding or misinterpretation occurred because of the different cultures. The teacher might also invite native speakers of the language to the class to give information about their culture. The students will not just listen to cultural experiences but also the language from a native speaker (Sarıgül & Ashton, 2005: 7-8).

As mentioned before gestures and body language play an important role in diverse cultures. One behavior or body action might be appropriate in one culture and inappropriate in another. Providing the students with the input that gestures and body actions might represent quite different meanings in different cultures will help them to appreciate and be aware of these differences. As a result, Sarıgül and Ashton (2005: 10-11) insists that cultural information should be provided from the first language lesson and be embedded with the linguistic information to allow the speakers of the target language to be more successful in real life situations.

Vernier et al. (2008:265) believe that language is not just memorizing vocabulary and grammar items and that social, cultural, and discourse conventions should also be included in the teaching of a foreign language. The aim of most EFL classes is to make the students to become communicatively competent. The authors do not just refer to the grammatical accuracy but also the success in real life situations where the language is used originally. Therefore, they suggest that culture should be included in the EFL instruction as being fully competent in grammar and accuracy might not be enough for a learner to be fully competent in using the language in real life situations.

Contrastive pragmatics is the discipline that compares the pragmatic systems of languages in cross cultural situations. The Speech Act theory which was first mentioned by Austin and Searle concentrates on conversational routines and linguistic politeness to explain how speech is used to meet intended actions and how they are perceived by the receivers. Examining speech acts can provide the target language learners with an understanding of the relationships between linguistic forms and socio cultural contexts (Farnia & Raja, 2009: 246).

While students bring their own culture to the classroom the teachers also bring their own culture to the classroom. Therefore, the teachers should raise awareness to these differences and provide the students with appropriate information about cross-cultural differences. By achieving this, the students will be more successful in using the language within its culture (Regmi, 2011)

### **Conclusion**

The information provided throughout this paper indicates the importance of teaching culture together with the language to avoid or minimize misunderstandings where the language is

used by the native speakers of that language. Being fully grammatically developed in a language does not ensure a person to be communicatively competent in the language. Our duty as language teachers is to raise students who are both linguistically and communicatively competent in the language, including culture in the teaching is a key for this issue.

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