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TEACHING CULTURE IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASS

LESSON ONE: DEFINITION OF CULTURE

Aim: to introduce the students to the concept of culture.

Outline:

-Definition of the Concept of Culture

   -What Culture is not

   -What Culture is

Guiding Questions:

1. What disciplines is culture confused with?

2. What basic factor distinguishes culture from other disciplines?

3. What is the origin of the term "culture"?

4. What is big 'C' culture and what is small 'c' culture?

5. What are the basic four approaches to culture?

Definition of the Concept of Culture

What Culture Is Not

There are numerous misconceptions about the nature of culture, for it is a broad and complex phenomenon. One way of understanding what culture is is by knowing what it is not. Brooks (1968) delineates its framework by differentiating it from other close subjects.

According to him, culture is not 'geography', for the latter is the 'setting' of the former: "Geography is the stage upon which the drama of human culture is played. But the play's the thing, not the scenery " (p. 19).

Culture is not the same as 'history' which heavily relies on written records:

> Of course everything has a history –even history– and
> human culture is no exception. […] In general, it is fair

to say that history goes back no further than the invention of writing. […] Though much younger than geography, human culture is vastly older than history, for culture appears at present to go back in time the greater part of two million years. (p. 19)

Furthermore, culture is not 'folklore', i.e., not:

the systematically studied customs, legends, and superstitions that are transmitted in an informal way from one generation to another by means of oral communication […] folklore can provide only a limited and partial view of what we mean by culture. (p. 20)

Moreover, culture is different from 'sociology' : " Sociology informs us with precision that in a given community there are three and a half children per family, but culture still waits for an interview with one of those half children" (p. 20). Damen (1987, p.82) also distinguishes between what is social and what is cultural: "In general, social refers to the interactions of groups of people, with the group serving as a major focus of analysis, while culture refers to a set of behavioural, cognitive and emotional patterns". However, what is social and what is cultural may coincide and be identical. Both the social and the cultural perspectives are important and are complementary and hence the term "socio-cultural".

What is more, culture is not to be confined within literature:" literature can supply us with but a part – though clearly a most valuable part – of what needs to be taught under the heading of culture." (Brooks, p. 21).

Culture is also not to be confused with civilization. Brooks puts it clearly that

Civilization deals with an advanced state of human society, in which a high level of culture, science, industry, and government has been attained. It deals mainly with cultural refinements and technological inventions that have come about as the result of living in cities and thickly populated areas. (p. 21)

Brooks argues that culture is above all (and most of all) about human beings, the point which distinguishes it form the disciplines mentioned before:

> The most important single criterion in distinguishing culture from geography, history, folklore, sociology, literature, and civilization is the fact that in culture we never lose sight of the individual. The geography for example, of mountains, rivers, lakes, natural resources, rainfall, and temperature is quite impersonal and would be what it is whether people were present or not. It is only when we see human beings in this geographical picture and observe the relationship between their individual lives and these facts and circumstances of the earth's surface that our perspective becomes what we may call cultural. (pp. 21-22)

What Culture Is

Culture is not an easy concept to define, for it reflects what one thinks of oneself and how one is seen by others. The concept of culture originates in agriculture where it denotes the tillage or the cultivation of the soil and plants.

Nowadays, there are two basic orientations in the definition of this concept: the literary, aesthetic, artistic approach or big 'C' culture, known also as 'formal' or 'high' culture, and the orientation of social science and anthropology which views culture as what shapes everyday life, namely patterned ways of behaviour, including the thought processes of a given people, in other words, small 'c' or 'deep' culture. (Brooks 1968; Seelye, 1993).

Anthropologists were the first to try to define culture given that this concept is the core of their discipline. However, going through one of the many anthologies or collections of readings on this subject makes one become 'bewildered' given the various definitions offered. Three hundred definitions were analysed by Kroeber &

Kluckhohn (1954; as cited in Seelye, 1993), on the basis of which culture was regarded in a very broad perspective, being linked to all aspects of human life. These many (sometimes conflicting) definitions attest to the complexity of culture as a human phenomenon. Since the mid-nineteenth century, anthropologists in both Europe and the United States of America approached culture as human (universal) patterned ways of living.

Culture is most commonly defined in **behaviouristic** terms. Behaviourists view culture as a set of shared observable behaviours or patterns of behaviour, having to do with habits, events, customs... . They are, however, interested in the mere description of behaviours without interpreting them, i.e., without attempting to understand their underlying rules and the circumstances of their occurence.

Subsequent definitions of culture are **functional**. Unlike the behaviourists, the functionalists were interested in understanding the underlying reasons and rules which explain and govern observed behaviours and events. Both behaviourists and functionalists, however, assume that identifying cultural behaviours (and their functions) could objectively and accurately be done, though, practically speaking, this proved not to be the case. For instance, a cultural anthropologist may observe a smile and infer the reason for smiling is happiness. Another may infer that the interpretion of the smile, in the same context, is embarrassment. A third might not perceive the smile but another act. Besides, the behaviourists and functionalists restricted culture to what is observable in behaviours and to what may be deduced on this basis.

The unobservable features of culture are taken into account by the **cognitive** approach (known also as the ideational approach). It views culture as a system of ideas and mental constructs rather than material observable things in Robinson's (1985, p. 10) words, "culture is like a computer program. The program differs from culture to culture. The program refers to cognitive maps ". Similarly, Hofstede (1991; as cited in De Jong, 1996, p. 26) refers to culture as the "software of the mind". To put it otherwise, cognitivists view culture not as behaviour but as knowledge, or as an internal system for thinking, interpreting and behaving.

Other abstract definitions of culture consider it as symbols and meanings. In other words , while cognitive anthropologists point out culture as a ' process' , a cognitive mapping , **symbolic** anthropologists consider it as a ' product' of this process , a set of meanings .These meanings are historically intertwined in the sense that one's past experiences influence present and future ones in a dynamic process.

Culture is now regarded as a broad concept that embraces all aspects of human life. Jandt (1998) thinks of culture as a life experience in which people share problems, pleasures, tastes, eating habits, values, challenges, … . In the concise words of Seelye (1993, p. 22) culture "is everything humans have learned."

LESSON TWO: CHARACTERISTICS AND ELEMENTS OF CULTURE

Aim: to deepen the students' knowledge about culture through a reference to its characteristics and elements.

Outline:

-Characteristics of Culture

-Cultural Elements

Guiding Questions

1. What are the characteristics of culture? Is it human? Is it learned? Is it questionable?

2. What elements constitute culture? How would you define cultural beliefs, values, assumptions, rituals, … ?

Characteristics of Culture

Cushner & Brislin (1996) outline many characteristics for culture:

1- It is human (i.e., it is all that is related to humans and made by them).

2- It has subjective and objective facets. Subjective culture has to do with the beliefs, values, norms and assumptions about life that underlie people's behaviours and attitudes. Objective culture means material visible culture, i.e., "things as the artifacts people make, the food they eat, the clothing they wear, and even the names they give to things." (Cushner & Brislin, p. 6). Some of the less tangible cultural aspects remain implicit and not discussed. These aspects mostly underlie intercultural miscommunication and misunderstanding. It is perplexing for people to speak about or figure out what is going on when it is the subjective elements of their culture that are in conflict with those of others.

3- It is socially and collectively constructed and transmitted. It follows that it is not innate but learned. Because it is learned and is learnable, it can thus be taught.

4- It enables its bearers to readily communicate much information via few words or gestures (the cooperative principle).

5- People are likely to react with emotion when their cultural norms and values are violated in cross-cultural encounters.

6- The values and norms of a culture are unquestionable.

7- Cultures may be described on the basis of contrastive criteria in relation to the use of time, orientation in space… . Hofstede (1991; as cited in De Jong, 1996) developed a set of dimensions according to which cultures can be analysed, described and compared, namely:

- 'Power distance';

- 'Individualism' / 'Collectivism';

- 'Assertiveness' / 'Modesty';

- 'Avoidance of uncertainty'; and

- 'Short term' / 'Long term' focus.

The 'power distance' dimension is related to how a culture views influence; it has to do with the internal relationships within a community. 'High Power distance' cultures "believe that authority is essential in social structure, and strict social classes and hierarchy exist in these countries." On the other hand, 'low-power-distance' cultures "believe in equality and the people with power may interact with the people without power on equal level." (Matikainen and Duffy, 2000, p. 41).

With respect to the 'individualism'/'collectivism' dimension, a culture is assessed as loosely structured or highly integrated. The importance of the group and that of the individual are differently considered in different cultures. The United States of America is probably the best example of an individualistic society. Nations that score high on collectivism are primarily those in Asia and South America.

On the basis of the 'assertiveness' versus 'modesty' dimension, a culture is said to be governed either by masculine assertive values or feminine nurturing and modest ones. In many societies, the roles of men and women are changing.

The 'uncertainty avoidance' dimension describes the extent to which a culture may accept ambiguity and risk.

With respect to the fifth dimension, a culture is evaluated as being short- or long-term focused, depending on whether it values 'now' or 'then': "Europeans are typically focused on the short term (…) Asians generally take the long-term view" (De Jong,1996, p. 34).

Differences between cultures can be "measured" on the basis of these dimensions. They are interrelated in that, for example, a high score on the dimension of power distance correlates with a high score on the dimension of uncertainty avoidance and collectivism, and vice versa.

Cultural Elements

1. Beliefs

A belief is a conviction in the truth of something that one learned by living in a culture.

2. Knowledge and Views

Knowledge is the facts, skills and understanding that people of a culture have gained through experience and learning. One's views are what one has learned from one's culture about how to regard and think about issues and ideas.

3. Values

Values are a set of beliefs made up of rules for making choices. They tell one what is right and wrong, good and bad; they tell one how to live one's life. Friendliness, individual courage and initiative, team spirit (or support from all the members of the team) are examples of American cultural values (Kramsch, 1993). In the Chinese culture as well as in socialist cultures in general, the major value is to uphold the needs

of the group over those of the individual, together with a reluctance to draw attention to oneself.

4. <u>Assumptions</u>

An assumption is a belief that is not proved.

5. <u>Behaviours</u>

Behaviours are the way people act, based on their learned beliefs and values.

6. <u>Cultural Patterns</u>

 "The cultural behaviours of people from the same country can be referred to collectively as cultural patterns, which are clusters of interrelated cultural orientations."(Matikainen & Duffy, 2000, p. 41). According to Lado (1957) the 'pattern of behaviour' is the functioning unit of a culture. He describes it as "the mold or design into which certain acts must fall to be considered [as belonging to the same pattern of behaviours]" (p. 111).

7. <u>Rules and Norms</u>

According to Jandt (1998, p. 18), rules and norms represent distinct paradigms: "Rules may refer to socially agreed–on behavior or to individual guidelines for behavior. Norms specify appropriate and inappropriate behaviors." Knowing cultural rules means, for instance, knowing when to call a friend on the phone. Hand salute and walking on the left of a senior are illustrations of norms in the military sub–culture. It is useful to note that cultural rules and norms are explicitly stated by people to justify their attitudes and behaviours, while cultural values and assumptions lie at a more sub-conscious level and are unquestioned.

8. <u>Rituals</u>

For De Jong (1996, p. 29), "rituals are to do with areas of behaviour like ways of greeting and saying farewell, and showing respect towards others, i.e. 'customary' cultural behaviour , both at the level of the individual and at the social level." The way knives and forks are handled during a meal, the way people get dressed in ceremonies or formal occasions , the way formal meetings are opened and closed, the way one

greets friends upon meeting in public or private (kissing, handshaking, verbal greetings , ...) , handing out a sport winner medals are all examples of rituals.

9. <u>Superstitions</u>

People in a culture may cherish superstitious acts and beliefs. For Cushner & Brislin, a superstitious behaviour is "a learned habit repeated periodically, often a behavior coincidentally reinforced in association with other rewarded action (e.g., a person always bets on gray horses because he once won a large sum of money on one)" (pp. 308 –309).

10. <u>Customs</u>

Customs are settled practices that cannot easily be given up, in Cushner & Brislin's words, they are "habitual ways of going about everyday activities. " (p. 57)

11. <u>Symbols and Signs</u>

Hofstede (1991; as cited in De Jong, 1996, p. 29) defines symbols as "words, gestures, pictures or objects that carry a particular meaning which is only recognized by those who share the culture." The national flag, for instance, symbolizes a country's unity.

12. <u>Stereotypes</u>

A stereotype is a belief or an opinion held by one group that the majority of a different group can be classified by the actions, appearance or attitudes of a few members of that group. In other words, it is an unanalysed attribution of some characteristics to all members of a cultural group. Stereotypes are handed down from one generation to another as fixed truths about 'otherness'. They are, hence, more likely to be reinforced than questioned or modified. The Americans in general are usually stereotyped as gregarious, the Germans as very disciplined, and the French as individualists (Kramsch, 1993).

13. <u>Prejudices</u>

Prejudice towards a culture is essentially caused by ignorance of or preconceived ideas about this culture. It was defined by Clarke & Clarke (1990, p. 31) as: "aversion fuelled by ignorance".

14. Myths

For Jandt (1998, p. 8) myths stand for "the society's collectivity of persistent values handed down from generation to generation that help make the world understandable , support the social order , and educate the young . Myths provide the cultural image of perfection and provide a guide for living ", for example, the myth of the American Cowboy. Under the cultural category of myths may be included the category of heroes.

15. Taboos

A taboo is an act or a word which religion or custom considers as forbidden. One probably universal taboo question is to ask a woman about "her age".

LESSON THREE: CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Aim: to point out the interrelationships language / culture / communication.

Outline:

- Interrelationship of Language and Culture.

- Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis.

- Interrelationships of Language, Culture, and Communication.

-Culture and Non-Verbal Communication

Guiding Questions:

1. What evidence would you advance to demonstrate the interconnectedness of language and culture?

2. In what way can this be linked to the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis?

3. Illustrate the cultural nature of communication patterns.

4. How can the non-verbal facet be cultural?

Interrelationship of Language and Culture

A language is an aspect of a culture and a culture is an aspect of a language; both are so intimately interwoven that they cannot be separated without losing their essence and significance. The anthropologist Kluckhohn (1944; as cited in Damen, 1987, p. 84) states: "Human culture without human language is unthinkable."

Interest and inquiry on the question of language and culture originate in the field of anthropology, as early as the end of the nineteenth century. The then researchers who investigated the structure of Amerindian languages (Boas, 1911, Sapir, 1920; as cited in Hinkel, 1999) were the first to throw light on the crucial relationship of language

and culture: language expresses the thoughts, beliefs and assumptions of a community, hence, language reflects ways of looking at the world and understanding reality. This thought was the core of what came to be known as the Sapir / Whorf hypothesis.

Language and culture cannot be separated given the very definition of language. It is widely agreed that language is a social institution that operates within a socio-cultural group or in 'cultural niches' (Eleanor Armour-Thomas & Sharon-Ann Gopaul-McNicol, 1998; as cited in Thanasoulas, 2001). We cannot conceive of a language in a vacuum. Any language has a setting and its setting is a society, a culture. For Thanasoulas (2001), to speak a language means to enter a culture. For Kramsch (1998, p. 3), language relates to culture in three main complex ways. First, "language expresses cultural reality", for it enables its speakers to express ideas, facts, attitudes and beliefs that can only be understood when shared within a specific cultural setting. Second, "language embodies cultural reality", since it is a system that is inherently creative in the sense that it enables people to use it in various ways, for example, face to face interaction, reading / writing messages, speaking on the telephone etc. Moreover, using language through one medium or another gives way to a variety of possible meanings, depending on the tone of the speaker's voice, accent, adopted style..., which are significant to the members of the same culture. Third, "language symbolizes cultural reality", because it symbolizes one's identity.

Instances showing that language is deeply rooted in culture abound. To begin with, in vocabulary, there are always nuances of difference between synonyms or similar words in different languages. Thus, there is no perfect similarity or synonymy across languages. Indeed, members from different cultures associate seemingly the same word with different culturally pre-determined objects, feelings or beliefs. As illustrated by by Kramsch (1993:2): "a rose, may be, is a rose, but it is not *une rose*, is not *eine Rose*, but multiple ways of viewing and talking about roses".

In grammar, the use of conjunctions, for example, may be culturally significant. The choice of a particular conjunction rather than another can reflect particular values, beliefs, assumptions or stereotypes:

> One can link 'he's from Madrid' and 'he's very nice' in a number of different ways. One could say: '***Although*** he's from Madrid, he's very nice'. The speaker is then clearly negatively prejudiced against people living in Madrid. One could also say: 'he's from Madrid ***and*** he's very nice', which is a neutral description of that person. A third possibility would be: '***Because*** he's from Madrid, he's very nice', the speaker here being positively biased." (Sercu, 1998, p. 267).

In English, plural and singular forms are not merely based on the factor of number. Rather, their use depends on the way English-speaking people view things in the world ('countable' versus 'uncountable' words, e.g. 'a cup of tea' versus 'tea'). Besides, a language can reflect the cultural dimension of power distance in its pronouns, for example, the availability of two forms for the second person pronoun in French: one indicates familiarity and a close social relationship, and the second mirrors social distance and is used with people in position of power ('tu' and 'vous' respectively). Change in word order across languages is significant in that it reflects specific focal points. In an SVO (subject verb object) language like English, emphasis is on the subject, the doer of the action: "Only about a third of English sentences lack a subject" (Jandt, 1998, p. 133). This is not the case of Japanese. Though the typical word order in this language is basically SOV (subject object verb), the subject is not emphasized: "75% of Japanese sentences lack a subject […] [The latter] is known by context" (p. 133).

Another aspect attesting to the close relationship of language and culture is language discourse patterns. For instance, the Arabic language, unlike English, mirrors a culture that is basically religious. References to 'God' and religion in general are very common in everyday situations: for example, no future event should normally be mentioned without adding ' God Willing' (Insha Allah) as a reminder of the conviction that only the 'Almighty God' holds the secrets of the future. In English, the term ' god ' is only used in oaths (blasphemous or solemn) or in very formal situations (Harrell et al., 1965; as cited in Hyde, 1994). Thus, language discourse patterns reflect, and are based on the values and beliefs of the speakers.

Poetry and idiomaticity are other instances in which language and culture merge. One cannot usually grasp the figurative meanings of a poem or an idiom without having an appropriate cultural background, and so is the case of proverbs, similes, metaphors and sometimes even newspapers' headlines. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980; as cited in Lantolf, 1999), language use is underlain by 'metaphors' that are culture-bound. For example, utterances like "thanks for your time "or " you're wasting my time" are based on the metaphorical concept that "time is money ". Lakoff and Johnson refer to the 'cognitive metaphor' "Good is UP and bad in DOWN" in terms of which positive and negative aspects of life are expressed, hence the expressions "To be in top shape" and "to fall ill", for example.

Moreover, the characteristics of a language may be those of its corresponding culture. A sexist language, for instance, reflects a sexist culture. What is more, a language changes and evolves along with the culture it reflects. One reason why artificial languages such as universal languages (e.g., Esperanto) do not survive is the fact that they remain static, as they have no relationship to a culture.

The Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that the structure of a language determines the thought patterns of its speakers, that the world as one knows it is largely predetermined by the language of one's culture. This is the strong version; it is known as 'linguistic determinism'. If we concede that language governs thought, it follows that a language structure is likely to hinder its speakers' grasping of particular thought patterns, as developed by the speakers of a different language.

The Sapir / Whorf hypothesis in its weak version, that is, what is known as the 'linguistic relativity', suggests that a language influences (rather than determines) the way one thinks and perceives the world, in the sense that its semantic encoding of experience highlights some aspects and not others. This varies across languages and cultures. Thus, what seems to be the same concept in different languages is not actually so but there are underlying cultural nuances.

This hypothesis, in our opinion, highlights, above all, the interconnectedness of language and culture: language reflects cultural meanings, choices, preferences…,

and at the same time, it can only be fully understood in the light of its cultural context. The language and culture connection is especially manifested in the systems of categorization of natural and cultural objects and relationships. Patterns of kinship, colour coding, organizing time and space, ... may be viewed as universal classifications. However, upon closer analysis, variations due to cultural differences will emerge. The linguistic system in Arab cultures, for example, makes available separate terms for father's brother and mother's brother ('âam' and 'khal', respectively). This differential labelling posits a difference in the roles, behaviours and attitudes expected of individuals on the basis of these relationships (one's father's brother, for example, is usually treated with deference and one's mother's brother with familiarity in the Arab culture). Considering cultural emphases or foci, and the way they are reflected in corresponding languages is also relevant to this discussion. The importance of some cultural elements is highlighted in language through the availability or even the proliferation of lexical items to express them or to enable fine distinctions in relation to them. The Yanomamo language of southern Venezuela has only three numbers that correspond to "one", "two" and "more than two" in English. Another striking example is that of the Arabic language: it has three thousand words for "camel", eight hundred for "sword", five hundred for "lion" and two hundred for "snake". This fact denotes that animals (living in the wilderness) and swords (traditional war arms or tools) are (or were) significant in the Arabian culture. Moreover, the Eskimo language was proved to have four hundred words for "snow", given its vital importance in the Eskimos' life and environment.

The Sapir / Whorf hypothesis was widely criticized by linguists and anthropologists, especially in its strong 'deterministic' form. Its weak version is generally acknowledged nowadays (Kramsch, 1998), but it needs further research and analysis.

The Interrelationship of Language, Culture, and Communication

Language and culture are interwoven in patterns of communication. Jiang (2000) compares communication to swimming, where language is the swimming skill and culture is water. Without language, communication would be very restricted; without culture, there would be no communication at all. Communication can as well

be compared to transportation: the vehicle is language and culture is traffic lights; language enables communication to take place, culture regulates communication in that it may facilitate or hinder it.

The ability to communicate or to use language appropriately in communicative interactions depends on the context of use: "In different times and places we may be obliged, permitted, encouraged, or even forbidden to communicate; and the quality or quantity of the language we use will be subject to social evaluation and sanction." (Crystal, 1997, p. 48). By context, reference is not only made to the immediate context or the context of situation; it also refers to the context of culture, or the broader culturally-determined context. In a communicative interaction, culture is present in the social environment or context in which the interaction takes place but is also ingrained in the meanings exchanged between sender and receiver on the basis of their cultural backgrounds. Background assumptions and expectations concerning, for example, requests, positive and negative responses to an offer or an invitation, initiating a conversation, ending an exchange, use of gestures,... may cause serious misinterpretations and hence the breakdown of communication. Even linguistic routines which are usually fixed communicative formulas such as greeting, parting, thanking, and complimenting formulas are highly culture–specific. For example, the American English phrase "see you later" is a leave-taking formula which does not necessarily mean that the speaker really intends to see the hearer later. The misinterpretation of this phrase often engenders stereotypes.

Culture and Non-Verbal Communication

Communicating does not merely mean speaking, for it is often carried out through hand gesturing, eye shifting, eyebrows raising, … Language is but one means of communication, though it is the most outstanding one. Any culture embodies other systems of communication which convey meanings that may complete, clarify, weaken or add an emotional tone to what is communicated verbally. They may also be used to manage the interaction, that is, for example, to give up the floor or to provide feedback about the listener's attitude: boredom, disbelief, relaxation, admiration... .

The non-verbal mode of communication is the target of such studies as kinesics and proxemics. Kinesics has to do with the non-verbal visual means of communication, namely gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, body posture, and other forms of body movement. They operate differently from one culture to another. It is noted that a back-and-forth nod of the head, for example, does not mean "yes" in all cultures; in some communities it rather means the opposite. Eye-contact may also vary in significance from one culture to another. In the French culture, for instance, establishing eye–contact in communicative interactions is a must (Zhihong, 2001), while in English-speaking countries, direct gazes in communicative interactions are rather considered rude (Keiko, 1991). "Proxemics is the study of one's perception and use of space" (Ivannia, 1996, p. 32), i.e., it studies how physically close to each other people may be, when communicating with one another in different cultures. For instance, when conversing, North Americans observe a respected space, while South Americans stay very close to each other; privacy, thus, is more valued by the former.

LESSON FOUR:THE PLACE OF CULTURE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Aim: to throw light on the place of culture in the foreign language course.

Outline:

-Opponents and Proponents of Culture Teaching

    -Against Culture Teaching

    -For Culture Teaching

-Culture or Cultures in the Foreign Language Course?

-Role of Culture in Language Teaching Approaches and Methods: a Brief

    Historical Survey

    -Grammar-Translation Method

    -Direct Method

    -Audio-Lingual Approach and Method

    -Communicative Language Teaching

Guiding Questions:

1. Are you for or against integrating culture in the foreign language class? Why?

- What are the pros and cons of culture teaching?

2. Is there more than one culture in the foreign language class? What are these cultures?

3. Is the teaching of culture in the foreign language class a new matter?

-What is the place of culture in major language teaching approaches and methods?

-What type of culture was given prominence in each method?

Opponents and Proponents of Culture Teaching

Against Culture Teaching

Some professionals in the field of foreign language teaching are against incorporating the foreign culture in language courses and coursebooks, for a number of reasons. To begin with, Altan (1995) thinks that foreign culture–based situations such as "finding a flat in Manchester", "purchasing a pet", "playing rugby", "watching a game of cricket", and their ingrained values, beliefs, and norms are irrelevant to the learners' native environment and background. Moreover, it is thought that teaching the literary and cultural aspects of a foreign language is of little use in a world where foreign languages are basically needed for science, technology, business and international communication. According to Altan, foreign culture-based textbooks are also culturally biased in the sense that they implicitly or explicitly belittle the learners' native culture. What is more, Altan raises the issue of the likely incompatibility or conflict between native culture and foreign culture, the fact which makes learning the latter a threat to the former, in that one runs the risk of having one's own culture overwhelmed and mind warped, when immersed in a new cultural system.

In case the target language is English, Altan advocates the perspective of 'international' English, a variety of English that is emptied of the English culture themes, beliefs, values and norms. Other educators recommend the 'nativization' of the target language, that is to say, to use it to reflect the local native culture, to make up a kind of "Algerian English", for example. Altan notes that a foreign cultural input would engender further difficulties for foreign language learners to cope with, in addition to the already existing linguistic complexities.

For Culture Teaching

Proponents of the cultural component in foreign language teaching usually advance one of two central arguments. The first argument has to do with the very nature of language: linguistic forms acquire unique colouring and bias, depending upon the beliefs, values and practices of the speakers. This intrinsic interweaving of language and culture makes it impossible to separate them in teaching/learning.

The second argument is geared to instrumentality: Cultural understanding is advocated as a prerequisite to communicate effectively with the target language speakers, and to function appropriately in the cultural context in question.

Another argument that is often put forward in this regard has to do with educational psychology. It is believed that cultural pursuit stimulates language learning in that it awakens interest and curiosity even in less-motivated learners, broadens their intellectual horizons, develops their imaginative powers and critical thinking, and sustains their motivation to work at a productive rate. Besides, as one learns more about other people from various cultures, one also discovers more about oneself. Elements of a culture a native is not actually aware of would be brought out when the others' models are studied.

Culture or Cultures in the Foreign Language Course?

Talking about culture in the classroom entails reference to more than one culture: culture as content, as a medium of communication, and of learning. The cultural content as portrayed in textbooks, or culture as content, is, thus, but one facet.

According to Jin & Cortazzi (1998), in addition to the culture as content, there should be a consideration of the 'culture of communication'. They define it as "a systematic pattern of culturally specific emphases in ways of speaking which mediates language and culture in verbal interaction" (p. 100). In other words, speakers of different languages communicate in culturally different ways; they have different patterns, emphases, priorities,… .

'The culture of learning' has to do with "culturally based ideas about teaching and learning, about appropriate ways of participating in class, about whether and how to ask questions." (Jin & Cortazzi, p. 100). It is also known as the cultural medium or culture as medium. Culture as medium is deeply rooted in the learners' and /or teachers' native culture. To learn and teach successfully about a target culture, we should not regard only the cultural content of textbooks, we should also give due care to the way this cultural content is to be handled by teacher and learners, that is, to consider their culture(s) as medium and hence their native culture(s), and the way they

match (or not) the culture as medium of the approach underlying the textbook being used.

The Role of Culture in Language Teaching Approaches and Methods: a Brief Historical Survey

It may be thought that the introduction of culture in language courses is relatively recent. However, a review of relevant literature indicates that culture has always been present in language instruction. Nevertheless, it has not been given due care until more recent years, namely in the seventies, when it was considered a 'new' trend in language pedagogy.

Grammar –Translation Method

The grammar-translation approach embraced a 'civilization' method, that is, it only considered capital 'C' or high culture. This cultural component was, in addition, an autonomous part of the curriculum. Texts were explored for their grammatical (rather than cultural) value, and they (indirectly) fostered a stereotypical view of the target language culture.

Direct Method

Some scholars believe that the significance of culture in foreign language teaching began with the direct method, at the end of the nineteenth century. The socio-cultural component was dealt with explicitly in foreign language instruction. Focus was on knowledge about the target culture geographical, historical, political, economic and technical facts, and their comparison with one's own cultural data.

Audio-Lingual Approach and Method

Heusinkveld observes that the teaching of culture before the sixties was 'sporadic' at best. It was assumed that the study of language leads automatically to

culture understanding and appreciation. In the sixties and seventies, the significance of culture in language learning/teaching developed with the audio-lingual (audio-visual) approach, when the relationship between culture and language was pointed out by structural linguists and anthropologists.

In the United States of America, the aim of foreign language education in the late sixties was to promote 'international understanding' that can be achieved through learning about other cultures and studying other languages. This need of linguistic and cultural learnings was particularly felt with the decline of isolationism, namely during and after world war two, when American soldiers were sent abroad and interacted with speakers of other languages and with different cultural backgrounds.

Then, scholars like Hall, Nostrand, Seelye and Brooks toiled to make the foreign culture more accessible to foreign language learners. While capital 'C' culture (i.e., art and literature) was the type of culture mostly taken account of, small 'c' culture (that is, information about everyday life) became the focal point in teaching.

Byram, Zarate & Neuner (1997) see that the audio-lingual method pertains to "the pragmatic concept of foreign language teaching". Though the cultural component raised in importance in the audio-lingual class, it was subordinated under other objectives related to language usage. Small 'c' culture was handled implicitly mainly through visual aids and vocabulary words.

Communicative Language Teaching

Beginning from the seventies, culture gained more significance in the framework of Communicative Language Teaching, where major importance is conferred on the context and situation of language use. Canale & Swain (1980, p. 31) think that the communicative approach allows for "a more natural integration" of language and culture, than the preceding approaches.

However, CLT was in its beginnings devoted to the promotion of the pragmatic functional perspective in language teaching. The socio-cultural content served merely as background information to communicative activities. Thus, culture was not explicitly and systematically taught.

In the eighties and nineties, the value of culture learning in language teaching was further investigated (Valdes, 1986; Robinson, 1985; Damen, 1987; Kramsch, 1993). The growth of relevant disciplines such as pragmatics, sociolinguistics and ethnography resulted in an increased focus on culture and culture learning. A new trend in foreign language teaching research emerged under the heading of 'cultural studies' (Byram, 1989). New insights considered the importance of developing the learners' comprehension and analytic skills. By that time, the importance of teaching culture in foreign language instruction was widely acknowledged, and culture together with communication became the two cornerstones of foreign language education. From then on, culture teaching has continued to be improved.

LESSON FIVE: PRINCIPLES OF CULTURE TEACHING

Aim: to introduce the students to principles of culture teaching/learning

Outline:

-The Culture Teaching/Learning Process Rationale

-Intercultural Approach to Language Teaching

-Questions about Culture Teaching

    -Why and How Much to Teach

    -What to Teach

    -When to Teach

    -How to Teach

Guiding Questions:

1. What principles underlie culture teaching in the foreign language class?

2. What are the cultural aims / objectives to be pursued in the foreign language class?

3. How much culture to teach?

4. What should be taught in the name of culture?

5. What is the appropriate time to introduce culture?

6. What methods and techniques are used to teach culture?

The Culture Teaching/Learning Process Rationale

A foreign language curriculum should provide for **explicit** as well as **implicit** culture teaching. What is more, discussing cultural issues as they 'incidentally' arise in language teaching materials is not enough. Rather, foreign culture teaching should be **purposeful**, **systematic**, **planned** and **evaluated**, that is, the study of culture should be taken as seriously as the study of language.

Culture teaching is, it should be made clear, not a mere listing of facts or transference of a body of knowledge from the mind of the teacher to that of the learner. Rather, it should be concerned with **how to approach these facts** and features by looking beneath them, that is, by exploring the patterns and values underlying them. Otherwise, the outcome might be either an insignificant tourist's perspective of the target culture and/or the reinforcement of already existing stereotypes and prejudices, instead of genuine cultural understanding. Similarly, the approach that focuses on providing learners with knowledge about the target culture without assisting them to develop skills to use this knowledge to interact and communicate adequately in this culture is also inadequate. Culture teaching is a matter of **raising awareness**, **developing skills** and **changing attitudes**, not only of inculcating culture-specific knowledge.

The Intercultural Approach to Language Teaching

Teaching professionals advocate in present times the 'Intercultural Approach' that is based on reflection upon and an analysis of cultural data, as well as on comparison of target culture and native culture. Learners do not only need to know about cultural matters. More important is the need to analyse what is taught and apply it in socio-cultural situations. Learners need also to develop intercultural skills such as gathering information, assessing it critically, taking the other's perspective to become interculturally competent.

The intercultural approach to language teaching is basically learner-centred. This is quite obvious in its characteristics as outlined by Byram, Zarate, & Neuner (1997).

1- The learners' native cultural background and socio-cultural experience are not excluded from the foreign language teaching class, given their impact on one's perception and interpretation of the foreign culture.

2- Effective foreign language use is not merely the result of a 'habit formation' process based on mechanical imitation. Rather, the development of socio-cultural competence calls for the learners' cognitive skills in that it requires them to think, interpret, analyse, compare, infer and negotiate meaning in a foreign culture. They are supposed to synthesize new cultural elements and their past experiences to form new symbols and meanings. It can be implied that in the framework of the Intercultural Approach culture is not merely regarded in behavioural terms but more importantly in cognitive and symbolic ones.

3- The development of socio-cultural competence in the target language is embedded in the learners' general socio-cultural competence concerning their world and the world in general. The aim is to achieve a balance between personal and social identity.

4- Both 'declarative' and 'procedural' knowledge are catered for in this approach, i.e., the learners are not only provided with facts and information about the target culture people, institutions and achievements, but attention is also given to developing their understanding and communication skills.

5- Content selection criteria are cultural representativity, accessibility and interest.

6- Differences between native culture and target culture are dealt with even at the beginning stage of foreign language learning.

7- 'Metacommunication', defined by Byram, Zarate & Neuner as "discussing the learner's way of perceiving, of creating ideas and images, and of dealing with experiences with the foreign language in situations of comprehension and interaction" (p76), is a crucial aspect of intercultural foreign language teaching/learning.

Questions about Culture Teaching

Why and How Much to Teach

To begin with, socio-cultural objectives are not easy to define. The general goal is to develop the learners' cultural awareness. To do so means to make them recognize or bring to a conscious level the characteristics of the target culture patterns of thought and action, to examine, interpret and assess them in a non-evaluative way.

Lafayette and Schulz believe that there are only three 'realistic' cultural goals that can be tested in secondary schools :' to recognize', 'to explain' and 'to use' cultural information: **'Knowledge',' Understanding',** *and* **'Behaviour'.**

Learners should be made aware of the socio-cultural aspects characterizing a conversation, but should not be recommended or constrained to appropriate them, particularly when it comes to gestures, mimics, and other body language forms.

What to Teach

Once the socio-cultural objectives of the course are specified, the selection and sequencing of content are to be undertaken accordingly. Post & Rathet (1996) distinguish between 'implicit cultural content' and 'explicit cultural content'. The former is inherent in the language syntax, vocabulary and other features. They call it the 'intrinsic cultural flavor'. Explicit cultural content is provided by the contents of the curriculum. Socio-cultural content has for a long time been subordinated under other dominating aspects particularly structural elements. It has accordingly been approached implicitly in vocabulary, visual aids, the situational context of dialogues or the context of certain authentic text types like advertisements. Explicit culture teaching, as mentioned before, should be considered in the foreign language class. Due to the intricacy of culture, it is not an easy task for teachers, syllabus designers and textbook writers to select those aspects of it that should be dealt with, whether implicitly or explicitly, at various stages of instruction.

Both big 'C' and small 'c' cultures should be considered. Many people think of culture as big 'C' or high culture, sometimes referred to as well as 'formal' culture, while equally if not more important, is little or small 'c' culture, known also as 'deep' culture.

Researchers (for example Brooks, 1968; Seelye, 1994) have defined big 'C' culture as a civilization's salient achievements in literature and fine arts, architecture, music and the like, its social institutions, its history, geography, technology and political systems, and little 'c' culture as aspects of lifestyle or patterns of daily living, including the thought processes, beliefs and values of a given people. In relation to big 'C' culture, learners could be taught, for instance, how to recognize and explain major geographical monuments, historical events, institutions (administrative, economic, political, religious, social educational institutions), artistic monuments (architecture, arts, literature) and national products. As far as small 'c' culture is concerned, everyday socio-cultural conventions and patterns such as eating, shopping, greeting people, making a living, using public transportation, chatting are to be delineated, and also what relates to social stratification, marriage, work, schooling system,…. Teaching small 'c' culture has to do, accordingly, with developing learners' intercultural communicative skills, that is, teaching them how to act appropriately in common everyday situations, whether verbally or non-verbally, orally or in writing. This entails teaching them about the target culture assumptions and values.

Attention should also be drawn to the cultures of target language-speaking communities in international settings. They are known as international target cultures or C3, C4… in Lafayette's words.

Kramsch (1993) draws attention to the fact that culture should be presented to learners with all its interpersonal dimensions (age of the target culture bearers, their gender, social class, religion, ethnicity, …). This aspect introduces them to sub-cultures, i.e., to the variety and heterogeneity existing within the same one culture, and invites them to examine their stereotypes and prejudices, to attempt to see beyond them, to view and interpret things form the other's perspective.

When to teach

Brooks (1968) believes that learning about culture should be programmed beginning from elementary courses. His argument is that many students do not have the opportunity to reach advanced levels. Therefore, the sooner culture is introduced, the better it is for the majority of learners. Brooks states that culture is an indispensable

component at all stages of foreign language learning, to avoid inappropriate language use**.**

Byram, Zarate & Neuner share Brooks' view as to what it is that should be introduced in terms of culture at the elementary stage of language learning, namely small 'c' culture. According to Robinson's (1991) standpoint, culture instruction should initially highlight the similarities existing between the native culture and target culture. She argues that first impressions of a new culture based on perceiving the differences (which are generally salient and whose frequency is often magnified) turn out to be negative, and may lead learners to develop stereotypes and negative attitudes towards people of other cultures.

An important relevant issue in this regard is the apprehension that the early introduction of a foreign culture may have negative outcomes as to the young learners' cultural identity. De Jong believes a foreign culture can only be introduced when learners have developed a firm knowledge of their native culture, lest they become negatively influenced by this foreign culture. This is particularly true for young children who "adapt more quickly and completely than older ones, often renouncing the previous environment virtually completely. The amount of pressure to conform is perceptibly stronger the younger one is, becoming less towards the age ten." (De Jong, p. 14).

How to teach

It is widely agreed that culture can best be taught through activities that require an active participation and involvement on the part of learners. Damen (1987) lists several methods and techniques to teach culture. Many of them overlap in that they are based on the same or similar principles. Many of them are also familiar to language teachers, but there are cultural implications in their use in a cultural context. This is to say that foreign language and foreign culture teachers need not devise activities that are exclusively culture-geared. They can combine linguistic, communicative and cultural objectives in the same task.

1- Area-Specific Studies

An area-specific study requires learners to gather information about a specific country or cultural area, using library resources (books, magazines, encyclopaedias, CD-ROM databases, Internet).

2- Case Studies

A case study is a case analysis or a problem-solving enterprise in which learners attempt to identify target questions and suggest solutions to them.

3- Contrast American

Contrast American is a contrastive method that applies to any cultural group, though frequently used in the context of the American culture. Damen (1987) identifies this method stating: "It involves the setting up and systematic examination of the contrastive qualities of one or more cultural groups" (p. 281).

4- Critical Incidents

A critical incident is a problematic interactive situation emanating from conflictual cross-cultural values, assumptions, standards, expectations… . They serve the learners to successfully handle everyday intercultural problems. The learners are purported to discuss the incident in question, and suggest possible explanations and / or solutions.

5- Culture Assimilators

Like critical incidents, culture assimilators present a problematic situation. They briefly describe its episodes and require the learner to identify its attributions or causes. Usually four possible attributions are mentioned: three are expected to be made by members of the learners' culture and one pertains to the target culture.

6- Cultural Capsules (Culturgrams) and Culture Clusters

Culture capsules describe briefly a typical incident or event in the target culture and require the learners to answer comprehension questions in relation to this material. The cultural content may delineate differences between two cultural groups. A culture cluster is a set of culture capsules dealing with the same topic.

7- Culture Quizzes

A culture quiz is a technique used to evaluate or test culture learnings. It is also said to stimulate cultural awareness.

8- Dialogues

Dialogues as traditional classroom techniques which may serve to present, elucidate or practise target cultural patterns. They may even be used to evaluate cultural learnings when they are to be produced by the learners themselves, following given instructions.

9- Group Discussions

Group discussions are powerful means to practise the speaking skill, and if their topics are culturally relevant, they will be very enriching in terms of cultural learnings.

10- Informant interviewing

Informant interviewing is an ethnographic technique used by ethnographers and anthropologists to collect data about a particular culture(s). It may in addition be used by language learners when possible for the same purpose.

11- Role-Plays and Simulations

Roleplaying and dramatization of simulated situations are very useful language and culture teaching activities, for they involve learners in life-like target cultural experiences and situations.

12- Situational Exercises

A situational exercise, as its appellation shows, presents the learners with a particular situation on the basis of which they are supposed to write scripts or complete skits. This serves at the same time as a culture-teaching and testing activity.

13- Translating Target-Language Jingles and Proverbs

This activity is both fun and insightful.

14- Collecting Symbols of the Target Culture Customs and Traditions

Flags, foods, advertisements, newspaper clippings, real pictures of people and places are instances of such symbols.

15- Writing Media Reports from Radio and Television

This activity may cover a variety of current cultural topics.

Organizing trips to learn about a foreign culture in its 'home', or to take the learners 'into the field' as ethnographers would express it, remains the most effective technique as it is, to acquire both the foreign language and culture. In addition, distance exchange, i.e., interaction with the target language speakers via both traditional and modern means of communication (letters, telephone, e-mails, online chat…) is equally crucial to develop the learners' intercultural competence, and adds significantly to classroom learning.

LESSON SIX: INTEGRATING CULTURE INTO LANGUAGE LESSONS

Aim: to teach the students how to integrate culture into lessons on language skills, grammar and vocabulary, literature.

Outline:

-Integrating culture into:

   -Lessons on Listening Comprehension

   -Lessons on Speaking

   -Lessons on Reading Comprehension

   -Lessons on Writing

   -Lessons on Grammar and Vocabulary

-Teaching Culture through Literature

Guiding Questions:

1. What passages and what activities can be used to teach the cultural component in the EFL listening class?

2. How can culture be integrated into lessons on the speaking skill?

3. How to make sure that texts are read for their cultural content?

4. How can culture be taught in the EFL writing class?

5. How can culture be valued in the grammar / vocabulary lesson?

6. How can culture be taught in the literature class?

<u>Integrating Culture into:</u>

<u>Lessons on Listening Comprehension</u>

Foreign language learners cannot identify the referents of commonly-heard items such as, for instance, 'the city', 'the chancellor', 'Halloween', 'the brunch', by mere anaphoric reference in discourse. Rather, they need to consult an encyclopaedic source or an informant (the teacher); hence the importance of culture in the language class.

Passages intended for listening comprehension in a foreign language classroom should be authentic in the sense that they should reflect actual language use in actual communicative situations. In addition, they should be selected with reference to the learners' objectives, needs and interests. It goes without saying that they should have a target cultural content.

Comprehension-check questions and other activities accompanying a listening comprehension passage should not only elicit facts about the content of the passage in question, but should most importantly raise the learners' awareness as to the socio-cultural factors governing language use: who is talking to whom, what is being said , when, where and why. The target culture patterns of spoken discourse should also be made explicit and distinguished from the native culture patterns.

Learners may also listen to music, songs and radio broadcasts. Musical texts may convey many themes pertinent to the target culture, reflecting faithfully the values, beliefs and way of life of its members. Besides, the choice of musical instruments, singing style and rhythm are actual manifestations of aspects of the target culture. Some teachers find it beneficial to play melodies from the target culture as background music during classroom activities. Some others choose to focus on songs accompanying dramatic play, or songs that tell a story, because they are appropriate for extended activities. Other teachers prefer to make learners work on popular music, being one of their (the learners') 'few' attractions, particularly in EFL settings, the reason why it should be exploited more regularly and more systematically in the foreign language classroom.

Lessons on Speaking

Various activities can be designed to develop the learners' ability to perform tasks using linguistically correct and culturally appropriate language like role plays simulations, goup discussions.

Integrating the target culture into lessons on the speaking skill means, besides, teaching about the non-verbal aspects of communication. One of the aims of a culture-teaching course may be, for instance, to raise the learners' awareness of touch and eye-contact in the target culture. Learners may even carry out experiments to explore people's reactions to inappropriate non-verbal behaviours: for example, to wink or to smile to a stranger, to stand closer than usual to a person, to sit in someone's usual place… .

Lessons on Reading Comprehension

It may be thought that the simplest skill to integrate with culture is that of reading, since all that is apparently needed is to select reading passages with a cultural content. What is crucial, in addition, is to design appropriate accompanying activities, so as to make sure the texts are read for their cultural content, and not for grammatical illustrations or pronunciation practice.

Foreign language and foreign culture teachers should carefully select passages that are not only authentic but also accessible to the learners. Selected passages to teach about the target culture should not contain only tacit and implicit cultural information. On the contrary, focus should be on texts which deal explicitly with the target culture.

At far as activities are concerned, professionals recommend tasks prior to reading, in order to introduce relevant cultural elements that would make the passage to be read meaningful to learners, and post-reading activities for fostering comprehension and for expanding the learners' appreciation of the target culture: to recognize cultural patterns via a written account, to identify cultural beliefs and values as reflected in selected passages, to empathise without judging with the motives, skills and assumptions of the target culture, and so on… . One of the other basic tasks of

teachers is to reconstitute and elucidate the cultural contextual factors of foreign language discourse (both in its spoken and written forms) to the learners to make it more meaningful and coherent to them. This means to raise the learners' awareness about cultural differences in discourse styles. One way to foster this awareness is to explicitly elucidate these styles and show how much they are different from native ones, what Kramsch (1993) calls "metatalk".

Lessons on Writing

A written text reflects, in its form and content, patterns of thought that are bound up with the culture of the writer. In fact, the purpose of writing, how the text should be constructed to achieve this purpose, what is considered a logical progression of the text, what is proper to write, the target audience, the circumstances of writing, and other conventions of written discourse are shaped by culture, and thus differ cross-culturally. In other words, every culture defines its 'genres' by specifying their form, content, language, audience in a way that is not necessarily shared by other cultures. An argumentative text in American and British English, for instance, is based on the problem-solution design. The writer raises an issue, discusses it, suggests a solution and argues for its effectiveness. Argumentative texts in other cultures do not necessarily have the same structure and purpose. The English text is generally characterized by 'linearity' and 'hierarchy', while the Arabic by 'parallelism' and 'repetition'.

Foreign language learners should be taught about the 'textual patterns' of the foreign language. This would at least assist them in reading comprehension. It is then up to them to adopt these patterns or not in their written performances.

Culture can be integrated in writing assignments in many ways: for instance, to have the learners write actual letters or e-mails to native speakers; to give the learners a topic sentence in the form of one or more cultural generalization, and ask them to provide supporting details to illustrate the target cultural topic… .

The learners' written performances in a foreign language should be evaluated for their cultural as well as linguistic content, thereby encouraging adequate attention to both components.

Lessons on Grammar and Vocabulary

When teaching grammar, the instructor is supposed to present target grammatical points and structures, and to provide for their practice in culturally relevant contexts. For instance, concerning the simple past tense structure, instead of asking the learners about what they did yesterday or last week-end, why not asking them about what William the Conqueror did in his time, … . By doing so, the activity would have the added advantage of reinforcing cultural information.

To present and practise vocabulary items in culturally appropriate semantic fields (or groupings) is a useful technique: for example, instead of presenting food vocabulary via traditional food groups, it would be culturally advantageous to place the items into subgroups according to what the target culture people eat during different meals, such as breakfast (cereal, eggs, toast, cake, …), lunch (sandwich, Big Mac, hot dog, pizza, …) and dinner (steak, potatoes, peas, …). Descriptive adjectives could be introduced and/or practised by describing a famous person, monument, or work of art belonging to the target culture. Another relevant activity is to study lexical borrowings across languages, for as aptly put by Rey (1985, p. 93), "Les mots aussi voyagent" ("words also travel"). Whenever visuals accompany the introduction of lexical items, it is important that they be culturally relevant.

Teaching Culture through Literature

Reading materials in foreign language classrooms may be selected literary excerpts. The relevance of culture to foreign language learning is highly put in evidence when it comes to teaching literature. It has always been believed that literature offers an ideal means to teach about people's way of life. Valdes (1990) states that literature can be studied for a better understanding of culture as may culture be studied for a better understanding of literature. It is the cultural aspect which very often brings about difficulties to understand a piece of discourse, particularly literary discourse.

It should be remembered, however, that literature teaching requires a well defined approach. Harrison (1990, p. 52) thinks that teaching culture through literature depends on the "sensitive choice of text" coupled with" skilled teaching". Literary texts should not merely be linguistically decoded in the language classroom. More

importantly, their cultural content and aesthetic features should be elucidated. Special emphasis should be laid, for example, on the analysis of expressions that pass unchallenged and are considered self-evident by foreign language writers: for example, "the American dream" and "the American way".

As part of literature, drama lends itself to teaching about culture in the foreign language classroom. Sometimes, learners watch a short piece of theatre; sometimes, they role-play one themselves; at other times, their tasks are to read, comment, discuss, write, collaborate in planning, analyse, interpret, deduce….

Story-telling is another way to teach about the target culture in the literature framework. A story with all its types expresses the values, fantasies, fears and aspirations of its tellers. Folk-tales, namely popular stories handed on, in spoken form, from one generation to another, are said to be particularly insightful to foreign language and foreign culture learners. Jokes and riddles are also part of the folklore and thus of the culture, and can be used in language and culture instruction. The interpretation of a joke is highly culture-bound; it is common to wonder about what is funny in a foreign tongue joke. In Europe, riddles take the form of short questions with a humorous character, and are mainly meant for children. In Africa, they are poetic and philosophical and are used by adults.

Proverbs have always been included in the language curriculum, given their fascinating phrasing. Attention should also be drawn to their potential cultural content. Learners may be asked to identify the values underlying the foreign culture proverbs, or to compare them to their native culture counterparts.

Idioms also use words figuratively and are important to consider in a language and culture curriculum. They are even more important than proverbs or any other figurative form, given their high frequency in written and spoken discourse. In their book "Metaphors we live by", Lakoff and Johnson (1981; as cited in Lantolf, 1999) discuss the way idioms are built upon metaphorical themes reflecting one's view of the world. For example, to talk about 'spending', 'saving' or 'wasting' time is underlain by the metaphor 'time is money' in the Anglo-American culture.

Other non-literal forms of language are the metaphors and the similes. In a metaphor, an element is compared to another one on the basis of one or more shared

characteristics. In a simile, the comparison is explicitly stated through the use of 'like' or 'as'.

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