



CONTEXTS FOR INTERCULTURAL LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8069960>

Abstract

Contact with other languages and cultures provides an excellent opportunity to foster the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC, or intercultural competence, for short). Once intercultural contact has begun, ICC development generally evolves as an on-going and lengthy process, occasionally with periods of regression or stagnation, but more commonly with positive results and no end point. Different individuals bring differing goals and motivations to the intercultural experience that result in varying levels of competence. Some wish to achieve native-like behavior in the host culture; others may be content simply to gain acceptance; and for still others, mere survival may be adequate.

Key words: intercultural learning, intercultural competence, communicative competence, intercultural experience.

Introduction

Language learners need to be aware, for example, of the culturally appropriate ways to address people, express gratitude, make requests, and agree or disagree with someone. They should know that behaviors and intonation patterns that are appropriate in their own speech community may be perceived differently by members of the target language speech community. They have to understand that, in order for communication to be successful, language use must be associated with other culturally appropriate behavior.

Contexts that are seen as appropriate for intercultural learning in the classroom are those which promote the acquisition of intercultural competence consisting of the components mentioned above. Examples: communication between members of different cultures via e-mail: not yet a standard in everyday schooling, but it serves many useful purposes for intercultural learning;

authentic print text: fictional texts are the ideal medium for intercultural learning since it is the substrate of a specific culture and its history, while it simultaneously contains culture-general aspects; it stimulates personal identification and it offers numerous options for creative activities; also it may induce discussions of aspects of subjective, as well as objective, culture - useful examples: Malorie Blackman's Noughts and Crosses series, Qaisra Shahraz' "A Pair of Jeans"; non-fictional texts are definitely useful in this context as well.

film: authentic film especially improves the language proficiency (and thus intercultural sensitivity), because it means direct and authentic contact with the L2; it also guarantees access to the evaluation of audiovisual media and maybe even new media- useful examples: Bend It Like Beckham, Save the Last Dance, My Beautiful Laundrette.

Intercultural communication competence development in EFL classroom

Teaching culture and developing intercultural skills have become fashionable phrases

in foreign and second language pedagogy in the last ten years. However, this is hopefully not only a superficial and quickly passing fad since many language teachers and researchers have established that the primary aim of second and foreign language acquisition is to enable learners to communicate with people coming from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in a multicultural world. Since there is an increasing need to be able to deal with cultural diversity effectively and appropriately, students also need to acquire intercultural communicative competence. Therefore, we can see that while teaching linguistic skills, second and foreign language instructors should also integrate a variety of cultural elements in their language lessons.

It is extremely difficult to define what culture is. 'Culture' is believed to be one of the most complicated words in the English language. A lot of time can be spent on trying to give a precise definition of the word.

Byram refers to culture as: 'the whole way of life of the foreign country, including but not limited to its production in the arts, philosophy and "high culture" in general' (Byram).

Valette, however, highlights the two major components of culture in the following broad sense: 'One is anthropological or sociological culture: the attitudes, customs, and daily activities of a people, their way of thinking, their values, their frames of reference. Since language is a direct manifestation of this phase of culture, a society cannot be totally understood or appreciated without a knowledge of its language. The other component of culture is the history of civilisation. Traditionally representing the "culture" element in foreign language teaching, it includes geography, history, and achievements in the sciences, the social sciences and the arts' (Valette in Valdes).

Hofstede sees culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another". In his pyramid model, he differentiates three levels of "the software of the mind": universal, cultural and personal. The iceberg analogy of culture compares the notion of culture to an iceberg only the tip of which is visible (literature, food, architecture, landmarks, etc.), whereas a very large part of the iceberg is difficult to see or grasp (beliefs, values, attitudes, perceptions, etc.). The items in the invisible body of the iceberg could include an endless list of notions from definitions of beauty or respect to patterns of group decision-making, ideals governing child-raising, as well as values relating to leadership, prestige, health, love, death and so on.

Clearly, culture covers a wide territory. Its broadness is certainly an attraction but can also be considered as a problem. However, it is worth making a list of the areas it includes: literature, the arts in general, customs, habits and traditions, humans' behavior, history, music, folklore, gestures, social relationship etc. These are ingredients and it is difficult to give a whole picture of them. This can be considered a problem deriving from the complicated nature of culture. Extending the image of culture leads us to the view that culture is 'unbounded' and 'not static' (Nelson), which opens the scope even wider.

Intercultural Communicative Competence

Generally, the more deeply one enters into a second language-culture (LC2), or "linguaculture", the greater the effects on one's native linguaculture (LC1). As a result, individuals often modify their initial perspectives of the world (or "worldview"). A willingness to truly engage in the new culture during a cross-cultural sojourn, promotes both transcendence and transformation of one's original mode of perceiving, knowing, and

expressing about the world and interacting within it. Developing intercultural competencies aids this process.

But what exactly is intercultural competence? Although this term is in wide use today, there is no clear consensus about what it is. Some researchers stress global knowledge, others emphasize sensitivity, and still others point to certain skills.

One definition of ICC is that it is the complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself.

The Importance of Culture in Language Teaching

Linguists and anthropologists have long recognized that the forms and uses of a given language reflect the cultural values of the society in which the language is spoken. Linguistic competence alone is not enough for learners of a language to be competent in that language.

In many regards, culture is taught implicitly, imbedded in the linguistic forms that students are learning. To make students aware of the cultural features reflected in the language, teachers can make those cultural features an explicit topic of discussion in relation to the linguistic forms being studied. For example, when teaching subject pronouns and verbal inflections in French, a teacher could help students understand when in French it is appropriate to use an informal form of address (*tu*) rather than a formal form of address (*vous*) - a distinction that English does not have. An English as a second language teacher could help students understand socially appropriate communication, such as making requests that show respect; for example, "Hey you, come here" may be a linguistically correct request, but it is not a culturally appropriate way for a student to address a teacher. Students will master a language only when they learn both its linguistic and cultural norms.

Teaching Culture Without Preconceptions

Cultural information should be presented in a nonjudgmental fashion, in a way that does not place value or judgment on distinctions between the students' native culture and the culture explored in the classroom. Kramsch describes the "third culture" of the language classroom—a neutral space that learners can create and use to explore and reflect on their own and the target culture and language.

Some teachers and researchers have found it effective to present students with objects or ideas that are specific to the culture of study but are unfamiliar to the students. The students are given clues or background information about the objects and ideas so that they can incorporate the new information into their own worldview. An example might be a cooking utensil. Students would be told that the object is somehow used for cooking, then they would either research or be informed about how the utensil is used. This could lead into related discussion about foods eaten in the target culture, the geography, growing seasons, and so forth. The students act as anthropologists, exploring and understanding the target culture in relation to their own. In this manner, students achieve a level of empathy, appreciating that the way people do things in their culture has its own coherence.

It is also important to help students understand that cultures are not monolithic. A variety of successful behaviors are possible for any type of interaction in any particular culture. Teachers must allow students to observe and explore cultural interactions from their own perspectives to enable them to find their own voices in the second language speech community.

Intercultural competence and the teacher. Finally, for many teachers, culture teaching

and learning is a relatively new and unfamiliar venture, especially in the framework of our model of culture learning. The problem is compounded by a lack of concrete examples of how to teach for intercultural competence and by teachers' mistaken belief that they need to be culture experts. Rather, we hope teachers will come to share the view so perceptively expressed by Kane that, "By being the one invested with the knowledge and authority, the teacher's responsibility is to invite - and join - the students in challenging unexamined beliefs and stereotypes". Teachers can become guides and partners in a process of culture learning and discovery with their students, rather than culture expert upon whom their students exclusively rely for cultural knowledge.

How to go about incorporating intercultural communication?

Some very simple general guidelines for language teachers and teacher trainers:

- If you do have first-hand experiences from other cultures, take every opportunity to tell your students about these and elicit their reactions as well as their own similar experiences;

- If the course book you use contains culturally-loaded texts (most of them do by definition), make sure you do not only exploit these texts for grammatical analysis and vocabulary building;

- Even grammar practice and vocabulary activities can be sources of cultural knowledge, means of intercultural skills development or ways to form open and accepting attitudes if you do not fail to add those two or three sentences that will help students understand the cultural dimension better;

- When you give writing tasks and tests, do not only assess your students' knowledge of grammar rules and vocabulary items but sometimes ask them to write (guided) reflective compositions about their experiences in other countries or in their home town with people from other cultures;

- Encourage your students to look things up, be open, curious and non-judgmental, establish e-mail partnerships with students in other countries, participate in simulations, role-plays and ethnographic projects during language lessons (see concrete ideas below), and go on study trips if possible.

The role of culture in foreign language teaching materials: an evaluation from an intercultural perspective

Textbooks used in foreign language (FL) instruction are primarily designed to facilitate language learning, but they cannot simply do that since language learning is inseparable from its cultural context. As Cunningsworth states, "A study of language solely as an abstract system would not equip learners to use it in the real world" (Cunningsworth). For that reason, it is usually expected that FL teaching materials (TM) should include elements of the target language culture. Moreover, many documents analysed by Byram highlight three general goals of FL instruction:

- the development of communicative competence for use in situations the learners might expect to encounter;

- the development of an awareness of the target language;

- the development of insight into the foreign culture and positive attitudes toward foreign people.

But as Byram stresses, these three aims should be integrated. The extent and ways of incorporating cultural aspects in FL instruction vary in different TM, and therefore it is

important for the FL teacher to know what to look for in a particular language textbook in order to decide if it is suitable for attaining the aforementioned goals.

Defining the cultural content for FL classes

One of the most difficult problems confronting FL teachers is the choice of adequate instructional materials. What should students learn about a foreign culture to be able to function in that culture? Different academics offer various suggestions concerning the cultural content of FL TM. In order to answer the abovementioned question, it is essential to examine some ways in which culture is reflected in FL textbooks.

Patrick Moran offers four categories where culture is identified as:

- knowing about, relating to cultural information – facts about products, practices and perspectives of the target culture as well as students' own;
- knowing how, referring to cultural practices in the everyday life of the people of the target culture;
- knowing why, constituting an understanding of fundamental cultural perspectives – beliefs, values and attitudes;
- knowing oneself, concerning the individual learners' self-awareness. In other words, students need to understand themselves and their own culture as a means to comprehending the target language culture.

Whereas the categorisation of culture concentrates mainly on description, the treatment of the cultural content in FL materials should also include analysis, comparison and contrast, which is more in keeping with the comparative method suggested by many scholars.

One of the aims of the FL classroom is the development of the learners' awareness of intercultural issues and their ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in a variety of situations and contexts, given the increasingly international nature of contemporary life. In order for this to happen, learners need first to acquire knowledge about the target language community and then they need to reflect on their own culture in relation to other cultures. That is, in acquiring knowledge about and reflecting on the target language culture, students need to be encouraged not simply to observe similarities and differences between the two cultures, but they should also analyse them from the viewpoint of the others and try to establish a relationship between their own and other systems.

Intercultural awareness, described as "sensitivity to the impact of culturally induced behaviour on language use and communication" comprises awareness of students' own culturally induced behavior, awareness of the culturally induced behavior of the target language community, and ability to explain their own cultural standpoint.

ICC, according to Byram, requires certain attitudes, knowledge, and skills to be promoted, in addition to linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence. The attitudes refer to curiosity and openness as well as "readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own (Byram). The acquired knowledge is of two kinds: on the one hand, knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in the foreign country, and, on the other hand, knowledge of the general processes of individual and societal interaction (Byram). Finally, the skills comprise those of interpreting and relating, discovery and interaction as well as critical awareness/political education (Byram). Byram also maintains that the FL classroom provides ample opportunities for the acquisition of the abovementioned skills, knowledge and attitudes, provided it proceeds under the guidance of a teacher.



Teaching intercultural communication

Kramersch (1993) hinted at the intercultural dimension in her classic book about culture in language teaching, and many methodologists of the 1990s picked up the idea; yet Beamer 1992, Brislin, Yoshida 1994, Landis, Bhagat 1996 and other leading studies of the same years separated IC teaching apart from language education, both in schools and universities, and in lifelong learning contexts, and this trend prevailed (a critique of intercultural communication training in these years can be found in Cargile, Giles 1996); only in Attard 1996, Byram 1997, Balboni 1999, Byram et al. 2001; Humprey 2002, IC teaching was seen under an educational perspective [16].

The basic assumption of the studies above (and many others we cannot quote here) is that IC can be taught. We think this is not exact. In fact, the dynamic and ever changing nature of intercultural communication implies that ICC must be seen as dynamic and ever changing as well, which implies lifelong and lifewide learning. In other words, no IC course can claim to be a 'complete' course.

Our opinion is that ICC cannot be taught as such because it changes continuously, but a model for lifelong observation of ic is fully teachable. The student attending a course of IC studies is an adult, a fully autonomous person, who needs a scaffolding (our model) to be filled up and completed through lifelong and lifewide observation.

As far as the behavioral component of ICC, exotopy, empathy, suspension of judgment, decentralization and so on can be presented to the student, can be described and discussed, but attitudes cannot be taught.

This perspective implies that teaching IC means making students aware of the nature of IC and of ICC, providing them with an instrument – the observation model – to record what they observe, lifelong, lifewide. The model thus provides the table of contents of a personal manual of IC manual.

Intercultural in the Foreign Language Learning Classroom

The link between foreign language learning and culture learning has been established by the linguists and anthropologists a long time ago. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages has concluded that through the study of other languages, students gain a knowledge and understanding of the cultures that use that language. Moreover, students cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs. Linguistic competence alone is not enough for learners of a language to be competent in that language. From simple, everyday things, like forms of address to appropriate ways of expressing disagreement, culture forms an integral part of the language learning curricula. In any case, in order for communication to be successful, language use must be associated with other culturally appropriate behavior, not only linguistic rules in the narrow sense.

Culture is often taught implicitly, as a part of the linguistic forms that students are learning. To make students aware of the cultural features reflected in the language, teachers can make those cultural features an explicit topic of discussion and bring them to the forefront when appropriate. It is of utmost importance that cultural information be presented in a nonjudgmental way which doesn't evaluate the distinctions between the students' native culture and the culture explored in the classroom. Claire Kramersch uses the term "third culture" of the language classroom to describe an ideal learning environment, one where learners can explore and reflect on their own and the target culture and language.

However, it is also important to help students understand that cultures are not monolithic and so a variety of successful behaviors are also possible for any type of interaction in any particular culture. Teachers can make it possible for students to observe and explore cultural interactions from their own perspectives to enable them to find their own voices and language egos in the second language speech community.

There are several practical ways to effectively teach culture, along with teaching a language:

Provide students with **authentic materials** – Watching films, news broadcasts or TV shows can provide students with ample information about non-verbal behavior, such as the use of personal space, eye contact or gestures. On the other hand, reading authentic fictional or non-fictional materials can also be a good introduction about the values and norms of the target language culture. These materials also help the students improve their language skills, especially in terms of listening and understanding written texts.

Compare and contrast **proverbs** – Apart from being very informative about the two cultures, proverbs can lead to a discussion about stereotypes or values represented in the proverbs of both cultures. Furthermore, proverbs and idioms form a significant part of every language and knowing them is a plus for every learner.

Use **role plays** – They especially support students in making the shift in perspective from their own culture, which can become a strange one and is looked at from the outside, and the target culture, which becomes more familiar. In the process, students practice speaking and using language in unpredictable situations.

Research **cultural items** – While also practicing their presentation or writing skills in the target language, the students can inform their classmates about an assigned item from the foreign culture and contextualized the knowledge gained.

Students as cultural resources – Many classrooms nowadays are very culturally and ethnically diverse and they often have exchange students from foreign cultures or returnees from an exchange program in the target culture. They can be invited to the classroom as expert sources and share authentic insights into the home and cultural life of native speakers of the language.

Developing intercultural competence of students in foreign language classroom

European higher education operates in a new environment characterized by globalization, new communicative technologies, increased competition and commercialization, English being the language of international communication. Hence, the importance of learning foreign languages and their role in the labor market as a whole has increased and is leading to a higher motivation in the study of foreign languages.

The integration into the international community puts a new goal to the education system – the formation of personality of students who perceive themselves not only as representatives of one particular culture, but as world citizens, conscious of their importance and responsibility in the global human processes taking place in and in the world as a whole.

Foreign language is one of the basic tools of education of individuals with planetary thinking. Foreign language as the means of international communication can foster students' bilingual social competence, including the formation of such qualities as tolerance, open-mindedness towards other cultures, peoples and countries. Studying the language and culture of another people, students have the opportunity to expand their social-cultural knowledge.

However, if studying two foreign languages at European schools is considered usual,

the process of mastering foreign languages in Russia is not so good. But carrying out the provisions of the Bologna Declaration, as one of the results, Russia can set 12 years of schooling, with increased period of studying some foreign language.

The international organization of the Council of Europe has taken the task of assisting the European countries to agree on the goals and content of foreign language teaching. Russia's entry into the Council of Europe has identified the need to harmonize educational standards in Russia with general European ones.

There has been developed a system of levels of language proficiency and the system of description of these levels using the standard categories. These two complexes provide a network of concepts, which can be used to describe any certification system and any training program in a standard language, starting with setting goals and ending attainable resulted competencies.

The developed specifications for the foreign language teaching are based on the main principles which are level approach to the presenting linguistic-didactic items and communicative-oriented approach to the selection of educational material content. The process of the formation of the text at the level of sentences, that is grammar and vocabulary, is considered not as an educational goal but as means for communication purposes.

The study and use of a foreign language include human's actions developing a number of competences: General competence and Communicative language competence. The competence is referred as the amount of knowledge, skills and personal qualities that allow a person to perform different actions.

General competences include: ability to learn; existential competence; declarative knowledge; skills and know-how. General competences are not linguistic ones, they mean any activity, including communicative one.

Communicative language competence includes: linguistic components (lexical, phonological, syntactical knowledge and skills); social-linguistic component; pragmatic component (knowledge, existential competence and skills and know-how relating to the linguistic system and its sociolinguistic variation) and allows to carry out activities with the use of linguistic resources.

There are following components of communicative competence:

1) Grammatical or formal competence or linguistic competence is systematic knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and phonetics units, which convert the lexical items into a statement.

2) Social-linguistic competence is the ability to select and use appropriate language forms and tools depending on the purpose and the situation of communication, social roles of participants of the communication process.

3) The Discursive competence (discourse competence) is the ability to build integrated, coherent and logical expressions of different functional styles in speech and writing, based on understanding the different kinds of texts for reading and listening, involves the choice of linguistic means, depending on the type of utterance.

4) Social-cultural competence is knowledge of the cultural characteristics of native speakers, their habits, traditions, ethics and etiquette and the ability to understand and use them properly in the process of communication. The formation of social competence involves the integration of personality in the worldwide and national cultures.

There have been two main approaches in the history of foreign language teaching: a)

the study of language based on the rules, and b) the study of language-based communication.

The first approach is conducted with the help of grammar-translation system in the process of foreign languages teaching. According to it, the process of teaching is based on the study of grammar and vocabulary with the next generation of the transition to the formation and decoding of the speech (reading and understanding spoken speech). Using the rules and vocabulary of the language, students must re-create (generate) a new language. The way of learning the language was passing through a huge number of errors that reduced any interest in its study. Experience has shown that this approach is not very effective.

The second approach is performed through communication. It is considered more effective, although contains a number of disadvantages. Lack of awareness of the foreign language rules both extends the process of study and reduces the quality of the foreign-language speech.

As a result, there has been a convergence of these two approaches of teaching a foreign language. That is, the unity of language rules and actions has been experimentally proved. The main action being developed with the help of a foreign language is a communication process, or speech communication. In the process of communication there is not only an exchange of views and feelings, but also the development of linguistic resources. Language rules perform an auxiliary function showing the use of linguistic phenomena in speech.

Conclusion

The idea of teaching culture is nothing new to second language teachers. In many cases, teaching culture has meant focusing a few lessons on holidays, customary clothing, folk songs, and food. While these topics may be useful, without a broader context or frame they offer little in the way of enriching linguistic or social insight - especially if a goal of language instruction is to enable students to function effectively in another language and society. Understanding the cultural context of day-to-day conversational conventions such as greetings, farewells, forms of address, thanking, making requests, and giving or receiving compliments means more than just being able to produce grammatical sentences. It means knowing what is appropriate to say to whom, and in what situations, and it means understanding the beliefs and values represented by the various forms and usages of the language.

Culture must be fully incorporated as a vital component of language learning. Second language teachers should identify key cultural items in every aspect of the language that they teach. Students can be successful in speaking a second language only if cultural issues are an inherent part of the curriculum.

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