

SOME ASPECTS OF INTEGRATING CULTURE INTO FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY

The problem of integrating culture components into the process of teaching foreign languages is very crucial now. The underlying assumption of the modern view is that any group organized for whatever political, social economic or religious purpose will create its own indigenous culture.

Culture is a manifestation of people's beliefs and values, perception and behavior, intellectual and artistic heritage and is used to describe perspectives, practices and products of any identifiable group or society. Each interest group must be held together by a common language and thus language is perceived as the main medium for the expression of culture and as a central influence in shaping its development. Culture can't therefore be fully understood apart from language as they both are so intertwined with each other as to make each essential to the nature and even the existence. Studying the products which were created by people (both tangible and intangible, practices (what people do) and perspectives (how people perceive reality) of a particular culture brings the learner closer to understanding how the people of that culture think, what motivates them and what colors their perceptions of the world.

When students begin the study of another language they often assume any new language will be like their own, except it will have different words. Soon they notice that elements to be often ignored in their own language may be very important in the second language. This awareness of linguistic differences not only enhances students' ability to use the target language, but also provides insights into the use of English.

One of the most important goals of language study is the development of communicative competence in languages. When students have developed communicative competence in a language they are able to convey and receive messages of many different types in a proper way. They also use the language and

obtain information from written texts and media and to interpret that information given the style, context and purpose of the communication. Students combine knowledge of the language system with knowledge of cultural conventions, norms of politeness, discourse conventions and the like ones. In order to develop such competence students must learn how interpersonal relations are conducted in the cultures in which the target language is spoken, how individuals use language effectively to achieve different purposes, how discourse conventions work, how oral and written texts are structured and how the language system operates.

Students must avoid being unduly influenced by the biases of their own language and culture and open their minds as fully as possible to all the nuances of meaning that the words of a new language can convey, including the cultural component often deeply embedded in those words.

Two pedagogical imperatives can be emphasized within this consideration. The first is a practical consideration: the relationship of language and culture is such a tight weave that language and culture really can't be teased apart and divided for teaching purposes. They are best taught in closely integrated conjunction with each other by emphasizing the full meaning conveyed by words, phrases or idiomatic expressions that have a clearly identifiable cultural component.

The second imperative is the critical importance of teaching students in the various ways available to them for learning about the cultural components embedded in the language they are studying and of thus empowering them to uncover the secrets of the language which dictionaries often neglect and which native speakers take for granted. The more thorough their knowledge of the characteristic perspectives, practices and products that reflect the culture, the more competent students can become as skilled readers and listeners in their second language. If they are only taught the language they will acquire a dry, bare-bones medium of communication, utilitarian but devoid of imagination, style or the richness of the human spirit. The study of culture also deepens our understanding of the connections threads of the human story over the time and will help students in their other courses.