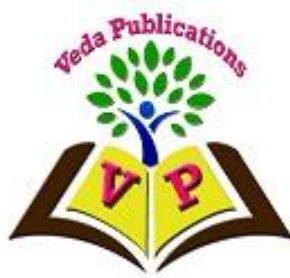


**CULTURE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING**

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*(Lecturer in English, The Hindu College, Machilipatnam, Andhra Pradesh.)***ABSTRACT**

English has been considered to be the first global lingua franca. In today's modern world the English language has become part and parcel of every existing field. It has been an international language of communication, business, science, information technology, entertainment and so on. The relationship between language and culture is dynamic. Firstly, language is an important part of culture. It is the primary vehicle by which a culture transmits its beliefs, values and norms. Secondly, language is influenced by culture. Language is one of the most important carriers of culture and reflects the latter. If there is no language, culture would not be known. Thompson (1990) views culture as "... the pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms, including actions, utterances, and meaningful objects of various kinds, by virtue of which individuals communicate with one another and share their experiences, conceptions and beliefs" (p. 132). Communicative competence (CC) is the main factor in constructing meanings (Loveday, 1982). Language and culture are so close that are being identified as synonyms (Scarcella, Oxford, 1992). On the one hand, language is used to express people's cultural thoughts, beliefs and to communicate; on the other hand, culture is embedded in the language. The fields of language and culture are particularly suited to the use of innovative pedagogy, though in most courses traditional approaches still prevail. Language education researchers have classified different types of cultural contents in language lessons to suit the purposes of their study. Learning culture of a language is a process including acquiring cultural knowledge and developing cultural awareness that gradually lead learners to be closer to a higher level of cultural outcomes called cultural competence. Several language education researchers, in different ways, have mentioned the three levels of knowledge, awareness and competence in describing learner outcomes of culture learning. Culture teaching and language teaching are inseparable and culture is always embedded, integrated into language learning context.

**Keywords:** *English, Global Linguafranca, Language, Culture, Dynamic, Communicative Competence, Innovative Pedagogy, Cultural Competence, Culture Teaching, Language Teaching.*



Language is important because it's one of the main ways to communicate and interact with other people around us. It keeps us in contact with other people. English language is the international language and has become the most important language to people in many parts of the world. It is most widely used in communicating around the world, Also it is spoken as the first language in many countries. English is playing a major role in many sections like education, medicine, engineering and business. There are many reasons that makes English is the most important language in the world. The role of English as an international language of communication in the modern technological world in the 21st century poses special demands on ELT teachers. ELT researchers have recognized the dialectical connection between language and culture since mid-1980s. Krasner (1999) for instance, recognized the necessity for language learners to develop not only linguistic competence but also an awareness of the culturally-appropriate features of the language.

The relationship between language and culture is dynamic. Firstly, language is an important part of culture. It is the primary vehicle by which a culture transmits its beliefs, values and norms. Secondly, language is influenced by culture. Language is one of the most important carriers of culture and reflects the latter. If there is no language, culture would not be known. On the one hand, culture is the basis and one of the most important attributes of language and exerts great influence on the latter. If there is no culture, language will be like water without a source or a tree without roots. Lado (1957, p.111) defined culture as "cultures are structured systems of patterned behaviour." This definition signaled two categories that are important in the concept of culture: structured and patterned. Robinson (1988) looked at culture from four perspectives: behaviour, function, cognition and symbols. From a behaviourist's point of view, culture is a set of patterned behaviours; and a functionalist is to make sense of the behaviours. A cognitive definition tries to argue that culture is a process of interpretation while a symbolic explains that culture is the product after interpretation. Thus, cultural meanings are produced after learners' internal interpretative process. Culture is both process and

products. Culture should be studied as a process as well as a product ( Moran, 2001). Kramsch (1993, p.205) identifies that "culture is a social construct, the product of self and other perceptions". The definition signaled that culture is not collective but also individual. McCarthy and Carter (1994) look at culture from a social discourse perspective. It refers to "social knowledge and interactive skills which are required in addition to knowledge of the language system (McCarthy and Carter, 1994, p.151-152)." Moran (2001, p:25-26) defines culture as 'a cultural phenomenon'--" A cultural phenomenon involves tangible forms or structures (products) that individual members of the culture (persons) use in various interactions (practices) in specific social circumstances and groups (communities) in ways that reflect their values, attitudes and beliefs (perspective)." Thompson (1990) views culture as "... the pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms, including actions, utterances, and meaningful objects of various kinds, by virtue of which individuals communicate with one another and share their experiences, conceptions and beliefs" (p. 132). In a more detailed version, Larson and Smalley (1972) describe culture as a "blue print" that: "guides the behavior of people in a community and is incubated in family life. It governs our behavior in groups, makes use sensitive to matters of status, and help us know what other expect of us and what will happen if we do not live up to their expectations. Culture helps us to know how far we can go as individuals and what our responsibility is to the group.

Traditionally in ELT programs and in many textbooks and teaching materials, the English language has been divided into four discrete language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Communicative competence (CC) is the main factor in constructing meanings (Loveday, 1982). The notion of CC, first introduced by Hymes (1972), refers to the ability not only to apply the grammatical rules of a language but also to know when, where, and to whom to use those sentences appropriately. CC in FL learning refers to a foreign language learner can use a foreign language in a "linguistically, socio-linguistically and pragmatically appropriate way (Council of Europe, 2001, cited in Sercu, 2005)." CC involves what a foreign language language user need



to know to use the language appropriately in a specific cultural-setting. In Canale and Swain's (1980) and in Canale's (1983) later studies, four different components make up the construct of communication competence. They are grammatical competence, social-linguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. According to Canale and Swain (1980), the grammatical competence is the competence that we associate with mastering the language. Discourse competence is the ability learners have to connect sentences and to form a meaningful whole from a series of utterances. Social-linguistic competence is the knowledge of the social-cultural rules of languages which requires an understanding of the roles of the participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction. Strategic competence is the strategies that learners use to compensate for imperfect knowledge of rules or the target language, to sustain communication. From this model, we conclude that the competence for an effective communication should include not only linguistic but also sociolinguistic knowledge (Tseng, 2002). The inseparable relationship between language and culture suggests that learning a foreign language means to learn an aspect of foreign culture.

Language and culture are so close that are being identified as synonyms (Scarcella, Oxford, 1992). On the one hand, language is used to express people's cultural thoughts, beliefs and to communicate; on the other hand, culture is embedded in the language. The interwoven relationship between language and culture can be summarized by Brown (2000, p.177): "A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture." The relationship between language and culture is a complex one and it is always quite challenging to fully understand people's cognitive processes when they communicate. Language competence does not only include the knowledge of grammatical principles and sentence construction, but also knowledge of the norms that link language to social and cognitive context. Many teachers and students seem to lose sight of the fact that knowledge of grammatical systems has to be

complemented with culture-specific meanings. It is therefore essential for language teachers to approach language learning with this in mind, as the understanding of this relationship is central to the acquisition of linguistic and cultural competency. After the introduction of the direct method into the English Language teaching, cultural elements began to be considered as an important aspect of learning the language, and in our age, cultural background knowledge is accepted as a must in teaching language. As Thanasoulas (2001) points, it should be reiterated that language teaching is culture teaching, and someone involved in teaching language is also involved in teaching culture at the same time. Language does not exist in a vacuum, so language learners should be aware of the context in which the target language is used i.e., they should also learn about the target culture. In this respect, Crystal (1997) well supports this statement: "Language has no independent existence: it exists only in the brains and mouths and ears and hands and eyes of its user." Another benefit of the culture class is that however course books provide real life situations, learners, lacking insights about the target culture, have difficulty in associating these situations with real people (Kitao, 2000).

Therefore, learners may think that they are studying the language of some fictive people. However, learners learn concrete facts more easily than abstract ones; if they know that they are dealing with a genuine and not virtual reality, that they are studying a language spoken by real people, then studying the language will become much easier. ELT students attending culture classes will easily provide background information for their prospective students thereby rendering the grammar or other language related classes more enjoyable, interesting, and attractive. Learners believe that besides other benefits, a culture class would help them in teaching grammar. That while teaching grammatical structures and other grammatical items they would provide their prospective students with examples taken from real life. Teaching grammar, as well known, may sometimes become problematic because one cannot make a one-to-one translation of one language into another. Furthermore, Sapir-Whorf hypothesis implies that there are certain thoughts of an



individual in one language that cannot be understood by those who use another language (Chandler, 1994). Therefore, dealing with grammar problems, teachers' ability to explain the new grammatical items referring to life of the target language society will help them have students overcome comprehension problems regarding grammatical structures.

The fields of language and culture are particularly suited to the use of innovative pedagogy, though in most courses traditional approaches still prevail. Nevertheless, there is evidence that new approaches are being used such as using e-learning and e-platforms, various types of group work and group assignments, project work, field-work, study visits, presentations in different media, autonomous learning and cross-curricular learning – in short, the whole range of learner-centred teaching and learning methods. There is strong emphasis on the fostering of self-evaluation and reflection by students as well as on the development of key skills alongside the development of subject-specific literary and culture competences. These might include: close reading of a variety of texts, intercultural skills such as empathy, contextualization, differentiation, linguistic competence in the target language which supports engagement with the study of literature and culture. Teachers who are aware of the necessity of integrating culture into their language lessons often face the question of which culture(s) to be taught. Language education researchers have classified different types of cultural contents in language lessons to suit the purposes of their study. Kramsch (1995), for example, discusses three different “links” between language and culture. Universal links imply the culture that can be shared by various language speakers across social and national boundaries. National links refer to the cultures separated by the national boundaries such as French “civilization”, German “landeskunde” or English “culture”. Local links are related to the culture expressed through the words and actions of everyday speakers in everyday life. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) categorize three types of cultural information that can be represented in language lessons: the target culture, the source culture and the international culture.

The target culture exposes learners to the culture of countries where the language they are learning is spoken as the first language. Learning the target culture, learners may be more interested in learning the language, or develop positive attitudes towards these language-speaking people and countries. The source culture draws on the learners' own culture. This culture can help students to develop a positive cultural identity. The international culture includes various cultures from various parts of the world, or cultural topics that are of concern to the global society (Matsuda, 2012). Learners can gain cross-cultural understanding of the sociolinguistic realities related to the language they learn from the international culture (Zacharias, 2014). Compared to other language teachers, teachers of English may be more familiar with the international culture associated with the language they teach, as English is seen the global lingua franca which is spoken by a huge number of people across nations.

Learning culture of a language is a process including acquiring cultural knowledge and developing cultural awareness that gradually lead learners to be closer to a higher level of cultural outcomes called cultural competence. Cultural knowledge, awareness and competence” is inspired by Fenner's (2000) idea that language education should be to give learners opportunities to develop cultural knowledge, competence and awareness of both the target culture and their own culture. Several language education researchers, in different ways, have mentioned the three levels of knowledge, awareness and competence in describing learner outcomes of culture learning. Piątkowska (2015), for example, distinguishes three main approaches of integrating culture into language teaching: the knowledge-based approach, the contrastive approach and the intercultural communicative competence approach. The knowledge-based approach aims to provide learners with knowledge of facts and information about the target language culture such as customs, habits, folklore of everyday life, literature or arts. The contrastive approach helps learners to be aware of similarities and differences between their own culture and the target language culture, and makes them to look for a connection between the two cultures (Thanasoulas, 2001). The



intercultural communicative competence approach expects learners to develop their communicative skills which allow them to engage in interaction beyond the contexts of their own culture and the target language culture (Marczak, 2010). Larzén (2005) proposes three objectives of teaching culture, including knowledge about other cultures, skills for intercultural encounters, and tolerance and empathy.

Drawing from Fenner (2000) idea of cultural knowledge, cultural awareness and cultural competence, Larzén (2005) and Piątkowska's (2015) we can identify the three approaches or objectives of culture teaching. The first level is cultural knowledge in which the learners are expected to gain, to a certain extent, information about the target language culture, their own culture or some other cultures. This information may include, but not limited to, people, customs, and habits, folklore of everyday life, cultural products, literature and arts. According to Byram (1989), cultural knowledge is structured and systematically presented information about culture.

This information may be related to people, customs, habits, folklore of everyday life, cultural products, literature or arts, as well as the nature of culture and the processes of learning other cultures (Moran, 2001). Tomlinson and Masuhara (2004) believe that culture knowledge is often transmitted by somebody else, not modified from one own experience. In language classroom, cultural knowledge is often presented in "national links"—information about culture of different nations/countries, such as the target language-speaking countries, learners' country or other countries (Kramersch, 1995).

The second level is cultural awareness in which the learners should have good cultural knowledge. They are expected to be able to raise their perception and awareness of cultural values and beliefs, make comparisons and contrasts between others' culture and their own culture. They understand strategic cultural cues or principles to communicate and integrate successfully in different cultural contexts, while still maintaining their own cultural identity. Cultural knowledge, as "pure information" is useful. It however does not help learners to develop critical thinking. In addition to knowledge, it is expected that language learners

need to increase their awareness of culture under study (Valette, 1986). Cultural awareness, in Tomalin and Stempleski's (2013, p. 5) view, is "sensitivity to the impact of culturally induced behavior on language use and communication". While culture knowledge is often transmitted by somebody else (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2004), cultural awareness is gained from personal experience. Acquiring cultural knowledge, at a higher level, learners are more aware of others' culture and their own culture's values and beliefs. They can understand strategic cultural cues or principles to use the language successfully in different cultural contexts and to integrate themselves into different cultural environments, while still maintaining their own cultural identity.

The third level is cultural competence in which the learners should have broad cultural knowledge and deep cultural awareness. They are not only able to understand and participate successfully in cross-cultural contexts, but also able to self-experience, reflect, analyze, argue and construct their own critical views of different cultural issues and their positive cultural identity. Learning culture of a language is a process including acquiring cultural knowledge and developing cultural awareness that gradually lead learners to be closer to a higher level of cultural outcomes called cultural competence. Cultural competence involves "the acquisition of resources to deal with interlocutors of diverse ethnic backgrounds" and "an awareness of cultural diversity and an ability to recognize and accept differences and manage them successfully" (Barraja-Rohan, 1999, p. 143). Gaining cultural competence does not mean that one must accept that culture or has an "obligation to behave in accordance with the social conventions" (Kramersch, 1993, p. 181). It implies someone who is able to see the relationships between different cultures and have a critical understanding part of their own and other cultures (Byram, 2000). At this level of culture learning, learners are expected to not only acquire cultural knowledge and raise cultural awareness, but also develop their ability to reflect, self-reflect, argue and construct their own critical views of different cultural issues and their cultural identity, that help building their tolerance and harmony with



themselves, with other people and cultures. Culture competence, therefore, may not be separately presented as competence of the target language culture, the source culture or the international culture, but as “intercultural competence”.

### CONCLUSION

Language and culture are inextricably intertwined. At the very least, students should be given the insights which will enable them to acquire the necessary cultural knowledge for participating in the second culture setting. Both learners and teachers of a second language need to understand cultural differences, recognize openly that people in the world are not all the same. Culture is an area in second language education in which the greatest need and potential for improvement exist. Culture teaching and language teaching are inseparable and culture is always embedded, integrated into language learning context. That is, foreign culture teaching should move from passing information of target cultures to teaching the language in context, to give meanings to foreign language learners, and raise learners' cultural awareness in the process of foreign language learning.

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