THE IMPORTANCE OF PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING THE CULTURE OF COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

English is accepted as an international language of communication. Language is also a tool that can be used to acquire knowledge and cross borders. A person who learns a language acquires knowledge of both social and cultural norms. Language and culture are inseparable. When communicating with other people using a different vernacular, to be proficient in this language, linguistic competence alone is not enough; one must also be aware of cultural ways of addressing people, expressing gratitude, and communicating.

For years, language learners approached foreign language acquisition primarily from a linguistic perspective, treating cultural understanding as secondary. However, today, with increased emphasis on cultural learning, this perspective has significantly shifted. The evolution of ideas about cultural learning is closely tied to changes in social and political environments. True mastery of a language involves not only grammatical, phonological, and lexical knowledge but also an understanding of the cultural nuances unique to that language.

International communication inherently includes intercultural exchange, and this process often reveals cultural differences. These differences exist in every language—for example, in the role of silence, intonation, appropriate conversation topics, and speech acts such as apologizing, making requests, complaining, or refusing. Thus, **language is a part of culture, and culture is an inseparable component of language.**

Defining Culture

Culture can hold different meanings for different people. According to Brown (1994), culture is an integral part of our existence. Language, meanwhile, serves as a medium of communication among members of a culture and is its most visible expression. Consequently, a person's worldview, self-perception, thought processes, behavior, emotions, and communication systems may diverge when transitioning from one culture to another.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, **culture is communication.** It encompasses interaction styles—both verbal and nonverbal (gestures, body language)—as well as the

social contexts in which communication occurs. Since language use is deeply intertwined with social and cultural values, language itself is considered a sociocultural phenomenon.

Each culture has its own norms regarding communication, and these norms may differ drastically—sometimes even conflicting—from one culture to another. When individuals are unaware of or disregard these norms, communication breakdowns can occur.

The Etymology and Dimensions of Culture

The word *madaniyat* (culture) originates from the Arabic *madina* (city). Arabs historically categorized life into two types: *badawi* (nomadic or desert life) and *madani* (urban, settled life). *Badawi* referred to nomadic tribes, while *madani* denoted city-dwelling societies with distinct lifestyles.

Adaskou, Britten & Fahsi (1990) provide a more precise definition of culture, outlining four dimensions:

1. **Aesthetic** – Includes cinema, literature, music, and media.
2. **Sociological** – Encompasses family structures, interpersonal relationships, customs, and material conditions.
3. **Semantic** – Refers to the conceptual framework shaping perception and thought.
4. **Pragmatic/Sociolinguistic** – Involves essential knowledge for effective communication, including social and paralinguistic skills.

When teaching English in ELT (English Language Teaching) classrooms, cultural learning naturally occurs. Communication patterns, greetings, speech formulas, and other expressions found in dialogues or sample texts reflect cultural knowledge. Elements like gestures, body language, and personal space also shape cultural understanding.

Students' intellectual curiosity is stimulated when they discover alternative ways to express emotions, desires, and needs—whether through foreign literature or exposure to different cultural norms. A deeper grasp of culture requires understanding how these elements interrelate within a cultural system.

Since language and culture are deeply intertwined, **culture directly influences how we structure speech and interpret meaning.** This influence manifests in two key ways:

1. **Verbal communication**
2. **Nonverbal communication**

Teachers must also recognize that differences in semantics, emphasis, dialects, and discussion styles can create communication barriers with individuals from other cultures.

Nonverbal communication includes:

- **Proxemics** (personal space)
- **Kinesics** (body movements)
- **Haptics** (physical touch)
- **Vocalics** (tone, rhythm, timbre)

Moran argues that **cultural learning is a conscious, purposeful process** where implicit knowledge is made explicit and understandable. According to Tomalin & Stempleski (1993), teaching culture today is seen as *"an aspect of teaching values,"* fostering critical thinking and tolerance for differences.

Cultural learning is a reflective process where students analyze their own culture and compare it with the culture associated with the target language. This approach sharpens analytical and interpretive skills.

In today's globalized economy and society, **education must promote social tolerance and respect.** If language is a vehicle for culture, rigidly structured communication methods in traditional language teaching risk erasing linguistic and cultural diversity—counterproductive to intercultural communication and global economic needs.

Practical Strategies for Teaching Culture of communication

- **Authentic Materials:** Films, news, TV shows, websites, photos, magazines, restaurant menus, and travel brochures help students experience culture firsthand. Teachers should adapt these materials to students' age and proficiency levels.
- **Guided Activities:** Teachers can provide translations, charts, or outlines to aid comprehension of dialogues or videos.
- **Comparative Discussions:** Encourage students to discuss cultural differences with peers who speak the target language, applying their skills in real-world contexts.

As Rivers (1982) emphasizes, **cultural teaching requires students to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes.** For true language mastery, teachers must guide students toward **communicative competence**, which includes:

1. **Grammatical competence** (knowledge of language structure)
2. **Discourse competence** (coherent expression)
3. **Sociolinguistic competence** (context-appropriate communication)

Conclusion

Developing cultural awareness in the classroom means helping students understand fundamental cultural norms, beliefs, and customs—both at individual and group levels. Students should have opportunities to discuss their own culture with peers while applying their language skills in practice.

By integrating cultural activities into lesson plans and using authentic materials, educators can enrich students' learning experiences, fostering not just linguistic proficiency but **true intercultural competence.**

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