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THE ROLE OF CULTURAL DIMENSIONS ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the role of cultural dimensions on foreign language teaching. This paper provides different definitions for culture and then moves to the effect of culture on foreign language teaching. In the last part of paper, there are some important issues that teacher should pay more attention while language teaching.

1. Introduction

People living in different places have different cultural features and use different languages to speak. Language and culture appear seem like distinct things on the surface, but they have a close relationship with each other and affect mutually. Gleason (1961) stated that languages are not only the products of cultures, but also are the symbols of cultures. As the language is associated with the culture, cultural patterns of cognition and customs, the features of the culture are coded explicitly in language. Certainly, language cannot exist in a vacuum and there is an inevitable kind of "transfusion" between language and culture (Fairclough, 1989). The close relationship between language and culture can be summed up 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." As this relationship is one of the most argued topics in the past and now, it has taken place important place on linguistic researchers' studies. In most of these studies, many linguists and researchers are on the same point that 'culture must be integrated with language teaching' (Paige, 2003). Furthermore, for acquiring a foreign language, a person should learn also its culture. Namely, while learning a foreign language, it cannot be ignored that learner couldn't properly learn the language only with its structure and grammar rules. To be able to succeed it, people started to use contextual language teaching that has become the new trend of language teaching in many places. Now, we are moving to definition of the culture in order to understand the importance of cultural dimensions on foreign language teaching better.

2. What is culture?

Culture is complex and broad concept that is actually harder to define. The research that Kroeber and Kluckholn (1952) came across 164 definitions for culture in their research will be a good example to say how it is difficult. Hofstede (1980, pp. 21-23) defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another", it changes all the time and each previous generation adds something before passing to another. Fukuyama (1996) is on the same page and people do it like a collective programming. Also, he supports the idea of innovative change and cross-culture. But, Huntington (1996) identifies the term in different way. He categories the cultures as Western, Orthodox, Islamic etc and he

thinks that next cold war would be among the dominant cultures. According to Hollensen (2011), there are main characteristics which are accepted by many authors. Those are: Culture is learned, not inherent, it is interrelated and it is shared by a group of people. To put it all in simple terms, culture is set of informations acquired to add something to the life, the remaining after reading everything and then forgetting everything, the feeling of missing; the longing of world where we have to explore, a summary of features that makes a human a human, a passion, being responsible for whole humanity, a love, believing someone, building a humanism all over the world, enhancing now with past and future, identifying ourselves, being far away from lies and prejudice, an intention, and the point of view to another. With reference to these definitions, we are focusing on the effects of culture on foreign language teaching and why it is important.

3. Culture Affects Language

Culture can be defined as a learned system of values, beliefs or norms among a group of people (Greey, 1994). Being in high context culture or low context culture, masculinity, power distance and individualism of society changes values, language and behaviors. Especially, acquiring a language depends on keeping step with these changes. Although some words even in the same language may refer to different meanings because of changes in some eras, learner will come across different difficulties. For example, a Turkish language learner watches a movie from 1980s and realizes that man was more stressed as the culture is more male-dominated. If he doesn't know that feature of the culture, he cannot understand or will misunderstand something. And, the other components of culture affects the language. Now, we are moving out the importance of cultural dimensions on foreign language teaching.

4. The Effect of Culture on Foreign Language Teaching

The primary goal of learning a foreign language is to communicate via that language. Yet, it does not make sense to communicate with a language learned in structural way. In that point, is the primary aim raising cultural awareness or making easier to communicate in target society? It is so clear that target culture can be taught or provided as a source, if required. As Baskan (2006:218) said, we learnt the language in

terms of skills while learning a foreign language and we learnt the culture in terms of knowledge.

To be able to give information in this way, it should be strongly emphasized that no culture is superior to the others, a culture shouldn't be classified as bad or good and some differences should be viewed with respect (Rivers,1968: 271). According to Straub (1999), for foreign language teachers, the first step is to create awareness for learners' own culture before learning target culture and the second one is to provide as a tool in order to compare different cultures. Foreign language learners can understand the opposite side and build an effective communication. So, that learner will be more motivated for the language. Apart from these, it shouldn't be ignored the importance of technology while learning a foreign language in cultural context. To be able to motivate learners and take their interest to the target language, those are important points to be used:

√ Music	√ Transportation	√ Sports
√ Wedding	√ Architecture	√ Games
√ Clothing	√ History	√ Vacations
√ Weather	√ Important dates	√ Idioms
√ Food and beverages	√ Cinema	√ Education
√ Theatre	√ Museums	√ Proverbs
√ Literature	√ Mimics	√ Geography
√ Gestures	√ Metaphors	

5. Conclusion

The culture shouldn't be seen as different component in foreign language teaching and it should be in the process of foreign language teaching. For foreign language students, language study seems senseless if they know nothing of the people who speak it or the country in which it is spoken (Deborah Peck:1998:1). In that process, language should be our medium and culture our message to students. Along the whole learning process, the aim of teacher would be to help students to develop empathy towards the target language but also he should be strong in both cultures. After all, the more cultural concepts learners gain, the more language they acquire and the more skills they have.

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