

PAPER

THE ROLE OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Abstract

This article examines the significance of intercultural communication in the teaching of foreign languages. It discusses the essential role of intercultural communication in language learning and explores how integrating cultural elements enhances the development of communicative competence.

Key words: Intercultural communication, community, communicative approach, cultural diversity, cross-cultural relations, intercultural competence.

Introduction

Language and society are mutually indispensable. Language could have developed only within a social setting, however structured, and human society—whether ancient or modern—could only be maintained among individuals sharing a common means of communication. In foreign language teaching, two major approaches have emerged: the communicative approach, focusing on increasing communicative competence, and the intercultural approach, emphasizing the development of intercultural competence.

Intercultural communication is a relatively new field of study, integrating a rich mix of elements. It offers a critical understanding of interculturality and has become increasingly important in language education. Although, for a brief period after World War II, it was believed that cultural topics should be avoided in language classrooms, this view has since changed. Today, language scholars widely recognize that culture is an integral component of foreign language learning, driven by increasing global interconnectedness and societal shifts.

The rise in cross-cultural interactions—through direct exchanges, the transfer of goods, and social networks—demands that language education prepares students for a globalized world. An intercultural approach to language teaching provides a powerful framework for achieving this goal.

Intercultural communication aims to familiarize students with the traditions and customs of other cultures, enabling effective communication with native speakers. While traditional

communicative competence (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) remains a priority, cultural content enriches language lessons, enhancing students' overall competence.

Intercultural communication involves verbal and nonverbal interactions between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, occurring both at the community and individual levels. While culture is often classified by national, ethnic, social class, or gender boundaries, in reality, cultural identity is more complex, shaped by personal beliefs, values, and norms. As global cultural diversity increases, the relevance of cross-cultural communication continues to grow.

Understanding cultural information is essential to overcoming differences and fostering effective cross-cultural relations. Cross-cultural communication requires mutual understanding between participants from different cultural backgrounds. Acquiring cross-cultural communication skills and paying attention to cultural differences enables individuals to navigate diverse intercultural situations successfully.

The use of **modern interactive technologies** and innovative teaching methods plays a crucial role in developing intercultural competence. They prepare individuals for life in multicultural environments, encouraging a deep respect for different cultures and promoting peaceful coexistence among people of various nationalities and beliefs.

Culture and communication are inseparable. Culture dictates who speaks to whom, about what, and how communication proceeds. It also influences how messages are encoded and

interpreted, shaping the meaning of communication. Thus, culture forms the foundation of communication itself.

Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) emphasized the importance of intercultural relations in language education. According to them, teaching culture in foreign language classrooms serves the following objectives:

- Helping students recognize that all people exhibit culturally conditioned behaviors.
- Understanding how social variables such as age, gender, social class, and residence affect communication.
- Increasing students' awareness of conventional behaviors in common situations within the target culture.
- Enhancing students' understanding of the cultural connotations of words and phrases.
- Encouraging students to critically evaluate generalizations about the target culture, based on evidence.
- Developing research skills to locate and organize information about other cultures.
- Stimulating intellectual curiosity and fostering empathy toward people from different cultural backgrounds.

Language teachers increasingly agree that teaching culture adds significant value to language education. A cultural component is essential for developing a complete and effective language syllabus. It equips students with the necessary tools to function in the target culture, whether abroad or within multicultural communities.

Culture can and should be introduced early in language programs, even if initially taught in the learners' first language (L1). Sellami (2015) proposed a **three-stage approach**:

1. Beginner Stage:

Students are introduced to basic cultural facts, becoming familiar with the target culture.

2. Intermediate Stage:

Students begin to compare their own culture with the target culture, developing empathy and appreciation, although still in the early stages.

3. Advanced Stage:

Students engage in deeper cultural exploration, achieving greater understanding and integration of the target culture's perspectives.

According to Peck (2017), culture encompasses all accepted and patterned ways of behavior within a given group. It includes not only the external manifestations of culture—such as art, customs, and achievements—but also internalized patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Culture represents our social legacy, distinguishing learned behaviors from innate biological traits.

The aim of integrating culture into language teaching is to **increase students' cultural awareness** and **stimulate curiosity** about both the target culture and their own. These cultural comparisons are intended not to diminish foreign cultures but to enrich students' experiences and foster greater intercultural understanding.

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