Teaching Foreign Culture in the Foreign Language Classroom

Kesinee Chaisri

Faculty of International Studies,
Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus, Thailand
Corresponding author: ckesineeth@yahoo.com

Abstract

Learning about foreign culture is becoming increasingly more important in the learning of a foreign language. Learners, apart from learning grammar, the phrasal structure and the vocabulary of the target language, have to learn how to communicate with the native speakers of a particular language. They have to achieve an intercultural understanding while still preserving their own culture. Different teaching methods take this into account; traditional methods (Grammar-Translation approach), Audio-Oral and Structured-Global Visual-Audio approach (SGVA), the Communicative approach, the Socio-cultural approach and the Intercultural approach. This article aims to show the different teaching methods that language teachers can adapt or be aware of when they teach foreign culture in the classroom.

Key Words: Foreign Culture; Intercultural; Learning Foreign Culture; Teaching Methods

Introduction

At present, in the era of globalization, an understanding in intercultural communication is necessary and the learning of foreign languages is beneficial in many ways. It is vital for the communicative exchanges between people from different nations and different cultures. To be successful in communication and relationships, the knowledge of other people's cultures is essential. Abdallah-Pretceille and Porcher (1996 : 1) stated in the introduction of their work that "the cultural dimension of learning is, from now on, the objective of the large consensus in which nobody could be against without risk of being either someone ignorant and/or someone incompetent, or someone who is like a dinosaur of pedagogy". From now on, the objective of language courses is not only to solicit the learners to know the grammar, the phrasal structure and the necessary vocabulary to be able to communicate with the native speakers of the target language, but also to have a better understanding and to accept the difference of others while keeping their own culture.

Objectives of Teaching and Learning Culture

In foreign language class, apart from the objectives like promoting communicative ability and the four base language skills, there are also objectives of learning the culture of the target language. Many pedagogues try to collect the important ones. According to Puren and Bertocchini (1998), the teaching of foreign culture in language class consists of

- making students aware of the superficial representations and the erroneous they have with that culture,
- initiating students to a necessary minimum knowledge about the reality of the country of the target language,
- making students aware of the great artistic and intellectual works of that country,
- making students understand, from inside, the subjective experiences of the people of the country,
- helping students to be able to see their own culture and to accept other people's culture,

- allowing each student to have a personal and subjective perspective in foreign culture,
- teaching students to behave like the citizen's of that country in some situations,
- leading students to systematically compare foreign culture with their own culture,
- leading students to discover their own and inside coherence to the foreign culture.

Keller (cited in Abdallah-Pretceille 2004 : 180) points out that the objectives in a civilization class are as follows;

- to recognize prejudices in the judgments' of the person belonging to the target culture and to the culture of the students,
- to know the function of the prejudices in each individual's life,
- to know the role of prejudices in social life (the study of the auto-stereotypes and the hetero-stereotypes),
- With awareness, discuss how the harmful consequences of the prejudices could be neutralized,
- to see how the relationship between different groups, especially international relations can be ameliorated by the knowledge of the stereotypes mechanism.

As a consequence, schools and teachers have to take into account the cultural diversity and the respect and tolerance of others, while avoiding the prejudices, stereotypes and the ethnocentrism, in order to promote inter-comprehension between people from different cultures.

Role of Teachers

Teachers have a double role to play in teaching foreign culture. Firstly, they have to "teach students to use wisely a system which makes them understand the world and be able to express themselves". Secondly, they have to teach students to have "an awareness of the stereotyped and cultural characteristics of a particular culture. Students then have to be able to relate to the representations, this will then enable them to respect the cultures of other people and be able to change" (De Smet & Rasson cited in Kerzil &

Vinsonneau 2004 : 83-84). The work of Pubiget (1983) demonstrated that if the stereotypes are directly related to the original environment of each individual, it is because they were learnt and not acquired through birth. As for the consequence, negative attitudes towards the country concerned develop, which can lead to the abandonment of foreign language learning.

The teachers, being the cultural mediators, have to be able to arouse the construction of the inter-subjective representation in their learners. Zarate (1986 : 66) specified that "the objective pursued in the class is to make students aware of the precariousness of stereotypes, to the ethnocentric vision and the manichaeism of the world which underlies it". The teacher then should show the students, when and why the stereotypes happen. The problem with stereotypes is that they don't allow time for thinking; things seem to be fixed forever, even worse, the people, the language, the country are characterized intrinsically (Auger 2003 : 29).

Teaching Methods

In foreign language teaching many methods involve cultural elements, which now have become an important issue. In this article, we are going to present some methods that we find interesting for the comprehension of a foreign culture and in the acquisition of the communicative competence which we find in exoglossic situations like Thailand.

1. Traditional Method (Grammar-Translation)

The traditional method (the oldest method, from the Nineteenth century to the beginning of the Twentieth century), comes from the method used in the teaching of dead languages (or old languages), that are Latin and Greek. The methodology is based on the "Grammar-Translation" method or "Lecture-Translation" (Cuq & Gruca 2003 : 234).

This method gives priority to the translation and the grammar involved. The grammar is taught in a very formal way, it emphasizes the parts of speech and the presentation including analysis of linguistic forms, such as; articles, verbs and objects. Each sequence is normally comprised of an explanation of grammatical rules, followed by practice exercises.

Apart from the translation and grammar, this method also associates importance to the teaching of literature, in a general way. It is often in the form of extracts or literacy works, (or pieces of work chosen from them). Cuq and Gruca (ibid : 236), later on these literacy texts become the preferred support to the oral translation and their explication is used in the acquisition of the literacy stories and the learning of civilization or more precisely, the literacy teaching of civilization.

Neuner (2003 : 19) adds that, in concerning the socio-cultural aspect, priority is given to the presentation of important productions (culture with a big C: arts and literature) and its incarnation by the "great men", including the important events in history of the country studied. We can see through a more modern version that this method presents "the facts and the numbers" and "life and institutions" of the country concerned.

It is noted that, at present, we can still find this method in traditional exercises and in the translation activities of extracts.

2. Audio-Oral and Structured-Global Visual-Audio (SGVA)

The audio-oral method appeared during the 1940's. It gives priority to oral learning and focuses the content to be learnt around various real life situations. The method is also based on the acquisition of the linguistic structure. This method was developed to respond to the immediate needs of particular groups. The United States of America during that period was taking part in World War II and needed their personal - their soldiers and their diplomats to learn foreign languages as quickly as possible. Due to this need, a new teaching method called the audio-oral method was developed.

Richards and Rodgers (cited in Martinez 1996 : 55) resume this methodology by insisting on priority been given to the exclusive usage of the oral component of the target language in class, on the facts that the new components introduced are always there in the situations provided. The place for vocabulary and grammar are also there, reading and writing intervene once the linguistic methods are assured.

Tagliante (2006 : 51) stated that this method is characterized by
- The presentation of the grammatical structure in a dialogue,

- The repetition and the memorization,
- The introduction of the structural exercises.

During the next 60 years this method was further developed by French pedagogues, which led to the development of SGVA - Structured-Global Visual-Audio (SGVA), which is based on the following principles;

- linguistic theory explicitly structured for content and progression,
- the firm dominance of the oral component,
- the heavy integration of audiovisual methods,
- the theory of teaching based on a "mobile structure of the optimal stimuli",
- the global conception of communication in society (Martinez 1996 : 60).

In general, the sequence of the SGAV method has various steps;

- Presentation of recorded dialogue accompanied with pictures for the overall comprehension of the situation,
- Explication of the lexical elements and the structures,
- Repetition of the dialogue with phonetic correction and the memorization of language structures and dialogue,
- Utilization or reemployment of the new elements (vocabulary and structure) and the off by heart memorization of the situations that have already been studied,
- Transposition or reutilization of the learned elements (vocabulary and dialogue) in the form of role play or drama activities in similar situations to which have been studied (Cuq & Gruca 2003 : 242-243).

Concerning the learning of culture, the priority of this approach moves the large theme (Culture with a big C) towards the study of different aspects of daily life (culture with a small c). This is shown in some situations and contexts which provide more than a background – often presented visually – to the dialogues happening in foreign countries. These situations are always in the form of contact between tourists and local people of the target country (Neuner 2003 : 21).

3. Communicative Approach

According to Puren (1998), the communicative approach is the third generation of the audio-visual method. For the definition of this approach, Beacco (1980 : 35) said that, it aims to create the communicative aptitude in foreign language. Cuq (2003 : 24) mentioned that this approach is applied to the dispositive of methodological choices aiming to develop the communicative competence among students. This communicative competence is, at present, one of the main objectives of foreign language learning because linguistic competence is no more sufficient in the communication perspective. In short, the communicative approach aims mainly to:

- Develop communicative competence, or communicative skills, it is the practical knowledge of society, cultural rules, and psychology which control the use of speech, and create the language exchange in the community,
- Acquire the pragmatic knowledge related to the cultural norms of language used in the community, this means the know-how, the implicit knowledge of the way to use the linguistic system to be able to understand and to express themselves. In this framework, the rules of usage for both communicative competence and linguistic competence have to be learned simultaneously. It is not only about understanding or producing utterances of a particular language but also, and especially, the knowledge of when and where to use them,
- Assure the autonomy of students while teaching,
- Enhance the interactions in different communicative situations.

For the component of communicative competence, Coste (1980 : 27) stated that it is composed of five parts: "linguistic" (mastery of system), "textual" concerning the organization and the sequence of linguistic materials, the "referential" linked with the different domains of experience, the "relational" (adequate speech to the intentions and the positions of the speakers) and the "situational" related to "the other factors that can have an affect, in a community, in any given circumstance or the choices operated by the language users."

Canale and Swain (1980) identified that the ability to communicate required four different sub-competences:

- Grammatical competence, it is about "the knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics and phonology",
- Discourse competence, the ability to connect sentences in discourse and to form meaning out of the series of utterances or the ability to "combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres",
- Sociolinguistic competence, is composed of two parts: the socio-cultural rules which are necessary to interpret the social meaning of the sentences and the discourse rules,
- Strategic competence, verbal and non-verbal communicative strategy that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or due to insufficient competence.

The competence that we are interested in here is the sociolinguistic competence because it is significant to the knowledge of the socio-cultural rules of using language. It means the ability to communicate while considering the interpersonal relationship and the context of the communicational situation. Edelhoff and Bommel (1980 : 50) identified the factors that characterize the communicative situation as follows:

- References to the people concerned (age, sex, profession, nationality, etc.),
- The group relationship between participants and partners in the communication,
- Social relations (superior to inferior, colleague to colleague, student to teacher),
- Affective relations (sympathy, antipathy, level of familiarity, etc.)
- The intention of communication,
- The external surroundings (country, place, environment, date, time, etc.),
- The topic of conversation,

- The nature of the text (report, discussion, emission of information, etc.).

Hence, we have to characterize the types of texts and their communicational applications so that the subject, the communicational situation and the type of text could be constructed by using certain techniques and skills. In short, this approach gives the priority to the discourse and to the use of texts or authentic documents. Besides, the communicative approach is very closely related to the intercultural approach, like stated by Debeser (cited in Atienza, Berard & De Carlo 1990 : 155) that in intercultural communication, it is always the culture which provokes the obstacles. It's the intercultural competence which allows the knowledge of how to live with others. Then the awareness of the cultural component in teaching, learning language and foreign cultures becomes important and necessary to the development of true communicational competence.

4. Socio-cultural Approach

This approach is actually sociologic and anthropologic. Windmuller (2003 : 393) stated that this approach places humans in the middle of the social organization and the cultural system in which they develop. Humans have multiple relationships to culture: they are based on the unconscious impregnation of behaviors, the mechanisms, the values and the principles shown in maternal culture, all of which characterize their cultural identity. It is also based on the relationship with which each individual has with the different structures, appearances and social products.

The learners here make contact with foreign cultures through their cultural practices. These practices could happen in unauthentic situations such as when they learn about historical, social or artistic data. The anthropological data plays a role in foreign culture acquisition, because it reflects the culture specificity and reveals a large specter of the appearance, the representation and the values shared by the members of the community. In teaching and learning foreign culture, this approach is important for the knowledge and the comprehension of the studied culture.

5. Intercultural Approach

During the 1980s, the intercultural concept progressively entered foreign language teaching (through the communicative approach). Chambeu (cited in De Carlo 1998 : 43-44) identified that this concept changes the modality to radically access foreign culture.

The authors claimed that the intercultural competence and the intercultural communication are the priority, in contrast to the interaction, which is the exchange process that allows two interlocutors to influence each other and to mix mutually, it also involves the inter-subjectivity. The intercultural element solicits two Subjects. It recognizes the status of the other, by accepting the eventual reciprocity of the "Significant" look.

According to Zarate (1983 : 36), for foreign learners "contact with other cultural systems and other visions of the world, construct points of friction, places of dysfunction and develop occasions where aberrant significations could develop". The intercultural approach, according to Defays (2003 : 78), aims to teach students the culture of others, to help them to understand and to encourage them about tolerance. It has the objective of allowing students to cross over the cultural difference and to live in a pluri-cultural society without incomprehension. Steele (1996 : 57) stated that the learning of foreign language according to the intercultural model is done in the context of human relations, the discovering of oneself, of others and of the plurality of cultural identities. Competence will help students avoid generalizations about the behavior and mentality of foreigners and to put into perspective the stereotypes concerning the country of the language studied. For Neuner (2003 : 22), from the 80s, there are "in the intercultural approach, some themes aimed at increasing awareness, not only of the language but also of the intercultural experiences, stereotypes, and the construction of meaning, etc.". The intercultural pedagogy is dynamic. It inspires a coordinated life and living together amongst a variety of different people. It makes the school a place of study, and a place to live. Porcher and Abdallah-Pretceille (1996 : 8) stated that "the intercultural concept is based on the principle of hard and simple at the same time, identical to me and different from me." This means that in order to live alongside other people

with different cultures can be smooth or difficult at the same time. If they have opposite ways of seeing things, it might be difficult for people from other cultures, but if their cultures are similar, it will be easy to those who want to adapt themselves to be one part of this new culture.

The acquisition of intercultural competence has to be based on the interaction between knowing how to be, knowing how to learn, knowledge and knowing how to do. Denis (2000 : 62) stated that learner should know how:

- to construct and maintain the attitudes system, and this inside the same class is done in their relationship with the other learners (know how to be),
- to develop critical thinking, which means the methods allowing them to evaluate and to readapt their ways of doing (know how to learn),
- to create points of reference among the general socio-cultural data, the elements concerning communication, and the intercultural connection (knowledge),
- to learn to react/interact in unpredictable situations and to deal with contextual information and the interlocution situation (know how to do).

For the implementation of these five approaches; traditional methods (Grammar-Translation), Audio-Oral and Structured-Global Visual-Audio (SGVA), Communicative Approach, Socio-Cultural approach and Intercultural approach, it depends on the type of material or document the teachers select for their class. Two kinds of documents used with these approaches are 'created documents' and 'authentic documents.' The first type of document is composed of:

- the presentation of the cultural themes,
- the different situations in daily life of people of the target language,
- the other documents created for teachers to teach culture of the target country.

For the second type of document, authentic documents, they are normally produced by the native for the native, not for people who speak

other languages. A type of this kind of document, for example, is a tourism brochure, metro ticket, newspaper, etc. As an example, contemporary French language textbooks include an increasing amount of intercultural issues within them. The producers of French language textbooks present not only French culture to the students, but also the ability to compare French culture with their own culture. Textbooks such as "Latitudes 1" or "Initial 1" or "Studio 60" contain some topics that need to be discussed about the differences between the country of the students and that of the target language (see annexe). Teachers can choose one or many methods which they think are best suited to the materials used.

For the conclusion, the aim of language class must not be only to learn to practice language perfectly but it is also a place where learners can increase their level of language, cultural and intercultural skills and competency. Tagliante (2006 : 166) states that the teacher should give importance to the socio-cultural practices and the content which create the comparative analytical approach, while watching that nothing could shock learners who have different ideology. We can conclude by borrowing the conclusion given by Haydée Maga in the article "Educate students of French language to the intercultural", published on the website Franc parler[1]:

The awareness of culture in teaching foreign languages is necessary, not only to communicate efficiently, but also because it addresses the ethical issues. Fighting xenophobia and ethnocentrism, avoiding prejudice and discrimination is from now on the responsibility of the pedagogues and the people in education.

And one of the educational objectives of learning institutions from now on is to, "enlarge the humanist project to the global level (understanding between people, mutual enrichments…)." Learners have to know how to behave and how to face the native speakers of the language they are learning in different situations.

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[1] http://www.francparler.org/dossiers/interculturel_former.htm

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Annexe

QUEL CADEAU OFFRIR ?

Selon les occasions, trouver une idée de cadeau peut être facile ou très difficile…

La naissance d'un enfant

Vos amis ont eu un enfant ?
Le cadeau est facile : des vêtements pour l'enfant. Pensez à prendre les chaussettes avec le pantalon, ou le chapeau avec le manteau. Quand l'enfant est grand, vous pouvez offrir un jouet qui correspond à son âge.

Info + : Les vêtements d'un bébé, pendant la première année, coûtent 1 200 euros.
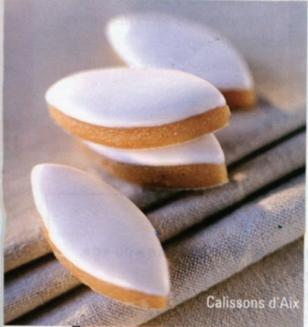
Vous êtes d'une autre ville, d'une autre région, d'un autre pays

Facile ! Apportez une spécialité de votre ville, région ou pays !
Une spécialité à manger ou à regarder !

Info + : Il y a, en France, plus de 600 spécialités régionales comme le nougat de Montélimar, le calisson d'Aix ou la bêtise de Cambrai.

Calissons d'Aix

Un dîner

Quand ils sont invités à dîner, les Français offrent des fleurs, du vin ou le dessert. Attention, pour le dessert, demandez leur accord aux personnes qui vous invitent. Les fleurs sont toujours un joli cadeau. Les Français offrent beaucoup de roses, de tulipes, d'orchidées et d'œillets. Si vous êtes invité à Noël ou à Pâques, vous pouvez offrir des chocolats (mais pas au mois de juillet !).

Info + : Chaque année, les Français achètent pour environ 990 millions d'euros de fleurs coupées. Le prix moyen d'un bouquet de fleurs est de 20 euros.

Info + : Les Français mangent environ 7 kg de chocolat par an, les Suisses 12 kg.

Latitudes 1, page 74

Latitudes 1, page 75

Studio 60, page 56

Initial 1, page 78