

# FOCUS ON ENGLISH

## TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGE CULTURE IN THE FL CLASSROOM

Both in Polish and foreign literature we may come across a variety of terms that refer to the concept of culture. The notion of FL culture is very broad and complex ,since it includes many aspects of human activity.E.D.Allen and R.M Valette (1972:246) define culture in the following way :

*" The word culture may be defined in two different ways. In one sense it is the sum total of people`s achievements and contributions to civilisation:art,music,architecture,technology, scientific discoveries and politics. The second meaning includes the behavioral patterns of lifestyles of people : when and where they eat, how they make a living the way they organize their society,the attitudes they express towards friends and their families , how they act in different situations, which expressions they use."*

The first meaning is often referred to as **culture with a capital C** or **achievement culture**.The second meaning belongs to the category which is usually called **culture with a small c** or **behaviour culture**.



Cultural patterns , customs the ways of living are reflected in a language. Every language has specific vocabulary items, idioms, speech acts, the concepts which are totally different in another language. Language learning is obscured without some recognition of cultural values.Therefore, second language learners must not only be aware of this interdependence,but *"they must be taught its nature in order to convince them of the essentiality of including culture in the study of the language"* ( J.M Valdes,1986:4)



## Culture As A Motivational Factor in FL Learning

**Motivation** is probably the most frequently used term for explaining the success or failure in performing any complex task. Motivation is commonly referred to as an inner drive, impulse, desire or emotion that encourage somebody to pursue a course of action.

Gardener and Lambert ( 1972:3) distinguished two basic kinds of motivation: ***integrative motivation*** when the learner wishes to learn more about a FL community because he wants to be accepted as a member of that group ; and ***instrumental motivation*** when he learns a language for utilitarian benefits gained from language proficiency such as a better job, marks at school or promotion.

Integrative and instrumental motivation are examples of **extrinsic motivation** which is related to factors that take place outside the classroom .

It is **intrinsic motivation** that plays the crucial role in most students` success or failure. This kind of motivation is connected with everything that takes place in the classroom.

Harmer ( 1991:4) observes that many students bring no extrinsic motivation to the classroom.What is worse, they may even have negative feelings about FL culture. One of the most significant factors influencing learners` motivation is the person of the teacher. . The contemporary EFL teacher must have a thorough background knowledge of culture of English speaking countries.When introducing cultural content the teacher must maintain a complete neutrality. His approach must be informative, analytical and objective so as not to prove the superiority of one culture over another.

The teacher should make the study of culture an integral part of every lesson and relate FL culture to teaching language patterns and skills.He should also stimulate students` intellectual curiosity about the target language culture by means of choosing appropriate materials, techniques and activities.



## Motivational Role of Realia and Authentic Materials in FL Learning

The idea of planning syllabus around students' needs rather than a fixed body of knowledge has

serious implications for language teaching. There are lot of coursebooks available which convey cultural information and contain a cultural component. However, the greatest disadvantage of them is that they treat culture themes from one dimensional perspective (usually Anglo-centric). Text are imaginary and lack any elements of real life. The language in them is perfect, but artificial. Moreover, even the best book covered from unit to unit may become boring and demotivating.

The emphasis on students' needs implies that the teacher himself becomes a writer and syllabus designer. In fact, he needs to develop materials and exercises based on realia and authentic texts. There are many sources of authentic materials that can be adapted and used in FL lessons. The most important of them are : **literature, newspapers, magazines, songs, video films, radio and TV broadcasts** .

For one thing they represent the actual goal of language learning, including the difficulties that learning materials avoid. The greatest advantage is that they provide an authentic, realistic model of written and spoken language and are challenging and motivating to learners. Their appropriate use will enable the FL students to gain an access to the life and thought of people who speak the target language. Their effective use calls for the sympathetic orientation towards the culture of the target language.

## Using literature in a FL Classroom

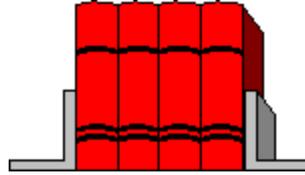
Literature can be a motivating factor in FL learning. It is very useful in developing linguistic knowledge. Besides, students like literature , since it gives them enjoyment. What is more, it provides a genuine linguistic context which could be an ideal way of understanding the life of the target language country.

The world of novels, short stories, poems or plays offers a full, vivid context in which the reader can discover customs, thoughts, values, feelings of characters, their lifestyles and behaviour.

The selection of literary texts must be adequate to the students' interests, expectations and language level. Texts should be modern and comprehensible to the students: not too easy, not too difficult.

Literature should be introduced in the FL classroom from the very beginning. In a primary school the teacher may use nursery rhymes, animal stories, fairy tales, humour stories, comics and so on...

Secondary schools seem to be proper place for introduction of literature in a broader sense. Students could be trained to read novels, poetry, drama. They could deal with the language intended for native speakers and become familiar with various linguistic uses and conventions of written mode and style.



## Newspapers and Magazines in a FL Classroom

Newspapers and magazines are one of the most easily available sources of written language. They contain authentic texts that can cover interesting topics. Language teachers who want to enliven their classes often turn to newspapers. On the other hand, newspapers are not easy material to teach, since they might set barriers to comprehension. They contain all aspects of FL culture: present people in their own natural settings, reveal those cultural patterns which are unfamiliar to readers.

In the classroom students might be trained to work on headlines, front pages, horoscopes, agony columns, advertisements, news, letters to editors or TV schedules.

There might be other things that can be fruitfully used during the FL lessons: cartoons, caricatures, photos, graphs, charts etc...

## Music and Songs

The idea of using music in the FL classroom is not a new one, although sometimes undervalued by FL teachers.

Songs have been perceived as something frivolous and good only for young children.

Learning through music and songs is often described as being very natural. Music is such a fundamental manifestation of language and human need to communicate that it is firmly associated with culture.

Using music and songs in the lessons of English may be both enjoyable and educational. Music can be helpful in removing psychological barriers, can evoke imagination, since the learners are free to interpret it on an individual basis and express their personal point of view. There is a variety to choose from : nursery rhymes, pop songs, protest songs, children`s songs etc...Songs and lyrics can be useful way of learning vocabulary, pronunciation, structure and sentence patterns. They are obviously connected with listening and learners are naturally motivated. However, the texts should be carefully selected as some of them are of the poor quality and cannot be quoted in polite company.

## Films and Video

Foreign language films, particularly video films are the most powerful media that can project culture life and provide the learners with the living experience of the FL culture. There are a lot of advantages of using video films in the classroom. The combination of sounds and vision gives a full, immediate context for the language use. Films present a variety of communicative situations. The speakers in dialogues can be seen and heard. The students can observe native speakers' behaviour and get much paralinguistic, non-verbal information like facial expressions, gestures and so on...

Another advantage of video films is that they make FL culture accessible to those who have never been abroad. Besides, watching a video film can give both enjoyment and relaxation. Video presentations are attractive to the students, since they like watching, even if their comprehension is limited.

## Realia and Pictures

The use of pictures and realia (physical objects that are related to the target culture) is another way of providing students with cultural knowledge. The classroom, where they learn should reflect the culture of English speaking world. It should become a kind of cultural island. The walls can be covered with advertising posters, maps, charts. Tables and shelves may be filled with books, current magazines, newspapers. All kind of realia: postcards, stamps, coins, calendars, menus, tickets, toys, souvenirs, and other artifacts should be attractively displayed.

The teacher should also collect pictorial materials to illustrate the topic of the lesson. It is easy to make own collection by cutting out the pages of glossy magazines. Cultural objects can be used in almost every aspect of language teaching and they can enormously contribute to attractiveness of the lessons.

# Summary

FL culture can be a motivating factor to study a foreign language. Culture should be taught by using and applying various types of authentic materials such as : newspapers and magazines, literature, lyrics, video films, realia . All of them are very important , since they make real communication in the classroom. They offer a wide possibility to develop linguistic knowledge as well as all language skills, Lessons are more attractive and students are better motivated.

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