

# INTEGRATING CULTURE INTO EFL INSTRUCTION

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## Abstract

The role of English as lingua franca demands not only the mastery of the linguistic aspects but also the understanding of the cultural ones from anyone wishing to communicate with people having the English cultural background. EFL teachers may all agree to the need of integrating culture and its teaching into foreign language education. However, EFL textbooks and classroom practice often focus on linguistic knowledge and neglect the importance of building cultural awareness that would enable the learners to perform appropriately in the target language. This negligence may stem from the worry about cultural erosion, the degradation of commitment to the local values or national identity, but it may also be due to the lack of knowledge of the target culture itself and how to integrate it in the language instruction. The writer of this paper raises the issue of this negligence and offers practical ways of integrating culture into the EFL instruction. Two texts of culture grams that can be manipulated as learning materials are provided and two modes of integrating them in the instruction are suggested. The presentation model is expected to enable teachers to foster intercultural competence at every stage of the teaching and learning process.

**Keywords:** Culture, cultural awareness, culture grams, EFL instruction, learning material, explicit and implicit modes

## I. Introduction

Anyone wishing to communicate successfully with people having a different culture must have some understanding of this new culture. Helping learners to master English for the purpose of communicating in English demands not only the mastery of the linguistic aspects but also the understanding of the English cultural aspects. EFL teachers, therefore, should incorporate culture in the teaching and learning process. However, EFL textbooks and classroom practice often focus on linguistic knowledge and ignore the target language culture that would enable the learners to perform appropriately in the target language. This ignorance may stem from the worry about the cultural erosion - the degradation of the commitment to the local or national identity or values and norms, but it may also be due to the lack of knowledge of the target culture itself and how to

integrate it in the EFL instruction. There is still another problem emerging, i.e. a controversy regarding which culture the teachers should teach – the learners' culture, the target language culture, or both.

## **II. Literature Review**

Since culture is embedded within every aspect of society, language learning should not be isolated from the society that uses it (Seelye, 1984). Helping learners to master the target language demands not only the understanding linguistic aspects but also the cultural aspects. It necessarily involves exposure to the situations in which the native speakers use the language in their day-to-day encounters. In Risager's (1991) words, speaking with a native speaker includes the ability to act in real life situations, and is not merely a question of knowing the grammar and lexis.

Learners should be made aware of the differences and similarities between their culture and the target language culture. In Byram's (1991: 19) view, in intercultural foreign language education, the process of foreign language learning must engage the learners in the role of a 'comparative ethnographer.' In Alptekin's (2002: 58) words, "learning a foreign language becomes a kind of enculturation, where one acquires new cultural frames of reference and a new world view, reflecting those of the target language culture and its speakers." Thus, language teachers must be equipped with intercultural competence, so that they can help the learners to acquire knowledge about how to use the language in order to function successfully in the appropriate socio-cultural contexts within the target language setting.

Up to the present it is widely acknowledged that textbooks are the main materials used in language classes. In Hinkel's (1999) words, the books may be the teacher, the trainer, the authority, the resource, and the ideology in the foreign language classroom. Therefore, if the cultural aspects of the target language are missing from the books, it would be the teachers' responsibility to provide the supplement. Turkan & Celik (2007) propose that teachers create a classroom atmosphere in

which questions and discussions about the target culture, comparisons between students' native culture and the target culture are facilitated to reinforce the students' language learning.

### **III. Definition and Elements of Culture, and Whose Culture is to be Taught**

#### **A. Definitions of Culture**

1. **Culture** is the full range of learned human behavior patterns. (Tylor, 1871, in Dennis O'Neil, 2006, accessed on 21/10/2009 from [http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture\\_1.htm](http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture_1.htm))
2. **Culture:** is a shared, learned, symbolic system of values, beliefs and attitudes that shapes and influences perception and behavior -- an abstract "mental blueprint" or "mental code." ( <http://www2.eou.edu/~kdahl/cultdef.html> )
3. **Culture** refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving. (<http://wwwtamu.edu/classes/cosc/choudhury/culture.html/>)

From the three definitions above, it can be inferred that culture refers to learned human behavior patterns, resulting from cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, and concepts of the universe, covering both non-material and material objects. While material objects or artifacts such as agricultural implements, kitchen utensils, food products, fashion styles, are important aspects of culture, for the purpose of developing awareness of the importance of cross-cultural understanding, the writer prioritizes the non-material objects, cultural elements which are directly related to the do's and the don'ts learners should understand when communicating with overseas speakers of English. The material objects of culture will find exposure when the discussion on the non-material aspects requires them. With non-material objects as the priority, two most important elements of culture are outlined below.

## **B. Elements of Culture: Values and Norms**

*Values* are relatively general beliefs that either define what is right and what is wrong or specify general preferences. A belief that homicide is wrong and a preference for modern art are both values. *Norms*, on the other hand, are relatively precise rules specifying which behaviors are permitted and which are prohibited for group members. (<http://hrsbstaff.ednet>)

## **C. Whose Culture is to be taught?**

Over 65% of interactions in English are between non-native speakers (Graddol, 1996 in Tomlinson, 2003) and that, as a result, an international variety of English is already being evolved by the millions of non-native users of English who communicate with each other in English every day. Therefore, in Tomlinson's (2003) view, EFL and ESL materials in Asia should focus on preparing learners to use English both with other non-native speakers as a lingua franca and with native speakers too. This implies that values and norms to be integrated in the EFL instruction cover those of the learners' and native speakers' cultures, and those of the speakers of English as the second or foreign language, such as those of the speakers of English in Asian countries. A further consideration is on which culture should be the models exposed in the instructional materials.

For the EFL acquisition to happen, both linguistic and cultural aspects should be exposed to the learners. Therefore, the writer proposes the target language culture becomes the major part of the cultural aspects of the materials on culture. Local cultures will serve as counterpart materials to enable comparison between the learners' culture and the target language culture. The understanding of the target language (English) culture and those of the people speaking English will widen the learners' cultural perspectives, which may lead to cross-cultural and multicultural understanding.

## **IV. How to Integrate Culture into EFL Instruction?**

There are two modes teachers can use to integrate culture in their EFL instruction: explicit mode and implicit mode.

### A. Integrating Culture using Explicit Mode

In the Explicit Mode, teachers can make use of Culture Grams, Culture Capsules or other prepared materials on a society's values and norms as parts of the instructional materials to introduce culture but which can be used simultaneously to develop the language skills.

The first thing to consider is to select suitable texts for instructional purposes. Teachers may start with a topic on a tradition that may be known in both the learners' and the target language cultures, such as New Year's Celebration. This will enable comparison and contrastive analysis, which make the topic meaningful to the learners. Then they can go on to the *culture grams*, which may extend the learners' understanding of the target language culture as well as those of other countries whose people communicate in English with people from other countries.. *CultureGrams* is concise, reliable, up-to-date country reports, written by local experts, addressing the cultures of all United Nations, 50 US states, and 13 Canadian provinces. CultureGrams helps teachers and learners discover the world with concise cultural and statistical snapshots of every country recognized by the United Nations - from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe.

The following is an example of prepared texts and how to use it explicitly in the instruction.

#### Text 1

#### Thanksgiving Day

<b>Observed by</b>	<b><u>Canada, United States</u></b>
<b>Type</b>	<b><u>National</u></b>
<b>Date</b>	4th Thursday in November (U.S.) 2nd Monday in October (Canada);
<b>2009</b>	October 12, 2009 (Canada); November 26, 2009 (U.S.)
<b>2010</b>	October 11, 2010 (Canada); November 25, 2010 (U.S.)



**Thanksgiving Day** is a harvest festival. Traditionally, it is a time to give thanks for the harvest and express gratitude in general. It is a holiday celebrated primarily in the United States and Canada.

The date and location of the first Thanksgiving celebration is a topic of modest contention. Though the earliest attested Thanksgiving celebration was on September 8, 1565 in what is now Saint Augustine, Florida, the traditional "first Thanksgiving" is venerated as having occurred at the site of Plymouth Plantation, in 1621.

Today, Thanksgiving is celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November in the United States and on the second Monday of October in Canada. Thanksgiving dinner is held on this day, or over the course of the associated weekend in Canada, usually as a gathering of family members and friends.

Text 2

### **Thanksgiving Day Recipes**

Thanksgiving is all about sharing, merry-making and feasting. Families get together for their customary 'thanksgiving dinner'. The festivity will be incomplete without making the customary 'Turkey' for dinner. Delight your near and dear ones with these mouth watering recipes. Right from main course to desserts, we have it all.



## ***How To Make A Perfect Roast Turkey***

Perfect Roast Turkey Recipe. Follow this recipe for a deliciously moist and tender roast turkey. The perfect choice for Christmas day with all the trimmings.

**Serves: 6 to 8 persons**

**Preparation Time: 2 minutes**

**Cooking Time: 5 hours**

**Oven Temperature: 220°c (425°F)**

Step 1: You will need...

- a 6 kg (13.2 lb) turkey
- 170 g softened butter
- 220 g smoked beef
- 1 Videojug recipe of sage, onion and sausage meat stuffing
- salt and pepper
- 1 skewer
- 1 roasting tin
- 1 large spoon
- aluminium foil
- 1 chopping board

Step 2: Preheat the oven

Set the oven to 220°C ( 425°F/ gas mark 7).

Step 3: Stuff the turkey

Place the turkey on a chopping board and push the stuffing deep inside the cavity of the bird. Use one hand to stuff and the other to keep the cavity area open. Continue until all the stuffing has been used.

Step 4: Grease the turkey

Generously grease the turkey all over the top with the softened butter. Make sure that you rub very well around the legs. Turn it over, continue to grease the underneath area and turn it back to its original position.

Step 5: Transfer to the roasting tray

Place the turkey onto a roasting tray and season with salt and black pepper.

Step 6: Add beef and wrap

Lay eight slices of beef, horizontally over the turkey, overlapping them as you go. Tear off two large pieces of foil and loosely cover the turkey. This allows air to circulate and keep it moist. Do not wrap it tightly as the turkey will not turn brown!

Step 7: Roast the turkey

Place the baking tray in the lowest part of the oven and leave to cook for 45 minutes. Turn the oven down to 170°C (325°F/ gas mark 3) and allow to cook for a further two hours.

Next, remove it from the oven, peel off the foil and place back into the oven. Cook for a further hour. After the hour, remove the turkey from the oven once more, take off the beef slices and set them aside.

Baste the whole of the turkey with juices from the pan. Turn the oven up to 200°C (390°F/ gas mark 6) and return the turkey to cook for another 45 minutes. Baste every fifteen minutes for the remaining cooking period to keep it nice and moist and to help the skin turn golden.

**Step 8: Check the turkey**

Remove the turkey from the oven after the cooking period. To check to see if it's cooked enough, place a wooden skewer into a leg or breast and give it a gentle squeeze. If the juices run clear it is done!

**Step 9: Allow to rest**

Transfer the turkey to a large serving platter and place the beef strips back over the bird. Allow it to rest for a good 30 minutes before carving.

**Step 10: Serve**

To create a traditional Thanksgivings dinner we have several serving suggestions to accompany your stuffed roast turkey: honey glazed carrots; fresh brussels sprouts; golden roasted potatoes; turkey gravy; bread sauce and roasted parsnips.

(<http://www.gourmet-food-revolution.com/thanksgiving-dinner-menu.html>)

Depending on the level of the learners' English mastery, any available text can be either adopted or adapted. Based on the background of the learners, a teacher should be able to make an accurate decision. While Text 1 may be used to introduce a Report text, Text 2 will serve as a Procedure text.

## **B. Integrating Culture using Implicit Mode**

In the Implicit Mode, teachers can make use of any possible means to insert cultural aspects in the instruction (serving as hidden syllabus). As a matter of fact, almost on any occasion, from the very beginning of an elementary course, a teacher can include cross-cultural understanding in his/her instruction. Providing time reference for *morning*, *afternoon*, *evening*, and *night*, for example, as these words are used in greetings, will raise learners'



awareness on the different uses of these words from their equivalents in the learners' native language. *Night* is equivalent to *malam* in Indonesian, but *Good night* is not the same as *Selamat malam* in Indonesian. The expression *Good night* is used when the interlocutors are parting and will not meet again until morning. The equivalent of *Good night* is *Selamat tidur* in Indonesian. Another example, a compliment given by a native speaker of English "You look great in this dress!" expects a response "Thank you." However, an EFL learner with Indonesian or Javanese cultural background might answer "Oh, no!" or "Come on, are you kidding?" – a response that suggests a form of modesty in the local culture, but can be violating a native speaker's expectation. These are only a small sample of cultural aspects teachers can include in their language instruction. There are myriads of cultural items that can be dealt with in the EFL classroom beyond the programmed activities or prepared materials. Resources on the do's and the don'ts in the American, English, Australian, Asian, or the world's culture can be accessed from the websites on *culture grams*, *culture capsules*, and other related topics.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In short, language learning cannot be detached from the cultural content it inherently carries to the language classrooms. As EFL learners in Indonesia will communicate with native speakers and non-native speakers of English, it sounds logical that the cultural aspects integrated in the instruction should include those of the target language culture and the learners' culture. Cultural items can be introduced to the learners explicitly embedded in the instructional materials or implicitly when occasion allows.

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