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THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Culture may be defined as a ‘social heredity’ transmitted from one generation to another generation with the accumulation of individual experiences, or a mode of activities differentiating people of one society from another society. Culture cannot be a biological phenomenon but a learned pattern of social behavior to be followed. It is a wonderful and unique phenomenon of human society with colorful diversity always changing its patterns which is the greatest beauty of human society. Culture forms beliefs, conveys ideas, and shares knowledge on customs and values. All of these characteristics are communicated through language which is an integral part of culture.

There have been popular speculations regarding the relationship of language with culture and thought. An American anthropologist, Sapir (1921), argues that culture and thought are language dependent on account of conveying the implicit meaning and inherited patterns of life. The acquired knowledge on such patterns reveals ones identity through the ways of thinking, feeling, acting, and behaving in a cultural context. Moreover, the cultural context determines the way people interact and make perceptions regarding any situation or the object of life. Thus, the existence of language into culture serves the means of communication among the individuals of a society.

Language and culture cannot exist independently: each is the shadow of the other to such an extent that language meaning can frequently be obscured if there is no recognition of cultural values. Using a communicative approach in the teaching of language involves teaching many aspects of the culture of the language too. Discussing the importance of cultural awareness in language teaching in his foreword to *Cultural Awareness* Formalin and Steeples, 1993), Alan Malay points out that "the concept of ‘culture’ has become something of a fashionable cliché in language-teaching circles in recent years." This being said, however, he feels that "culture" is an important

component of foreign language programmers and later on, he suggests that culture can be used as a valuable language-learning resource.

According to John Schuman (1976), learners will have greater difficulty acquiring a foreign language if the social distances between their native culture and that of the language they are learning are considerable. The converse should therefore also occur: the shorter the social distance, the easier it should be to learn a language. With Schumann's hypothesis, problems arise when one has to define what the term social distance means, how differing degrees or levels of social distance can be determined and how this distance can be measured.

It is observed that language is used in a cultural phenomenon to exchange ideas and opinions or share experiences. It is so much interrelated that without understanding properly the cultural setting and social behavior of a language use, it leads to misinterpretation and breakdown in the language communication, or it may result into errors and misunderstanding because language is not simply sending or receiving information but it functions as a social behavior in certain cultural context.

Culture is not only inseparably related to language, but also plays an important role throughout the process of language teaching and learning. The question is not whether or not to teach culture, but, rather, what kind of teaching can promote students' understanding of the nature of the language, communication and human relations. Tucker and Lambert (1973) stated that the ability to communicate fully in a second language depends on the degree of non-ethnocentrism of the learner. The successful learner must develop "an awareness of and sensitivity toward the values and traditions of the people whose language is being studied.

The ability to communicate in a number of foreign languages and successfully adapt to different cultures and their local manners thus becomes vital for the survival of businesses and enterprises operating in a globalized economy and participating in international markets.

Finally, among other things, studying culture can give learners a liking for the native speakers of the target language, contribute to general education and help to learn about the geography, history, customs and values of the target culture.

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