Chapter 4

Bringing Cross-Cultural Communication Analysis Into Foreign Language Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

The teaching of a second or foreign language has always incorporated some aspect of cultural information, but the full and rather complex nature of cross-cultural and intercultural communication has not always been an explicit pedagogical focus. The chapter outlines the key components of cross-cultural and intercultural communication (CCC/ICC), and reviews some major theories that have dominated the area. It is suggested that providing explicit instruction in CCC/ICC to language learners will prepare them for interacting appropriately in the target language in whatever global context they may wish to use it. Learners need to be not only linguistically and pragmatically but culturally competent as well as they move into multicultural contexts of interaction in that language. Specific elements of cross-/intercultural communication with regards to linguistic features and potential points of confusion in the EFL (English-as-a-foreign language) classroom are discussed as accessible examples. The chapter then relates some ways that cross-/intercultural mindfulness and understanding can form an active part of the teaching of a second/foreign language in order to enhance the full language learning experience and subsequent entry to successful communication.

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INTRODUCTION

The teaching of foreign languages is often closely tied to easily available components of culture; for example, a student of German would expect to learn something of German life (e.g., stereotypically castles, drinking customs, regional dress, formality levels in language, and so on) as part of learning the language itself. Structural and, more recently, communicative-based syllabi may include cultural references of a general nature. However, as Cowley and Hanna (2005) point out in their discussion of French language teaching in Australia, foreign language classrooms need to move beyond a purely linguistic or outer cultural focus and also implement an integrated series of authentic cultural studies relevant to the personal and career goals of the learners. So, in their case, students learning French should learn the deeper aspects of culture as represented by France. As Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has evolved into the preferred pedagogical framework, the introduction of cultural components into the language classroom is inevitable as authentic materials and diverse linguistic and sociological aspects of language learning are highlighted (see Kramsch, 1993, for example). English today obviously has roots in western British and American society (Kayman, 2004) and many students learn the language with the intention of interacting with native speakers who have a shared linguistic and cultural history with speakers in Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. However, while most students may have a particular “English” culture in mind, a broad cultural understanding of how English is contextualized across the globe is essential to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Learners of English cannot necessarily expect to learn so-called “English” culture as part of their language acquisition process. This is especially salient if its learners wish to move beyond their local context of study and become fully proficient as they travel, study or do business in the English language outside their home culture. Students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) may easily encounter speakers of English who do not originate in the five nations listed above. Moving into parts of the world where a variant of “Global English” (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006) is the norm will entail a broader communicative and cultural competence than a singular focus on any one of the five main predominantly English-speaking nations could offer. That is, students must learn how to become aware of, assess and implement general strategies for cross/intercultural communication in order to prepare for any context in which the English language is the medium of interaction. However, not all guidelines or pedagogical materials for teaching EFL embrace or focus on this obvious fact in a successful manner (Forman, 2014). This chapter outlines the general contributions of research in cross-cultural/intercultural communication to the area of language pedagogy, with a focus on teaching English as a foreign language. The main assumed audience of this paper are those who are now or intending to teach
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