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Do Instructors' Perceptions on Teaching Culture in Foreign Language Classroom Make a Difference: Lessons from a Qualitative Study of Language Instructors and Learners

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Abstract

The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (1996; 2006) listed culture as one of five goals of learning a foreign language. However, the perceptions of foreign language instructors towards the teaching of culture and their effects on students' foreign language learning remain unclear. This study involved six instructors from five different foreign language programs and four undergraduate students who are enrolled in the current language programs. Documents, classroom observations, and interviews were collected and analyzed to report the findings. The results indicated that instructors' perceptions on teaching culture in foreign language classroom did make a difference in students' learning and teaching a foreign language.

Keywords: The teaching of culture, perceptions, instructors, culture teaching and learning, qualitative study

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1. Introduction

With the increasing mobility of people throughout the world and the formation of a pluralistic community of diversity and co-existence created by globalization and internationalization, the needs for foreign language instructors and learners to develop intercultural competency has been advocated as an essential component in L2 classroom. The field of teaching culture in foreign language education has been rapidly developing and flourishing ever since the publication of Nelson Brooks' *Language and Language Learning: Theory and Practice*, in 1960 (Lange & Paige, 2003). This book started a discussion on the topic of teaching culture in the foreign language classroom. About four decades later, the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (1996) listed culture as one of the five goals of learning a foreign language. Since then, foreign language instructors have generally accepted that teaching culture is an indispensable part of teaching language. In 2007, a Modern Language Association of America (MLA) report on foreign language learning in higher education emphasized the importance of teaching both

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language and culture at the post-secondary level. This report demonstrates that culture continues to be an important element in foreign language education in the 21st century.

However, due to the student-oriented philosophy in education field, most of the existing research has focus on the learners' side (Gass & Mackey, 2012). Also, most of language instructors have negative attitudes towards the teaching of culture because culture is still viewed as a traditional domain of anthropology rather than foreign language education (Furstenberg, 2010; Lafayette, 1997). For example, although some foreign language instructors (Shrum & Glisan, 2005; Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2008) mentioned using music, fine arts, classical literature, or other resources, which essential fall into the cultural products and cultural practices categories, while teaching foreign language, they still avoid using the word "culture". Therefore, there is a paucity of research about instructors' perceptions on teaching culture and their effects in foreign language classroom.

To expand the existing research and share further insights on the instructors' perceptions on the teaching of culture in foreign language classroom, this study explored the how instructors' perceptions on the teaching of culture and their effects on learners in foreign language classroom. To address the stated purpose, this qualitative study examined the following research questions:

1. What perceptions do foreign language instructors have towards the teaching of culture in college-level classrooms?
2. What are the effects of instructors' perceptions on the teaching of culture at college classroom level?

2. Review of Literature

Brooks (1968) started the discussion on culture exclusively for language teachers' use by defining two different sources of a social group's culture, Olympian and Hearthstone, which indicate a culture either comes from the top of a society or from the bottom. From an intercultural communication perspective, Damen (1987; 2003) defined culture as a set of behavioral, cognitive and emotional patterns. In 1999, the National Standards provided a new definition of culture, which has heavily influenced language teaching. Since its publication, the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (1999; 2006) has become the most fundamental document in the teaching of foreign language in the United States. As the national standard for foreign language teachers, this document is used in conjunction with state and local frameworks and serves as a guideline to determine the best approaches and most reasonable expectations for students in individual districts, schools and colleges. In the National Standards, the term "culture" is generally understood to include the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products—both tangible and intangible—of a society (2006, p.47).

Despite different operational definitions of culture, a majority of scholars agreed that there is a close relationship between culture and language (Kramsch, 1993; Lange, 2003). Damen (1987) stated that language serves to facilitate classification within cultures and reflects relationships within cultures. Furthermore, Lange (1998) connected language and culture by saying "language is ... one aspect of culture and is the medium for understanding, sharing, and negotiating meaning for all aspects of culture" (p. 24).

The Modern Language Association (MLA) Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages (2007) published a report on teaching culture at the higher educational level in the context of globalization and the post 9/11 environment. This report emphasized "culture" as a comparable concept with "language" in today's modern language education. As the report pointed out, culture and language are tightly interrelated, "Language is a complex multifunctional phenomenon that links an individual to other individuals, to communities, and to national cultures," and "Culture is represented not only in events, texts, buildings, artwork, cuisines, and many other artifacts but also in language itself" (p. 236).

The definitions of culture by educators, especially by foreign language educators, have a significant influence on the development of teaching culture. The different beliefs about culture might cause different ways of teaching culture (Damen, 1987; Lange & Paige, 2003). For example, instructors who see culture as fact would view the learning of culture as the acquisition of facts and may only conceptualize culture as the teaching of stereotypes, famous events, and hero figures. In contrast, instructors who believe culture is a dynamic, rather than a static, entity would probably view the teaching of culture as a process of discovery and construction and encourage students to construct their own cultural knowledge. Thus, it is necessary to ascertain how teachers think about culture before asking them about the approaches, strategies and technology that they use to teach culture.

3. Methodology

To examine the culture-teaching experience of the instructors and their effects on students' experience in foreign language learning, we conducted a qualitative case study, a methodology in which "the case itself is center stage, not variables" (Schwandt, 1997, p.13). More specifically, in order to treat the experience of each instructor and student as a separate case as well as compare and contrast the effects of those different cases, we conduct a what Stake (2005) called "collective case study". It was our intention to study the experiences of those cases, as well as their similarities and differences on influencing students' foreign language learning, which would "lead to better understanding, and perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases" (Stake, 2005, pp. 445-446).

3.1. Setting

Merriam (2009) defined case study as an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system (p. 40). In this study, the bounded system is a foreign language department in a university as a single entity—the Modern Language Department at Western university. As a bounded system, the Modern Language Department has some characteristics that make it a good example for looking at foreign language programs at universities of similar sizes. For example, this department offers seven foreign languages: Spanish, German, French, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic at a university in the Western region of the United States. The department offers more Spanish and French courses than other kinds of language courses. Forty percent of the instructors in the department are native speakers of the language they teach. Most language learners in this department are undergraduate students born in the mountain west region of the United States.

In addition, Thomas (2011) emphasized that a case should be studied holistically by one or more data collection strategies. Thus, we used documents, observations, and interviews to study the teaching of culture and cultural perspectives in the Modern Language Department. Instead of focusing on one or two instructors, we studied a group of language instructors who teach different kinds of languages, come from different age groups, and have different teaching experience. This study adopted several types of data collection including interviews with instructors and students, classroom observations, and document mining in order to holistically study this department from various perspectives.

3.2. Participants

Six language instructors who responded to our invitation to participate in this study--Dr. Charles, Dr. Hassan, Lin, Frank, Claudia, and Asta²—showed their interest in the teaching of culture in the foreign language education than the other instructors. They talked about specific instructional strategies they use, and/or shared more insights about teaching culture than other instructors the researchers contacted.

These six instructors also invited researchers to observe their language classes. On average, we interviewed each of these six instructors twice and visited each of their language classes three times for this study. The six instructors are representative of three different types of language instructors: (1) tenured professors with many decades of teaching and research experience, such as Charles and Hassan; (2) tenure-line instructors in their 40s with more than 10 years of teaching experience, such as Lin and Frank; and (3) graduate assistants who teach introductory language classes and who have just begun their teaching careers, such as Claudia and Asta.

Dr. Charles and Dr. Hassan are both tenured professors with decades of teaching experience at the college level. Dr. Charles has been teaching Spanish for 29 years. He has published many academic articles about Spanish literature and Hispanic culture. Dr. Charles is a well-recognized expert for his teaching and research in the Modern Language Department. Dr. Charles has taught several Spanish courses, including introductory classes for beginners and literacy classes for graduate students. Dr. Hassan has also been teaching at the university for over 20 years. Originally, Dr. Hassan came from Tunisia and Arabic is his first language. His Arabic cultural origin is strongly reflected by the decorations in his office and his passion when he talked about how to bring Arabic culture into language classrooms. Dr. Hassan is currently working on bringing more teachers to the Modern Language Department at RMU to expand the Arabic language program.

Lin and Frank are senior lecturers in their 40s in the Modern Language Department. Lin came from China in 2002 and has been teaching Chinese at RMU ever since. Lin initially started the Chinese program at her university. Frank was born in the United States and German is his second language. He has been teaching German at the university for over 20 years. Frank teaches German courses at all levels and has interests in German literacy and culture.

Claudia and Asta are two instructors in their late 20s. Both have been teaching foreign languages at RMU for less than a year. Claudia recently came from Mexico to pursue a master's degree in Spanish while teaching introductory Spanish courses as a graduate assistant. She was not yet used to living in America, and her English was not very fluent. On the contrary, Asta was born in America and always wanted to be a German teacher. She had lived in Germany for about 2 years when she was a child. Both Claudia and Asta were teaching beginning level courses during the time of the study and were eager to learn more about how to teach a foreign language.

We chose these specific six instructors' responses because they are representative of a larger group of language instructors of different ages, experience, attitudes, beliefs, and interests in the Modern Language Department. Their ages range from the 20s to the 50s, their experience in teaching range from one year to 29 years, and they teach introductory, intermediate and advanced level courses. Three of them are native speakers, and the other three are not. In other words, these six instructors represented multiple generations and various types of language instructors at the targeted university. Also, these six instructors provided great details of their perceptions on teaching of culture and of their understandings of the effects that might have on their students' foreign language learning.

In addition, we interviewed four students from those six instructors' classroom to further explore the effects that the instructors' perceptions to students' learning. Hearing the experiences from both sides help researchers better understand the differences that instructors made on students' foreign language learning through the teaching of culture.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Documents, classroom observations, and semi-structured and in-depth interview data were collected from January, 2011 to January, 2012. We conducted the interviews with 12 instructors and nine students. Interview data were transcribed and analyzed along with the field notes after each interview, classroom observation, and document. When interview transcripts were completed, they were sent to participants to

check and clarify for accuracy and to seek additional responses. Once initial interviews were completed, follow-up interviews were conducted based on feedbacks from interviewees. In this way, the data we collected were further validated. After collecting data from the interviews and documents, we coded the data and selected emerging categories according to prevalence and frequency (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Each interview was audio taped and then transcribed verbatim (Creswell, 2009). Credibility of the findings was secured by exploring in different sources of information, member checking, rich and thick descriptions, and academic advisor's auditing (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Also, throughout the study, we wrote analytical memos (Glense & Peshkin, 1992) through which we were able to recognize and refine emerging themes.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. *Perceptions on the Relationship between Language and Culture*

In the interviews we conducted with the six language instructors, each instructor acknowledged that culture is a key component in foreign language classes. These instructors expressed their beliefs about the relationships between language and culture, as well as noting the possible consequences of teaching a foreign language without teaching its culture. Instructors reported that language and culture are closely interconnected, and that students cannot have a comprehensive grasp of a language without understanding its culture. For example, Lin stated:

Personally, every language is the carrier of its culture; therefore, it is hard to teach language without teaching culture. When you use the textbook to teach language, there will be culture between the lines. I mean, you need to teach students about the culture, or you will find a common phenomenon in students' language learning: students have no problem in learning the vocabulary and grammar but when it comes to using them, they do not know how to use them within a certain culture context because they do not know the culture.

Similarly, Dr. Hassan suggested that, "Language is a primarily cultural practice," when he said:

Culture in the classroom is something that has to be defined as a curriculum. In other words, it should be in teachers' minds even at the beginning level of learning that teachers should not only introduce the mechanics of the language, not only the format of the language, they also need to introduce to students the aspects of culture. They are not only learning the cold language ... If you don't teach culture, your students still can speak the language but would act in totally wrong ways.

Lin and Dr. Hassan explained how language and culture are related in different ways: Lin said that "language is the carrier of its culture" and Dr. Hassan said, "Language is a primarily cultural practice." In spite of the different ways they expressed it, both of them proposed that language and culture are closely interconnected. Because of the interconnection, they reached the same conclusion: instructors must teach culture while teaching a foreign language. Lin's and Dr. Hassan's choice parallels closely Damen's (1987) seminal argument that students need both the knowledge of a language, including vocabulary, grammar, and the knowledge of its culture, such as how to choose suitable words and behave appropriately in certain situations, in order to communicate with native speakers. Lin and Dr. Hassan worried that students probably would not successfully communicate with native speakers in the target languages without the knowledge of the culture associated with the language.

Although the other four instructors in this study did not explicitly address the relationship between language and culture like Lin and Dr. Hassan, all of them discussed culture as a key component in their language classes during their interviews while implying that culture and language are closely interconnected. The close relationship between culture and language has been identified as a basic

rationale for the teaching of culture in foreign language education by other scholars in the field (Brooks, 1968; Damen, 1987) and by the National Standards (1999; 2006).

4.2. *Perceptions towards the Role of Culture*

Among the six instructors, there were two main types of attitudes toward the role of culture in language classes. The first type of attitude views culture as an additional or add-on component of teaching language. In this perspective, instructors described culture as a dispensable component in language classes. For instructors who have such an attitude, teaching culture in language classrooms is like adding an appetizer to a meal in order to entice people to eat the main course. These instructors viewed cultural knowledge as an appetizer and language knowledge as the main dish of a meal. An appetizer is usually served to stimulate people's appetite rather than to be the main purpose of a meal. The use of culture is only a way to add interest to a language rather than integral to the learning of the language. Some instructors in the study, for example, believed that talking about cultural knowledge in class would attract students to the target language, but they rarely considered teaching culture as one of the major objectives in class. Claudia, a new Spanish instructor, showed this culture-as-appetizer approach when she shared:

Because I'm from Mexico, when I'm there, there's always culture. I always tell them about my personal experience, like the songs that my mom sang to me when I was a baby. Because some students are not interested, I have to capture their attention. I talk about culture and then give them a little bit [of] grammar.

In the quote Claudia implied that the teaching of culture is like providing students an appetizer and that grammar is the main dish. Although Claudia talked a lot about teaching grammar, she emphasized that her primary goal in class should be capturing students' attention to teach grammar. And she realized that as a person from Mexico, she has built-in advantages—rich personal experience in the target language environment—to offer such an appetizer to attract students' attention. For instructors like Claudia, culture is not one of the ultimate goals of or a major part in their classes. Since culture is just an appetizer and not intrinsically as important as grammar, there is no compelling reason for these instructors to spend much time on the teaching of culture, or making cultural perspectives a focus of the class.

Lin also believed that culture is an additional, not a major component in her classes. Lin explained:

Based on my knowledge and experience, culture has its tangible and intangible parts and to the beginner, culture teaching will stay on the tangible part ... for beginners, they usually are not encouraged to raise questions on intangible culture; instead, we will focus on the tangible part.

Even though Lin understood that culture contains the intangible part—in other words, cultural perspectives—she still believed that it is not worth the trouble to bring in the complexity. An appetizer is just an appetizer, which is never as important as the main dish. For instructors like Claudia and Lin, teaching language is their ultimate goal, and teaching culture becomes necessary only for the purpose of attracting their students' attention.

In contrast to the first type of attitude, which treats culture as an additional component in class, the second type of attitude considers culture as a broad and important context for language. In other words, culture always surrounds a language and helps to determine its interpretation. For example, Dr. Charles argued, "Language does not exist in the vacuum; you have to have a context, in which language [is] to be taught. And, contexts could be related to the cultures". Dr. Charles indicated that language always exists in a cultural context. Asta shared a similar belief and offered an example:

I think if you really want your students to understand the language, you have to teach culture. For example, in Spanish 1010 we talk about foods. There are some foods that do not exist in America. So you have to teach about that, and how they eat them. If you really want your

students to understand the language, culture comes naturally. You also should give students a real context for the language. If you give a real context, the language and culture would come naturally. Just teaching them vocabulary does not make a real context.

As Asta indicated, one language does not simply translate to another language because they exist in different cultural contexts. Some descriptions of German foods do not have counterparts in English since the concepts they represent do not exist in American culture. For example, one day Asta mentioned *Mettbrötchen*, a sandwich frequently eaten in Germany but not as well known in other countries. Teaching the German language without teaching German culture may keep students from learning the appropriate use of the language. Therefore, language instructors must teach culture while teaching a language. For Dr. Charles and Asta and instructors like them, culture plays a central part in their language classes because the accurate and appropriate use of a language always needs to take cultural contexts into consideration. Dr. Hassan stressed that culture should serve as an important goal of his teaching because he expected his students to eventually become intercultural speakers and promoted exchanges and communications between Arabic and American cultures. He stated:

There are some people (Arabic learners) not being motivated by American security or business, but [by a] deep understanding of culture. Such people, I expect them to become intercultural speakers. They need to learn enough Arabic to read authentic materials, and then write to people back at home. They should be able to interpret Arabic materials independently, and be able to express American behaviors in Arabic to build a bridge between two cultures.

From Dr. Hassan's perspective, culture in language class does not simply serve as an appetizer to attract students' attention to the target language. Unlike some other instructors who only see the teaching of culture as a way to serve the teaching of language, Dr. Hassan believed mutual relationships between teaching language and teaching culture are crucial elements of his classroom. He argued that language can serve as a tool for students to understand culture. Thus, in Dr. Hassan's class, culture becomes a significant part of the curriculum, and understanding Arabic culture is one of the ultimate goals that his students are expected to achieve. During our three classroom observations of Dr. Hassan's Arabic classes, researchers noticed that culture always served as a major focus of his class activities. Compared with some other instructors who used grammar knowledge as topics, such as past tense and future tense, Dr. Hassan usually brought some culture-related topics into his classes. On one day, for example, one researcher observed that Dr. Hassan brought a cartoon from an Arabic newspaper to initiate a discussion about people's reactions to the conflicts between politicians and religious persons in Arabic countries.

Corresponding with results of the interviews, our classroom observations also showed that Claudia and Lin, who believed teaching culture should serve the purpose of teaching language, usually directly taught culture to their students by introducing famous people and places in the target culture, or by sharing with students the habits and general beliefs of native speakers. Many scholars in the field of teaching culture in foreign language education (Barnes-Karol & Broner, 2010; Kearney, 2010) pointed out that some language instructors, who only teach about famous figures, general cultural knowledge or even stereotypes of a culture, are actually teaching culture as fact. Instructors like Claudia and Lin did not seem to realize that culture is dynamic and knowledge about culture is always relevant to time, location, even individuals (Banks & Banks, 1997; Damen, 1987). Claudia and Lin only taught culture as static facts existing in textbooks and literature. Thus they required students to remember cultural knowledge taught in class rather than encouraged the students to build their own cultural knowledge. In contrast, Dr. Charles, Asta and Dr. Hassan, who view culture as the context for language, often encouraged students to pursue cultural knowledge on their own by urging students to communicate with native speakers or by assigning them to conduct research on cultural topics. Because language instructors with two different attitudes toward culture in language classes actually teach in two different ways, the two types of attitudes towards the role of culture in foreign language classes are probably a major reason behind the two different kinds of instruction.

4.3. *The Effects of Instructors' Perceptions on Themselves*

In order to understand how the perceptions of the instructors get themselves involved in the profession of teaching foreign language, we asked each of the six instructors how much they know about the National Standards which consists of the teaching of culture and how these standards affect their teaching.

Claudia, a new instructor, said that she did not know anything about the National Standards, but she showed strong interest in learning them and in other professional development materials about how to teach a foreign language. After our two interviews with her, one researcher sent Claudia a list of books, articles and journals for foreign language teachers about how to teach culture and language, as she requested. In contrast to Claudia's lack of knowledge about the National Standards, another new instructor, Asta, was very familiar with the National Standards and 5Cs goals because she took two courses on how to teach a modern language in the College of Education at her university before she began teaching.

Compared with Claudia, Asta had achieved an understanding of the rationale and importance of teaching culture in language classrooms and expressed more confidence in the teaching of a language and its culture. For example, Asta believed that culture is the context for a language. In contrast, Claudia only taught culture to attract students' attention to the target language. While Asta collected various authentic materials of German culture and arranged various classroom activities to teach culture, Claudia usually limited her talk about culture by talking about her own experience in Spanish-speaking countries or by playing a Spanish song from YouTube for her students. Furthermore, Asta actively took part in a statewide foreign language teacher organization and its professional conferences, as well as constantly cooperated with other German instructors at RMU to teach language and culture. Compared with Claudia who had not been formally trained to be a foreign language teacher, Asta's professional training experience has had a positive impact on her career and allowed her to make numerous connections between her own classroom and the teaching of culture.

Lin, Frank, Dr. Charles, and Dr. Hassan acknowledged that they knew about the National Standards and 5Cs goals. Lin and Dr. Hassan explained that they developed their language program at RMU based on the National Standards. Lin said, "We (two Chinese instructors in the Modern Language Department) follow the 5Cs of the National Standards, and designed a curriculum to cover culture" (personal communication, October 14, 2011). Dr. Hassan also stated that "I designed the language (Arabic) program at RMU based on the 5Cs ... Learning is not just learning a language, it is about learning the 5Cs". Thus, the National Standards have had a great impact on these instructors' teaching practice and the development of their language programs. Some instructors compared the old objectives of learning foreign languages, such as the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), to the 5Cs as the new objectives. For instance, Lin stated, "In the past, language learning and teaching focused on listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing, but now, cultural understanding is added to language learning and teaching". Similarly, Frank stated:

The older expectations are based on skills, the four skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. I think we moved away from them a good bit. Those skills are certainly sorts of what we are doing. Those skills neglected the contexts of teaching culture. I think in the modern classrooms, we continually address the four skills and also address the five Cs.

Both Lin and Frank realized that culture has become a part of the new objectives for learning foreign language. However, they implied that the four skills objectives do not conflict with the 5Cs. Even though Lin and Frank would like to teach culture as the National Standards required, they would not give up on the old objectives.

In addition, Frank and Dr. Hassan reported that some people's prejudices against the teaching of certain foreign languages likely have negative influences on their professional development in terms of teaching culture. Frank shared:

There are many misconceptions and expectations that they [students] gained from movies about Germans. Germany is the enemy for the two World Wars, which has left a lot of stereotypes about Germany in the minds of Americans. We have relatively little opportunities to interact with Germans. The stereotypes are very common and often go un-clarified.

Frank believed that students' misconceptions and stereotypes of Germans might affect their learning of German culture.

In total, many issues that influenced the teaching of culture in foreign language classrooms emerged in this study. First, the close relationship between language and culture appears to be the primary reason for teaching culture in the foreign language classroom. Second, culture either served as an additional component or a key component in foreign language classrooms. This focus depends on instructors' attitudes towards the role of culture in language classes. Third, many language instructors taught culture and designed their language programs as the National Standards required. Last, misunderstandings and stereotypes towards certain foreign languages and cultures have become obstacles to teaching culture in foreign language classrooms.

4.4. The Effects of Instructors' Perceptions on Their Students

Based on students' descriptions of instruction and activities in their language classes, we found two different attitudes of students' views of instructors' towards the role of culture in language education. First of all, some students said that their instructors rarely taught culture; instead, their instructors put grammar at the center of the language teaching, and the majority of their lessons focused on either lectures on grammar or the practice of grammar. For example, Rosa said that there was nothing directly related to culture in her Russian class, as far as she knew. Similarly, Rob did not think that there was much about French culture in his class. Apparently, in Rosa and Rob's language class, culture was invisible, which revealed their instructors' attitudes: culture should not play any role in a language class.

In contrast to Rosa and Rob's experience with instructors who did not teach culture, the other four students reported that their language instructors often teach about culture in class. For example, Marcela's Spanish instructor used culture as a tool for students to practice language, as Marcela said, "She (Marcela's instructor) did have us read some literature about Spanish culture and we have to sum it up in Spanish" (personal communication, October 6, 2011). On the other hand, Kate and Denis' instructors talked about culture because culture-related content appears in their textbooks. Kate stated, "We had one discussion in the beginning of the year, about culture in the book" (personal communication, October 18, 2011), and Denis explained that "we have cultural sections in each chapter. We discussed culture a lot, like pop music, history" (personal communication, October 21, 2011). Moreover, James' instructor of his SPAN 2030 class talked a lot about his personal experience with culture and initiated many activities in class around culture because he is a native speaker of Spanish. James explained,

My teacher last semester used to talk about the town in which he grew up. The weather that he talked about is not much snow. But if it snows, everyone went crazy. What the significant things are in Mexico. Culturally, Mexico is very similar with America because we are close, but many people don't understand that. He showed us different cultural perspectives in different cities, a lot of similarities, and some differences. It is nothing better than experience that and share the experience... He always played a song each chapter by artists from Central America. Then we talked about social issues in that song, how it relates to the country. There's one song about environmental issue in the world. He used songs and life experiences to show cultural issues ... Mexico is very similar with America in many ways. We compared foods, people's daily life, and

songs about how they view Americans. He talked about a lot of life experience. It's more focused on culture in Mexico, in Spain (personal communication, November 6, 2011).

James' instructor realized that as a native speaker, he has the advantage of bringing Mexican culture into class to enhance students' interest in the target language. But James did not say anything about his instructor's efforts to make culture one of the major learning objectives of the course, nor having culture as one part of the assessment. It appears that James' instructor treated culture as an additional or add-on component in his class. The above four students' quote revealed their instructors' attitude that culture as an appetizer serves a purpose of attracting students' attention to the target language.

In sum, there is a major conflict between instructors' self-reported attitudes—culture as appetizer or culture as context—and instructors' attitudes in their students' eyes—culture is invisible or culture as appetizer. This conflict between instructors and students indicate two possibilities. One is that instructors might need to improve their use of culture in their language classrooms. Instructors should view culture as one of the five course objectives as the National Standards (2006) require, rather than as an appetizer. For example, instructors can list culture as one objective of their courses in the syllabus, assign culture-related materials for students to read, and assess students' understanding of the target culture on the final exam so their students would realize culture is an important part of their courses. The other possibility is that instructors might need to clarify the role culture plays in their language courses to their students. For example, instructors can explain culture and language are closely interconnected and provide examples of people's mistakes, misunderstandings, and misbehaviors because they do not understand the culture.

5. Discussion

In this study, we found instructors' perceptions towards the teaching of culture in their language courses can be classified into three categories: (1) teaching culture is not important, (2) teaching culture can be considered as an appetizer to the teaching of grammar, and (3) teaching culture is part of a meaningful context. Language instructors in the first category did not seem to teach culture at all as part of their classes. Our findings reveal that some language instructors have not recognized the close relationship between language and culture or the significance of teaching culture in a foreign language course. These instructors rarely used the word culture while teaching language and did not include culture-related content in the assignments or assessments for their students. Those instructors did not fulfill the requirements of the National Standards (2006) in which culture is viewed as one of five ultimate objectives in foreign language classes.

Language instructors in the second category who taught culture as part of their classes were driven by the perspective that culture should be used as a way to motivate students to learn more about language. Culture, in a sense, was used as an appetizer for teaching language. For these instructors, the teaching of culture is only an additional, not an indispensable, component of their language class. Even though these instructors occasionally introduced some cultural perspectives to students, they still did not help students make connections between cultural products and cultural patterns with underlying cultural perspectives. It is clear that these language instructors did not realize the importance of teaching culture as many scholars have discussed (Matsumoto, 2009; Ormrod, 2012).

Also, through a series of interviews and observations, we found many difficulties in teaching culture for instructors, such as the lack of knowledge by instructors of the National Standards (2006), the lack of time for preparing classes with cultural elements embedded in them, the lack of appropriate materials, the absence of technological support, and students' misunderstanding or stereotypes of the target culture. However, these difficulties are superficial phenomena. Through our analysis of the data, we found two profound barriers to the teaching of cultural perspectives: (1) some language instructors did not

recognize that culture is an important objective for teaching foreign language in the 21st century, and (2) the knowledge of how to teach a language is undervalued.

First, many instructors set up a false dichotomy between the teaching of grammar and culture. They used the importance of teaching of grammar as a major reason to explain why they do not spend more time on the teaching of culture. However, neither the present goals of foreign language learning, as seen in the 5Cs in the National Standards (2006), nor the former goals at the end of the last century—the four skills (listen, speak, read, and write)—places grammar as the most important feature of foreign language teaching. It seems that the instructors in this study still use the lens of grammar-translation to view the teaching of foreign languages. In the 21st century, the teaching of grammar no longer plays a major role in language classes because the primary reason of learning another language is not for the purpose of understanding classic literature any more (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). On the surface, the conflict happens between the views on the teaching of grammar versus the teaching of culture. In fact, these instructors' beliefs are the real barrier to the teaching of culture and cultural perspectives. Unless these instructors realize that culture, rather than grammar, is an important objective for foreign language teaching in the 21st century, these instructors would not consider the teaching of culture as a significant part of their courses.

The second major barrier to the teaching of culture is that there is an implicit thinking by many instructors and the department that to become a language instructor, the knowledge of the target language is sufficient, and the knowledge of how to teach a language is optional. Thus, several native speakers in the Modern Language Department at RMU teach foreign language without knowledge or experience of teaching, and many instructors only teach as they were taught when they themselves were students. It is no wonder that many instructors do not fully understand the National Standards and the goals of teaching culture or the importance of cultural perspectives. Moreover, the subtext to such thinking is that if a person can speak the language proficiently, then he/she can naturally teach the language. However, this approach definitely underestimates the pedagogy of language instructors. As a competent language instructor, one needs not only know linguistic knowledge of the target language, but also the knowledge of the target culture and educational knowledge of how to teach, motivate, and assess students. Few people are born good language instructors. A teacher education or preparation program is one major key to making a person a better language instructor.

In addition, this study revealed that instructors' perception on culture and their instructions in teaching culture in foreign language classroom have great effect on their students' foreign language learning. On the one hand, culture learning in foreign language acquisition is a process of acquiring the culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction with individuals from other culture. This dynamic, developmental, and ongoing process engaged the learners affectively. Therefore, instructors who teach culture in their language classrooms have students who are more engaged and motivated. On the other hand, foreign learning teaching with a culture learning goals and outcomes trained their students intercultural adjustment skills because language and culture learning is a dynamic process in which cultural context, prior experience, and other factors come into play (Street, 1993).

6. Recommendations

We concluded this study with four recommendations for foreign language instructors at college level. First of all, we suggest that instructors get familiar with the profession of teaching foreign languages. The knowledge of a language and its culture is ever-changing over time. A good instructor should also be a life-long learner and constantly update the knowledge of the subject. Furthermore, a good language

teacher needs to know not only the linguistic knowledge and cultural knowledge well, but also pedagogical knowledge of how to teach students.

Second, instructors should lead students to build a positive attitude towards a foreign culture. A positive attitude does not simply mean that students like the target culture and think it is wonderful. Keeping our students into a cage filled with beautiful cultural impressions does not motivate students to learn the language nor make them competent enough to use the language in the real world. Instructors should make sure that students understand that the differences between the target culture and their own cultures are usually profound. In this study, I found that many language students carry a belief that people live in other countries live similar lives, pursue similar goals, but only speak a different language. Such a belief implies that most cultural perspectives in diverse cultures are essentially similar. In other words, it is not necessary for instructors of language to put much emphasis on the teaching of cultural perspectives because there are no differences between them. In fact, such a perspective that all cultures are essentially similar make it easier for people to force their views on other people, because they assume that if something is good for us, then it is definitely good for other people. In contrast, expecting differences between cultures and respecting the differences between cultures would provide the basis for students to develop positive attitudes to open a door to another language and its culture.

Third, instructors should train students to master the skills of acquiring cultural knowledge rather than only teach "culture as facts", such as famous events, heroic figures. Culture is dynamic. All the knowledge of a culture is relevant to time, region, and even individuals. By only remembering facts about a culture, students cannot become good communicators with native speakers, unless they are able to update their knowledge constantly. Thus, instructors need to emphasize the skills of acquiring cultural knowledge, through a series of consistent activities, such as Damen's ethnographic inquiry (1987).

Last but not least, since students are adult learners, instructors can build rubrics with their students. Unlike assessments which focus on measuring students' knowledge and skills, rubrics usually help student to think about the criteria on which their learning will be evaluate before assignments and texts. Through using rubrics on culture, students can clearly understand what content they need to understand about culture, be able to self-assess before the formal assessments, and their learning would become more focused and self-directed (Wlodkowski, 2008).

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