

## **The Benefit of Using of Authentic Materials and New Technologies in the Culture Teaching in Foreign Languages' Classes**

PIRI Sonila  
University of Tirana, Albania  
sonilapiri@gmail.com

GJINALI Aida  
University of Tirana, Albania  
aidagjinali@yahoo.it

Received 12.10.2014; Accepted 10.11. 2014

### **Abstract**

*The first part provides an analysis of the concept of culture: the one related with the academic meaning of the word, which expresses the level of a society's evolution regarding literature, music, and painting, i.e. artistic and intellectual expressions of a society. In addition, this concept includes the anthropological perspective which encompasses the way of life, customs, traditions, beliefs, mindsets, principles, as well as abilities that the individual and the community in which he lives have developed. Further on, an analysis is provided of the concept of culture in glottodidactics and its importance in the program of studying a foreign language.*

*The second part highlights the importance of learning culture and civilization in the foreign language classroom; this is a major task which every teacher and instructor should pay close attention to: when learning a foreign language it not only necessary to acquire knowledge of its morphology and syntax, but also to study aspects of culture and civilization. In order to optimally achieve this, the teacher can use different methods to analyze cultural differences; for example comparisons, simulations, newspapers, media and the classroom too.*

*The third part focuses on the importance of authentic material as this material originally reflects the culture in a particular moment and context. In this way, by the use of this material, the teacher provides students with a way of understanding situations and foreigners' behavior, in this case the persons who represent the culture and the language being learnt. New technology, such as video and internet, is very good sources of authentic material. Internet is particularly a mere environment where students can interact in order to improve their communicative competences and where they can discover the culture of the language which they are learning.*

**Keywords:** *culture, student, teacher, technology, authentic material*

## **1. Language and culture**

Learning a foreign language does not mean just *learning the language*, but also *learning how to deal with it*, that is, being able to use the language as an action tool. It should be used within the proper contexts, when taking into consideration the culture it is being used in. Therefore, learning a new language is more than simply enriching the lexicon with new words. Learning a new language means learning a semantic system, and of course, a new thinking method. Therefore, the language is deeply intertwined with the culture, forming thus an inseparable binomial. (Jantorno G. 1990).

Actually, language is closely linked to culture by a multitude of ways, often very complicated which cannot be perceived directly and immediately. This is the reason why the relation between language and culture is considered as indivisible.

Therefore, the words of a language refer to a common experience of the speakers, which reflect their shared knowledge of the world and in the meantime, they express their attitudes, beliefs, viewpoints. In a few words, it means that language expresses cultural reality.

Moreover, those individuals who speak a language provide meaning to the tool they used for their communication and the way a communication tool is used builds up special meanings, whereas the de-modification is assisted by the voice tone, gestures and facial expressions. Through these linguistic and extra linguistic aspects, language contains and expresses cultural reality. Finally, language implied as a system of signs has also a cultural value, because speakers are identified themselves and identify others through the language they use: consequently, language is displayed as a symbol of cultural identity (ethnic minorities, etc.).

Hence, the relationship between language and culture is ambiguous. Language expresses the cultural reality of the speaker, but, in the meantime, culture creates language in the diachronic or historic and in the synchronic or social sense. From its side, language changes the way experiences are perceived and systemized, by modifying the culture of a group of people. We would like to take as an example some Nordic languages, which use 35 words to define different representations of ice and snow, whereas in the Arabic language there are similar classifications for horses. This evidence shows that a certain cultural phenomenon is expressed from a linguistic variety.

Accordingly, language can be considered a complicated system, where there are reflected relations between meaning and behaviour, but also the manners they can be expressed through.

According to the well-known theory of Sapir-Whorf, language constitutes a filter of the surrounding reality, of what is perceived and of what is learned. Language is defined as a symbolic system of understanding the world and processing experiences, because its communicative function is taken into consideration and it refers to those language philosophy theories who highlight the language not just as a system, but also in the same balance as those who speak it.

As stated in the pragmatic perspective of Bruner, learning a language means learning cultural patterns intertwined with that language. Consequently, learning a language does not mean simply achieving a good linguistic level, but also getting to know its interactive social-cultural context.

Therefore, learning a living language means acquiring it as a small cultural world, that is, being able to express yourself by using not just different grammar, but also a different gamma of cultural values, which, additionally, enriches the content of a text.

What do we mean nowadays with the notion culture and how is it perceived within the didactics of the foreign language?

Different practices and approaches have rarely provided correct orientation among the relationship between education and culture, but it is clear that it is not adequate the interference of a simple change of cultural context, but it is important to study closely and treat concepts, values, patterns and mentalities that contribute to the creation of this context.

From my professional experience so far, I have concluded that the cultural element can be analyzed and brought forth through simple didactic techniques from the initial linguistic levels. I believe that culture and subculture have a spiral form, where teachers and students go continuously deep into cultural issues and aspects, which have been analyzed from different point of views in different analytic levels. Hence, cultural patterns which have been considered as important and unavoidable in a specific point of the didactic and cultural journey, are reviewed and studied thoroughly.

Usually, each student considers his own culture as natural and therefore, he tends to simplify the other culture, so that he can easily compare and learn it.

Actually, the only way to view another culture from a critical point of view is to compare it with the culture of origin, in order to find the point of analytic beginning after finding similar parameters, even when it is not possible.

We believe that teachers should insist on these common matrixes, for often, many teachers tend to highlight the differences, because they are more tangible and easier to be perceived and draw attention.

## **2. The importance of authentic materials in the foreign language class**

We think that the use of authentic materials in the foreign language class is very important in order to avoid the stereotype phenomenon trap, which is often encountered in those cases when information is sent through mass media in a simplified way, or when materials are not updated and adapted for didactic purposes. The use of authentic materials is necessary in those cases when the foreign language texts in use are a little out of date, but also in those cases when they do not contain enough information on the language, but mainly on the culture of that language. The student should be able to know and respect the culture of the language he is learning, and the differences it represents compared to his own culture. This can be achieved through the use of authentic materials, which provide insight on history, civilization, and traditions of the language being studied.

Moreover, authentic materials should be integrated in the language class when the country of the language being studied is very distant and students cannot stay there for study purposes. With regards to the reality of Italian language, it is true that in the case of our country, it can be known through television, as it has been done through the years, but recently it has been noticed a certain indifference. If the teacher notices it in his class, it would be necessary for the scholastic text to be completed with authentic materials.

The language teacher has the advantage of using an infinite number of authentic materials in his class. They can be in paper, audio, video or multimedia format. The use of these materials is of a

great importance, because the intercultural didactic of the foreign language starts from the concept that the learning of a language should start through its discovery, if possible through the contact with native speakers. Authentic materials can find extensive use in the cases when a foreign language is being learnt in a context other than the natural one.

It is important to understand that the student will not be able to realize the right communication, if he does not possess a proper social-cultural competence. As the activities of skills' development and those of cultural patterns are closely linked to the operational plan, it is important that the material in use to be authentic for teaching in an intercultural perspective.

### **3. Technological support and culture teaching in foreign languages classes**

As it is already known, the culture of a country is experienced through different codes, such as linguistic, visual, kinetic (gestures, facial expressions), space positioning (use of interpersonal spaces), objects (clothes, *status symbol*), etc. Audiovisual tools, such as pictures, slides, videos, DVDs, movies, etc, are perfect for the display of complete cultural information. However, it is necessary for the perception to be oriented, so that the student can perform an analysis and a summary, by surpassing the filters of his personal culture, with the target of achieving a comparative analysis.

Moreover, audiovisual tools are necessary for the creation of motivation and to present the holistic approach of the text that leads the didactic unit. As it was mentioned above, one of the basic competences a student has to achieve while learning a new language is the cultural one. The achievement of this competence is assisted by the use of network through infinite and updated authentic cultural materials of the language being studied. Direct communication with native speakers provides a contact point with the culture of the language students are learning.

### **4. Conclusions**

In conclusion, we suggest that the authentic materials and their sources, within the concept of teaching technologies, are widely used in the language class to provide cultural and intercultural objectives a student should possess, with the purpose of learning the language in a more complete way.

### **References:**

- [1] Balboni, P.E.. (1999). *Parole comuni, culture diverse. Guida alla comunicazione interculturale*, Marsilio, Venezia.
- [2] Bruner, J. S.. (2009). *La cultura dell'educazione*, Feltrinelli, Milano.
- [3] Demetrio, D.; Favaro G.. (2002). *Didattica interculturale*, Angeli, Milano.
- [4] Hofstede, G.. (1991). *Culture and Organizations: Software of the mind*, McGraw-Hill, London.
- [5] Jantorno, G.. (1990). *Lingua e cultura: la questione della civiltà*, in *LEND, Glottodidattica. Principi e realizzazioni*, Scandicci (Fi), La Nuova Italia.
- [6] Mezzadri, M.. (2003). *I ferri del mestiere*, Guerra Soleil, Perugia.