Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1. Background

It has been internationally recognized that teaching languages goes hand in hand with teaching culture. In today’s world the term *Intercultural Competence* is frequently used in the domain of Foreign Language Teaching (henceforth FLT) and a lot of research is being done worldwide to understand, promote and implement the phenomena. Today, with the development of theory and related praxis in FLT, it is almost a given expectation in most parts of the world that foreign language teachers or instructors are not only familiar with the term Intercultural Competence, but have also carefully considered and evaluated their own teaching practices in relation to it.

My own interest in this field of teaching culture in a foreign language classroom arose through my work as a foreign language teacher in the Educational Language Centre, in my home country, Turkmenistan. Later my participation in the Intercultural Studies programme at Hamburg University made me reconsider my mission of a Foreign Language teacher and re-evaluate my teaching skills. It brought me to a better understanding of the meaning of *Intercultural Communicative Competence* (hereafter referred to as ICC) in the domain of Foreign Language Education.

As an educator and a language teacher, I have been studying the concepts of culture and ICC for the last few years in both Turkmenistan and Germany. Today, however, as a postgraduate student in India, I am surprised to find that these terms are seldom problematized and not even clearly defined in the field of education within this country.

As a research student in one of the top universities in India, I have had a chance to explore FLT as an insider. Unfortunately, my experience has only strengthened the opinion that even today, foreign language teachers at Indian universities and the material used by them unfortunately “tend to represent an old-fashioned view of culture as something static that can be transmitted to the students through teacher-centered education” (Eva Larzen 13).

The surrounding academic atmosphere, socio-economic situation and curriculum had made me arrive at the conclusion that there was an urgent need for Classroom Research in the field of FLT in India. Needless to point out, it is recognized worldwide,
that the “Intercultural understanding and intercultural competence are concepts that are frequently light-heartedly used in today's pedagogical discussions, not the least in curricular contexts” (Eva Larzen 13). Lundgren (2001, 2002) and Tornberg (2000), the researchers from Europe, who studied conceptions of culture, were similarly surprised by the fact that “these terms are seldom problematized nor clearly defined in educational debates in Sweden” (Eva Larzen 13).

2. Research Problem and General Aim of the Study

Universities need to set as a mission goal the improvement of the nexus between research and teaching…The aim is to increase the circumstances in which teaching and research have occasion to meet. (Hattie and Marsh 533)

Exploring similar research data in various countries and in an attempt to find the valuable information on intercultural competence of Indian foreign language teachers, I realized that India is just on its starting point on its way to the intercultural sensitivity and acquisition of ICC in the domain of FLT. This is especially unacceptable while facing the fact that India currently has the world’s largest number of universities, and consequently the third-largest student population. Lack of research being done or attention being paid in this area seems to be an unfortunate fact that requires more attention from academia, educators, researchers, teachers and government as well as an active collaboration between universities and research institutes in India.

Taking this into consideration, the overall aim of the study is to explore and enhance the existing knowledge on how Indian Foreign Language University teachers think about the teaching of culture and understand ICC. More specifically, we aimed to identify patterns in teachers’ and learners’ conceptions about culture, and to describe the objectives they set up for their teaching and learning as well as how they tend to attain those objectives.

The problem of the study was reformulated in terms of the following questions:
1. What are the perceptions of teaching culture held by Indian university teachers and students of foreign languages?
2. What is the relationship between their beliefs about culture and their instructional behaviour?
3. What are the levels of intercultural sensitivity demonstrated by the teachers and students in the classes of participating Universities?

The primary specific objective of this study is to identify and assess the nature, scope and extent of intercultural competence currently developed in foreign language education in selected Universities of India.

Accordingly, the goals of the present research project are:

- To explore Indian foreign language teachers' beliefs about culture and culture learning;
- To probe the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their instructional practices;
- To investigate the acquisition of intercultural sensitivity in foreign language classroom at Indian universities.

It is hoped that the results of the study will provide practical information and advice to policymakers and other researchers and teachers working in this field. The study is meant to contribute to a better understanding of the connections to be made between foreign language education and the development of intercultural competence in India.

3. Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is made up of five Chapters. The Chapters are linked to one another and the issues are presented largely in their own right to provide information that corresponds to Chapters’ names and intentions.

The Introductory Chapter of the dissertation presents the research background, research problem and general aim of the study as well as the outline of the thesis.

In Chapter One, within the theoretical framework, I will focus on the concept of culture and the relationship between culture and language. In the same Chapter I will consider culture in FLT and provide a brief overview of the trends in the teaching of culture in Foreign Language (henceforth FL) classes and the international research in the area. In the same Chapter some important research findings regarding Teacher and Learner Cognition will be presented since my major task is to investigate the beliefs and reflections that foreign language teachers and students have concerning language teaching in general and the cultural aspect in language teaching in particular. Some
important research findings regarding students' beliefs about language learning and the place of culture within it will be discussed. The discussion of the ways of integrating the intercultural dimension and language teacher/learner cognition will conclude this Chapter.

In Chapter Three, the setting of the present study will be presented. FLT in the context of the Indian University will be described. Next, a brief account of the way in which the socio-cultural objectives in Foreign Language Education are articulated is also to be discussed. It will be followed by the discussion of teaching culture in FLT at the foreign language departments at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi University (DU) and Jamia Milia Islamia (JMI).

In Chapter Four, the methodological consideration of the present study is to be highlighted and explained. The actual survey, its instrument, sample, methods and means of data collections, the choice of data analysis as well as the reliability, validity, ethical aspects of the survey are to be reported step by step to make the whole research process as transparent as possible.

In Chapter Five, the results of the teacher survey followed by the results of the learner survey are to be presented and discussed in connection to previous research findings in the field. It will be followed by a discussion about ways to teach foreign language cultures to Indian foreign language learners at university level. Some suggestions for cultural content to be taught in Indian university foreign language classes are to be presented.

In the concluding Chapter Six the summary, aims and objectives as well as the contribution of the study, relevant suggestions and recommendation for further research will be presented.