

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Teaching culture in L2 is certainly as important as teaching language and literature. Culture is one of the most important concepts in social sciences like Psychology, Political Science and Economics, which has now made inroads into applied linguistics and second language acquisition as well. Societal values, beliefs, cultural elements and attitudes should be incorporated into communicative approach to increase the effectiveness of L2 learning. Inclusion of ‘culture component’ is motivational in learning second language. The main aim of language teaching is to enhance linguistic abilities of the learners along with cultural competence which can be together called as intercultural competence.

In present day language classrooms, teachers are expected to include cultural components in teaching because of paradigm shift in language teaching with a different outlook on culture. This outlook which emerges from social sciences, defines ‘culture’ as a broad term that embraces in it many aspects of a society like arts, food, environment, customs and traditions, religious practices, ethics, morals and manners. Consequently, culture includes everything that man has either acquired or learnt in his individual and social life. Anthropologists like Ward H. Goodenough believe that “Culture is an idealized cognitive system- a system of knowledge, beliefs, and values- that exist in the minds of individual members of society” (qtd. in Casson 17).

Statement of the problem

No human society can exist without a culture of its own. Language and culture are inter-connected and are mutually dependent in social life and cultural competence is an essential aspect of second language acquisition. Since languages

comprehensively reflect complex cultures of any society, the teaching of culture is regarded as an important part in second language teaching and learning process.

Cultural awareness and learning second culture or the target culture will help in attaining proficiency in second language learning. This implies that a second language learner necessarily, learns the second language culture simply as language cannot be taught or exist in isolation. No language can be understood and taught without understanding the cultural context in which it is used. Culture provides adequate and authentic materials and it also provides interesting practical situations in teaching learning process.

The major aim of any language teaching and learning is to enhance tolerance and better understanding of different cultures among the learners. There is an increasing need in incorporating cultural components in English as a second language textbooks in the present as well as in the future because of globalization. The significance of teaching culture is also affirmed in the Common European Framework of Reference for language as there is a strong relationship between teaching and learning of English as a second language or English as a foreign language textbooks and culture.

Claire Kramersch argues against those who regard cultural knowledge as ‘an educational objective’ in itself and is separate from language. She says if we regard language as a social practice, culture becomes the core of language teaching. She further claims, “Culture awareness must be viewed both as enabling language proficiency and as being the outcome of reflection on language proficiency” (Kramersch 8).

Some people believe that language mirrors culture, in the sense that people can see and understand a particular culture through its language. Yet, some others compare language and culture to an ice berg. The visible part is language, with a small part of culture and the greater part lying unseen is the invisible part of culture. Brown (2001, 165) describes the relation of the two as follows: “A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture.” In one word, culture and language are inseparable.

The relationship between culture and language can be best explained philosophically, communicatively and pragmatically.

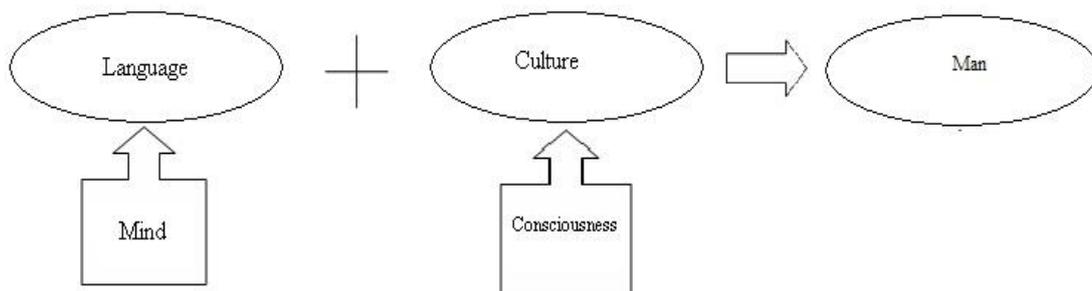


Fig 1. Philosophical view

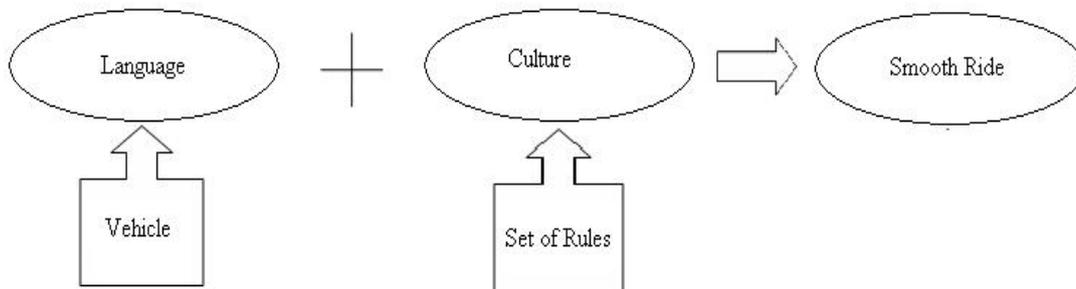


Fig 2 Communicative view

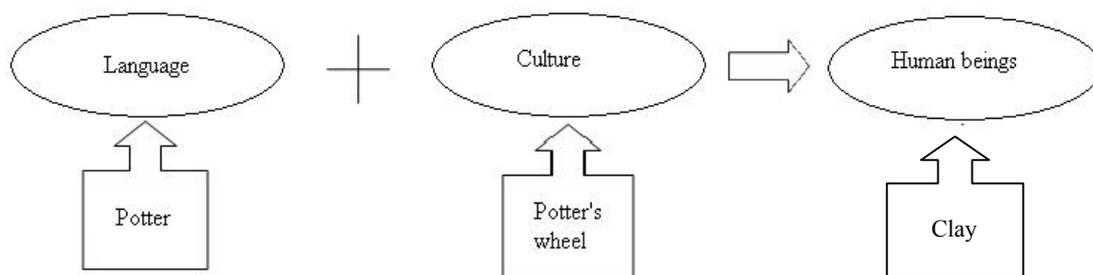


Fig 3. Pragmatic view

Aims and Objectives

The present research is aimed to present English syllabus that incorporates cultural materials considering the needs of the learners. The objectives and scope of this study can be summarized as follows:

- To analyze and evaluate the present English syllabus at Under-graduate level in Sreenidhi Vaughn College of Aeronautics and Technology, Ghatkesar, Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India.
- To present various aspects of culture as depicted in the story or lesson to enhance learners' participation in classroom discussions.
- To enable the students to understand their culture and at the same time promote cultural tolerance towards other cultures.
- To provide suitable ways and means to make English language more interesting, and relevant to the requirements of the present day learners.

Justification

Socio-linguists and anthropologists have long back recognized that language, its form and use echo cultural values of the society in which the language is spoken. According to Krasner, linguistic competence alone is not enough for learners of a language to be competent in that language. It is here that culture occupies an

important place. For effective communication language used must be related with culturally appropriate behaviour.

Culture differs from society to society and these cultural variables should be brought to the notice of the students and explained clearly to make learning English a satisfying and complete process. Yet, the prevailing syllabus does not have universally accepted inter cultural communicative components that suit the needs of the divergent student population. To balance the situation, existing syllabus should be enhanced with intercultural materials.

Language teaching should also focus on teaching culture. Literature is one way through which culture can be incorporated in second language teaching and short stories are the best vehicles to teach culture. Culture plays a vital role in language teaching because some words in the foreign language refer to specific meanings in a particular society, which may not be understood by the members of other cultures unless the cultural context is explained. For example, Indian students in a French class may be surprised to listen to the word '*homme au foyer*' which means a house maker (masculine). In India only women are addressed as house wives and it goes as a surprise to the students to think of a man doing the duties of the woman at home. The main reason behind is the cultural differences that prevail between Indian culture and the French culture. Thus, it is indispensable to include cultural components in language learning.

Scope and limitations of the study

Culture is a broad concept that embraces in itself many aspects of life. To give an elaborate and detailed discussion of every aspect of culture is practically impossible and inconvenient. Therefore, the present study will limit itself to the

teaching of an important cultural aspect as highlighted in the story. The present research work is based on the study of culture through short stories.

The scope of the study covers the culture of different countries as portrayed in the short stories. Each story is selected with a different culture as its background to facilitate multicultural awareness to the students. This study is primarily based on the students' responses after understanding the stories and completion of exercises given after every story. The present work is also based on the teachers' responses on the relationship that culture has with language and vice-versa. The present study also concentrates on the much important aspect of how cultural components should be included in the English lessons. Only four short stories prescribed in the syllabus are taken up for a close study. The exercises were carefully prepared including all possible elements of culture that cropped up in the lesson.

The present study 'Role of culture in second language acquisition' is planned into six chapters. The first chapter provides an elaborate introduction to the topic of the study. It provides statement of the problem, justification of the problem and the need for such a study. The chapter also discusses the aims and objectives, scope and limitations of the work.

The second chapter deals with an extensive description and discussion of the term culture. Different definitions and dimensions of the word culture are analyzed. The relationship culture has with other concepts of language learning like perception, psychology and cognition are also explained. The relationship between culture, language and literature are also discussed.

The third chapter deals with English language teaching in India from a historical point of view. The factors responsible for strengthening the widespread use of the language in the past, present and future are also dealt extensively.

Considering the role of literature in teaching culture as well as English language, short stories were introduced in the fourth chapter. A variety of culturally oriented exercises were given for the students to enhance their language learning capabilities.

The fifth chapter gives a detailed analysis of the questionnaires given to the teachers as well as to the students. This chapter occupies a significant place in the work as their responses are central to the present study.

The last chapter concludes with the findings that are derived from the questionnaires collected from teachers and students. This chapter also provides important suggestions based on the analysis and findings of the study.

WORKS CITED

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