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Compartmentalizing culture teaching strategies under an emotioncy-based model

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ABSTRACT

Given the significant role of culture in communication, language researchers, among many other educationalists, have endeavored to develop strategies and techniques for teaching culture in foreign/second languages. The abundance of these strategies, nevertheless, does not seem to realize its full potential due to being a fragmented rather than coherent whole. In the current study, we reviewed the relevant literature to find common grounds in culture instruction strategies and, accordingly, embarked upon introducing a framework to unify and categorize strategies used in teaching culture with respect to the emotions they provoke in learners. Building upon the prominent role of emotions in various domains of language teaching and learning, it was assumed that the emotions generated in the classroom may play an important role in culture learning as well. To this end, we employed the recently-developed hierarchical model of *emotioncy* as the underlying basis for our framework aiming at offering a hierarchy of teaching culture. Consequently, a number of classroom activities were suggested as ways to make better use of learners' emotions.

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Introduction

The inextricability of language and culture renders one's socialization into the contextual use of a language without learning its cultural roots impossible (Seelye, 1993). We are constantly surrounded and immersed by the culture of the society we live in, and depending on the context in which we are communicating, we use language in certain ways. Moreover, in the global community of the 21st century, communication between people with different cultural perceptions and symbol systems is more inevitable than ever. What language learners need in every educational context is, therefore, to develop an awareness and understanding of such connections between language and

culture, so that they can communicate effectively and survive in a framework of different cultures (Brown, 2010).

In the realm of language education, culture was acknowledged as an integral part of language teaching with the advent of communicative approaches during the 1970s and early 1980s, as a result of which cultural issues were placed at the forefront of second/foreign language teaching. In fact, the importance attached to teaching culture since then made language researchers advocate the need for a systematic presentation of culture in second/foreign language classrooms. To this end, curricula, textbooks, and teachers have been recognized as intercultural mediators shouldering the primary responsibility for teaching culture (Chastain, 1988; Clouet, 2006; Drewelow, 2009; Turkan & Çelik, 2007). Now for teachers to be equipped to teach culture, researchers have attempted to propose different class activities and techniques, each placing an emphasis on one aspect of culture teaching. For instance, some researchers (Wintergerst, DeCapoua, & Verna, 2003) have

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underscored the role of audio and visual aids and kinesthetic techniques, while others (Brown, 2010) have placed a premium on aids such as classroom discussions and problem-solving activities to teach cultural elements. The literature, however, seems to be devoid of any general framework for the culture teaching techniques to lie in.

To devise a framework, it is possible to approach the task from different perspectives, each based on a certain orientation. Indeed, culture goes beyond a list of holidays, shared recipes, dressing codes, or traditional and religious ceremonies; it is *an experience* lived by unique individuals and shared by communities of people (Brown, 2010). An individual's lived experiences are indeed instrumental in shaping his/her emotions; in fact, the relationship between emotion and culture has been widely investigated, focusing on how emotions, while being universal, are socially constructed and affected by culture (Tsai, Miao, Seppala, Fung, & Yeung, 2007). However, to our best knowledge, the reverse has not received much attention to the present day, with culture not having been scrutinized from emotional aspects.

Through the lenses of their newly offered approach, Pishghadam, Adamson, and Shayesteh (2013) accentuated the missing role of emotion in every facet of language teaching and learning, presuming that real world knowledge encompasses emotion which is instrumental in word knowledge. In their emotion-oriented approach, they introduced *emotioncy*, defined as the degree of emotion towards different language entities. Thus, we assume that, from among different features of language learning, an individual's emotions may play a critical role in learning the cultural issues of a language, which are deemed vital. Taking an emotion-based orientation, therefore, the main goal of the current study was to compartmentalize culture teaching strategies based on the metric of emotioncy (Pishghadam, 2015) developed originally from Pishghadam, Adamson et al. (2013)—emotion-based language instruction (EBLI). To this end, the paper first defines culture and reviews the relationship between language and culture. The focus will then be shifted to teaching culture, and investigating the changes and key ideas permeating the last few decades. Further, some of the most commonly applied techniques and strategies in teaching culture are enumerated and, finally, an emotioncy-based framework for clustering culture teaching strategies will be proposed after elaborating on emotioncy and its relevant concepts.

Theoretical Framework

The Significance of Culture

The extent to which culture plays a significant role in our lives and the lives of our students may only be understood through raising an awareness of what culture is and how it can affect our lives in both direct and indirect ways. After all, culture has been generally depicted as a broad concept including all aspects of human life (Brooks, 1975; Brown, 2010; Seelye, 1993). This is while the elusiveness of culture as an ever-changing construct which shifts constantly over time and according to the people perceiving and interpreting it (Chastain, 1988; Harklau,

1999), also makes it a difficult concept to define. In other words, culture is considered a dynamic construct (Robert, Byram, Barro, Jordanand, & Street, 2001) embracing different definitions ranging from the patterns of meanings embodied in symbolic forms through which individuals communicate with one another (Tomlinson, 1999) to sets of ideas, skills, customs, arts, and tools which describe different groups of people in different periods of time (Brown, 2000). However, most definitions of culture revolve around the same key notions, viewing culture as a system which is shared by a community of people allowing them to meet their needs and communicate (Baumeister, 2005; Matsumoto & Juang, 2013). Shared beliefs, norms, and values are also central to many definitions provided for culture (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004; Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino, & Kohler, 2003; Peterson, 2004). To have a better understanding of culture, it also matters to know about different aspects of it and to be able to spot and distinguish the observable sides from those hidden and less observable. “Visible culture”, as Peterson (2004, p. 25) put it, is culture as classic or grand themes encompassing a community's literature, classical music, architecture, historical figures, and geography; it can be seen as the tip of the iceberg sticking above the water level of conscious awareness. This is while “invisible culture” represents the more significant part of the iceberg known as the unconscious (Weaver, 1993, p. 139) and refers to “minor or common themes” including people's everyday thinking, behavior, common traditions, practices, and customs. Brown (2010) conceived the former as objective and the latter as a subjective culture.

Despite its various definitions and aspects, every culture is closely interwoven with its language; indeed, language is considered as the most important means of communicating information, thoughts, and feelings in a culture (Brown, 2000). Additionally, communicating through a language calls for an exposure to the culture it rises from. In fact, the status of culture and its inseparability from language pointed out the prominent part it plays in language learning, and teaching. The delineating lines between language and culture in education were probably formed prior to the 1960s (Allen, 1985). In 1957, Robert Lado highlighted the necessity of cultural understanding and support through a structural approach, claiming that diversities of languages can be surmounted by means of cultural understanding which will therefore result in students' better mastering of the new language. Ever since then, culture has been brought into the consciousness of language teaching by a great many scholars with Brooks (1968), Hall (1959), Kelly (1969), Lado (1957), Nostrand (1966), and Politzer (1959) being some of the main vanguards of the change. Politzer (1959, p. 101), for example, argued that teaching language without teaching culture at the same time invites comparison with “teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning”. Brooks (1968), also, stressed the significance of culture not for the study of literature, but for learning a language and Kelly (1969) referred to teaching of culture as an unstated aim of teaching language. Later in the 1970s, the heyday of sociolinguistics, a period of further interest in culture was embarked upon by Lafayette (1975), Luce and Smith (1979),

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