

# Psychological and conceptual framework of Language and Culture: Theoretical groundings and Pedagogical implications

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**Abstract:** *In English language pedagogy, behavioural and Cultural studies begin with a general theory of culture and continue to wrestle with different modern and post- modern philosophies. It incorporates the theory of ideology and representation, Marxism, Pragmatism and post structuralism. It was introduced in second language classroom after World War Second with the purpose of understanding behaviour, language, culture, power and context. The need for mastering English is also an essential requirement for any professional industry in a global business world. The effective way to develop language skills and communicative competence among second language learners is to prepare them for effective intercultural/transnational interactions. Scholars claim that the purpose of introducing culture in Second Language / Foreign Language classroom is also to develop high order thinking skills such as solidary, humanistic and cultural views (Heusinkveld 1997). Cultural awareness exposes learners to authentic contexts and meaningful situations and helps them to build schema of the foreign cultural understanding. Several models for the inclusion of culture in curriculum have been proposed. However, its implementation in the curriculum has been lagged considerably. Only, the Indiana guide has developed a fully extended four level sequence, which nonetheless, represents significant beginning, considering that teaching of grammar and vocabulary has been the primary focus for centuries. This paper evaluates the present state of cultural awareness among second language learners. The study was conducted with the undergraduate students of Aligarh Muslim University. The study also aims to highlight the opinions of second language learners on the role of culture in teaching foreign/second language. The results reveal that students lack transnational communicative competence and are not satisfied with their performance; however, teachers showed positive attitude towards the integration of culture in language curriculum.*

**Key Words:** *Psychological Framework, Language & Culture, Communicative Competence, Intercultural Awareness.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Language as a vehicle of communication cannot be adequately handled by structure based formal approach. The communicative euphoria talks of integrating culture by involving learners into actual domain of the subject. Hence, the conceptual, humanistic and solidary knowledge can be induced by exposing learners to collaborative and efficient environment. Besides educational factor, culture teaching has become an important component for two other major factors, behavioural, political, and ideological. Many of the western countries have put a lot of political weight to take care of the social and financial issues of the circumstances. They are arguing to supplement the customary procurement of "communicative abilities" and humanistically oriented, social "substance". In addition, the recrudescence of patriotism around the globe draws political attention from expanded connections between national languages and national societies. Despite of conflicting issues, 'culturalisation' of language teaching has been increasing steadily throughout the world. (Kramche, 1996a)

### 1.1 Definition of terms

At the outset, it is important to concede the definition of 'culture', which has two dimensions of a social community. The principle definition originates from humanities; it talks about the representation of social community that speaks to itself as well as people from other groups be they work for art or culture or social establishment or artifacts, mechanism of reproduction or preservation of history. The second definition comes from social sciences it talks of carrying and recollecting attitudes, beliefs, convictions, thought and behaviour, shared by individuals from that group (Nostrand, 1989). This former definition deals with numerous points of view which (Brislin, 1990), wrote "widely shared ideals, values, formation and uses of categories, assumptions about life, and goal-directed activities that become unconsciously or subconsciously accepted as "right" and "correct" by people who identify themselves as members of a society."

Both definitions have offered two diverse ways to deal with the investigation of culture: the historic and the ethnographic (Kramche, 1996b). The former definition depends on the composed custom of writings; it comprehends the present and envisions the future in light of the past; it gets its power from time-respected organizations that have

arranged the tenets and codified the expositions composed writings. The later definition deals with the observation, information gathering and analysis of the most oral phenomena. It understands the present situation by analysing current events in light of their social diversity and their connection to other contemporary occasions. Both the dimensions put meaning to the natural phenomena by setting them into authentic and social context and by articulating in time and space. Since it has a tendency to “naturalize” culture and to make ones’ own specific manners of conversation and behaviour normal. Culture is arbitrary which does not mean that it is insignificant to the extent of identifying and recording cultural manuscripts only (Kramche, 1996c). However, distinctive examples can be recognized and could have been articulated differently. That is the reason why culture needs to be legitimate and shroud its laws in the mantle of ‘righteousness’. Rather than bearing force of its assertion.

## **1.2 Language and culture**

According to Kramche "teaching culture means therefore teaching not only how things are and have been, but how they could have been or how else they could be". Historical and ethnographic research alone cannot give the innovative jump that will empower learners to understand foreign culture from their own perspective. For example in order to break stereotypes it is not just simply to understand individuals in one way, thinking we all are same. It is a common understanding that we are irreducibly special, unique, and distinctive, and that I could have been you, you could have been me, in different situation — as such, that the outsider is in you (Kramche, 1996c). In addition, culture expands from identity to literature and connotations are derived in a contextual framework, for that it enables reader to live other lives.

Culture manifests itself through language. It is constantly intervened and improved in the diachronic and synchronic hub of space and time. Language is considered as an essential component for developing culture, as well as, an instrument for social change (Kramsch, 1993). In sixties and early seventies, people were offered the opportunity to change their attitude and beliefs to understand social realities and maintain ideological strengths irrespective of race, gender and nationality (Fairclough, 1989). However, education did not bring direct and immediate impact on society rather; it is a gradual process that occurs slowly. Emphasising members of one group to produce utterances and behave in the same manner as native speakers does potentially change the social and cultural condition of both groups. This perspective of the social development of culture through language has been diagnosed by many research scholars and sociolinguists and came out with one conclusion that language and culture is inseparable and interdependent entities.

## **2. TEACHING OF CULTURE IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM:**

The notion of ‘intercultural communicative competence’ advocated by Michel Byrum in 1993 is an attempt to build bridges between one culture and the other. The teaching of intercultural sensitivity has raised a political debate among scholars and politicians for whom language teaching is just teaching of language and not context and not politics. According to them, cultural teaching must be prohibited in classrooms instead learners can go outside the country and experience culture there. The pervading issue needs to be assessed with respect to the cultural gains among learners and teachers of language. The next part of the paper attempts to evaluate intercultural competence among second language learners and views regarding the teaching of culture.

## **3. Research Questions**

This research attempts to answer the following questions:

- (1) What is the status of student’s inter-cultural communicative competence?
- (2) Should culture be practiced in language classroom?

## **4. METHODOLOGY :**

In order to obtain first-hand information about the present situation, a test was conducted involving students of different educational streams. Students of science, commerce and arts stream took part in the study. This research was conducted to find out the constructive suggestions for culture teaching in EFL/ESL classroom.

### **Research Questions**

This research attempts to answer the following questions:

- (1) What is the status of student’s cultural awareness and communicative competence?
- (2) What is the present state of the classroom teaching of culture?

### **Participants**

Participants involved English language teachers and undergraduate students of three streams (B.Sc., B.Com, and B.A.) at Aligarh Muslim University. Five teachers participated in the interview, all of whom have had more than five years of teaching experience. As far as students are concerned, 15+15+15 undergraduates were randomly selected from three different streams respectively. They had different cultural backgrounds and life experiences. Enhance, they were the representatives of the second language learning.

Detailed Information about these sections are given in table one.

**Table 1. : Proportional distribution of three educational streams**

| S.No | Stream           | Number of participants |
|------|------------------|------------------------|
| 1    | Science (B.Sc.)  | 15                     |
| 2    | Commerce (B.com) | 15                     |
| 3    | Arts (B.A.)      | 15                     |
|      | <b>Total</b>     | 45                     |

### Student’s questionnaire

The test for students consisted of two parts. Questions in the first part were put up to evaluate student’s performance with regard to verbal behaviour (such as expressing gratitude, asking for help greetings etc.) and non-verbal behaviour (such as postures, gestures, eye contact etc. The later part consisted of four Open-ended Questions. The test was designed in accordance with the sociolinguistic framework (Zehanya, et al. 1990).

### Teacher’s Interview

An interview was taken from the five teachers of English Department at Aligarh Muslim University. In the interview, the author inquired their attitudes towards culture teaching, perceptions of the present methodology and the present state of culture teaching. The interview aimed to enrich the data collected from the questionnaire. A sample of the interview questions is given in Appendix two.

## 5. RESULTS OF THE TEST

There were 12 questions in the test, allowing a full score of 12. The students’ scores were grouped into three categories: 00- 04, 4-8 and 08-12. The results of the two categories were converted into percentages. The highest score was 09 while the lowest was 03. The following table shows the results of the test.

**Table no.2. Shows the participants responses.**

| S.No | Groups (Marks) | Students | percentage |
|------|----------------|----------|------------|
| 01   | 0-4            | 6        | 13%        |
| 02   | 4-8            | 24       | 53%        |
| 03   | 8-12           | 8        | 18%        |

From the above table, it can be concluded that there were a few students who obtained high score. The percentage of students who scored above 08 was low. The majority of the students were falling into the lowest range. The result clearly indicates that the inter- cultural awareness among learners were not satisfactory.

In response to the open-ended questions regarding culture teaching in class, many of the students said that they did not receive adequate culture teaching. Some mentioned that teachers often focus on teaching of grammar, vocabulary and forms and norms of written communication. One of the respondents advocated that they are “unable to speak and behave native speakers”. They viewed obstacle to communication is insufficient understanding of English culture. However, a keen interest was seen among learners who thought that cultural knowledge could enlarge their perspective of the outside world. In response to the another question: “What do you think is important in culture teaching?”, the following were the most frequent answers: cultural differences, festivals and holidays, peoples’ way of life, sports, music, customs, etiquette, society, education, food, body language and values. When answering the last question “In what ways you would like to learn about foreign culture?”, Most of the students mentioned that they like extensive reading, watching English movies, listening to music, reading stories, role-playing, and personal contact with native speakers. The responses to the questions indicate that the present state of culture teaching and learning is not satisfactory. However, the students had a positive attitude towards culture learning. They were found interested in learning how English-speaking people live, what their customs are and in what ways foreign cultures are different from Indian culture.

## 6. FINDINGS OF INTERVIEW:

When answering to the first question “Do you agree that culture teaching is relevant in the EFL/ESL classroom?” All five teachers responded positively. One respondent replied that culture is embedded in language. “Any listening to the utterances of native speakers, any reading of original texts, and any examination of pictures of native speakers in natural activities will introduce its cultural elements”. According to the other interviewee, “teaching of culture appears obligatory because teachers need to offer their students useful cultural information to help them to have successful communication with people from other parts of the world”. With regard to the second question “Do you often introduce cultural information to your students in your classroom?” three out of five teachers answered “sometimes”. These teachers thought that they had less time for the frequent introduction of cultural information, as they needed to cover the syllabus within a limited amount of time. One respondent replied that it is not necessary to talk often about culture in class because learners would acquire cultural knowledge naturally, as they become advanced in linguistic competence. Although, this does not mean that he was against the notion of developing

students' intercultural awareness. When asked, "Which do you think is more important, culture teaching or linguistic knowledge, in EFL/ESL context? Two teachers agreed that language is more important while two said that language and culture should go hand in hand. They emphasised that, communicative methodology is adopted to develop communicative competence among learners. However, one of them argued that vocabulary and grammar is an obligatory requirement and is the basis of language learning. Raising cultural awareness is probably complementary skill. They believed that if students acquire linguistic knowledge, their English proficiency could be developed more effectively. When discussing the aspects of culture, which interest and benefit the students most, the teachers mentioned values, beliefs, customs, history, literature etc. are interesting. When talking about the current textbooks, none of the teachers was satisfied with the cultural information in them. They also mentioned that there were a few exercises designed to practice cultural knowledge. Additionally, in spite of a variety of textbooks, most of these focus on British and American cultures and are characterized by a dearth of cultural information pertaining to these countries. From the interview, the author found that teachers have a positive attitude towards culture teaching. They believe that culture is an important component of the EFL/ESL class, although they still emphasise on 'forms' of language due to the constraints imposed by the syllabus and textbooks as they could not give adequate time to teach culture

## 7. CONCLUSION:

There exists a marked discrepancy between theoretical research and the actual implementation of culture teaching in language classroom. Language learning must be strengthened and for that, learners and educators are equally accountable. To reaffirm the cultural and social development, language educators are required to fulfil social and political duty. It is a matter of concern that a high degree of linguistic knowledge does not ensure effective communications. To be bilingual, one must be bicultural also, thus, due attention should be given to the importance of inter cultural awareness. The urgent need is to set up a task for language educators to ensure that students must be inter-culturally and behaviourally aware while acquiring linguistic competence. The achievement of goal is possible with the preparation of an organised inventory that would include verbal and nonverbal aspects of the foreign culture.

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