



## TARGET CULTURE TEACHING IN THE ENGLISH AS A SECOND/FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

HAJAMOHIDEEN BIN MOHAMED ALI<sup>1</sup>, SHAMIMAHBINTIHAJA MOHIDEEN<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>International Islamic University Malaysia, <sup>2</sup>KolejUniversiti Islam Sultan Azlan Shah



### ABSTRACT

Culture learning leads to awareness of cultural practices both in individualistic and collectivist societies. Acceptance or rejection of others' way of life depends on individual learners who may be greatly influenced by their own culture, language and religion. Cultural knowledge and awareness through direct or indirect exposure via learning materials may groom the learners who later may have to travel to the target language countries for study, work or leisure. To withstand culture shock, L2 learners need to be exposed to the L1 culture with the help of illustrations, dialogues, etc. which are not incompatible with their own home culture and their society's norms. Other cultural information about the target language culture may be gained through multiple sources such as the internet, TV programs, literature and music. Culture teaching may be done to complement various learning items in a prescribed text book. It does not have to be done separately, but rather incidentally, as something additional. Linguocultural teaching does just that. It combines language teaching with cultural input. Cultural knowledge contributes significantly when interacting with primary speakers of the target language. Text books are not meant for culture teaching, but the cultural knowledge embedded in texts may be exploited in a beneficial way. Culture sensitivity knowledge is also part of sociolinguistic competence.

**Key words:** second language teaching; cultural knowledge; cultural awareness; intercultural competence

©KY PUBLICATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are so closely interwoven that we cannot understand the target language without reference to the target culture. In an interconnected world, communication problems may arise if we are not familiar with the norms and practices of other cultures. To solve communication problems which may arise in multinational workplaces and social encounters where much of a particular language is used, it is advisable for the learning and teaching of the target culture alongside the curriculum.

Realizing the significance of intercultural competence in an increasingly globalized world, The Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2015 in its Preliminary Report Executive Summary states that to develop values-driven Malaysians, every student needs to leave school "as a global citizen imbued with core universal values.....a willingness to embrace peoples of other nationalities, religions and ethnicities..." This may also be the goal of many nations in an interdependent world. Culture has even been described as the fifth language skill (Tomalin, 2008). Culture as a fifth skill involves a set

of abilities: the ability to perceive and recognize cultural differences; the ability to accept cultural differences; and the ability to appreciate and value cultural differences (<https://coerl.utexas.edu/methods/modules/culture>)

To achieve the aforementioned objectives, linguocultural teaching, i.e. the combination of language learning and information relating to culture, propounded by the Russian linguists Vitaly Kostomarow and Vereshchagin (1983) is recommended with respect to learning English as a second language in both upper secondary English language classrooms and tertiary levels. Culture may be understood as a way of life of a people, their beliefs, values, customs, etc. Information pertaining to the target language culture may be introduced incidentally or indirectly within the course syllabus to enable students to become successful readers, listeners, communicators in English as a second or foreign language environments anywhere where English language teaching is involved. This is because there are many expressions in English which have to be understood with reference to the culture of native English speakers. A passing reference to non-English speaking communities would give the learners a broad worldview of fellow human beings. Topics related to culture include art; music; dance; designs; proper names; signs and symbols; performances; ceremonies; architectural forms; handicrafts; sports; seasons; buildings; writers; leaders; literature; history; proverbs, etc.

Liddicoat (as cited in Brown, 2014) mentioned that the role of language was to "prepare language learners for meaningful communication outside their own cultural environment and to develop in language learners a sense of themselves as *mediators between languages and culture*" (2011: 837). Cultural expressions used in the target language help in cross cultural communication when both primary and non native speakers of a language are involved.

Acquisition of cultural knowledge reduces the phenomenon of culture shock when learners come into contact with primary target language speakers. Culture shock is defined as "a phenomenon ranging from mild irritability to deep psychological crisis" (Brown, 2014: 187). Some idiomatic expressions some learners may be

uncomfortable with are: *to rob Peter to pay Paul; eat like a pig; as dirty as a pigsty* and *What the hell are you doing here?* This is due to the discomfort felt by the usage of words referring to certain animals, activities and hell. The expressions should, of course, not be taken literally.

There are metaphors with culture-specific connotations which have to be correctly interpreted (Ponteroto, 1994) Examples include:

He *shot down* all his opponent's arguments. He *demolished* almost all of them. Few people have ever *won* an argument with him.

In the debate among presidential hopefuls, Bernie Sanders *demolished* Hilary Clinton.

The examples demonstrate how the primarily English speaking world values argumentation to drive home their message. The target words are metaphorical of free speech and how debates are conducted in Western societies.

This paper attempts to show that target culture information may be used to augment language teaching in the ESL/EFL situation as it is believed that language "incorporates a wider social and cultural perspective" (Baker, 2003:1). Baker further emphasizes that "every language will reflect the values, beliefs and assumptions of the culture it came from" (*ibid* 2). Therefore learning the culture of the target language speakers is almost inevitable. Whether one is agreeable to the idea of teaching culture or otherwise, the development of cultural awareness leads those in contact to more critical thinking (Cakir, 2006). As the world becomes increasingly multicultural, and contacts with primarily English speaking communities increase, it will contribute to our multicultural competence. Valdes (1990) asserts that imparting cultural knowledge enhances the learning experience.

#### **Methodology**

*English Form 4* (2013), an excellent text book for year 10 pupils, approved by the Malaysian Ministry of Education, whose authors are Annie Lee, Lyla Roberts and Magdalene Chew was used to study how linguocultural teaching may be carried out in the English language classroom.

#### **Findings & Discussion**

There are many cultural expressions in English. A reader or listener may come across some of these

while reading online or printed materials, while listening to TV & radio programs or when interacting socially with their colleagues. Some specific culture topics and the expressions related to them are given as examples:

**Climate-** the Arab spring; summer/winter of discontent; Make hay while the sun shines; When autumn comes can spring be far behind, summer school

*The summer of discontent* refers to a situation where there is suffering politically, economically and lack of social justice. The heat in the summer months is unbearable, similar to the suffering of affected people.

*The winter of discontent* refers to any difficult political situation during winter, for example, *The problems within the ruling coalition led to another winter of discontent.*

Autumn is the season before winter, the weather is cold, the sun sets early, the trees are bereft of their leaves and this may be disconcerting for those who had enjoyed the sunshine in the summer months preceding autumn. But spring which follows is joyful as flowers start to blossom and gardens proudly display their beauty. So the proverb *When autumn comes can spring be far behind* is used to cheer up people and motivate them. There are expressions such as "autumn blues" and "winter blues." These are used to show feelings of unhappiness over the passing of summer when the residents had been used to glorious sunshine.

**Clothing-** jersey; sweater; windbreaker; gloves, blazer; footwear; summer wear; winter clothes; department stores

*A wolf in sheep's clothing* is used for a person who appears friendly and harmless, but is not exactly so.

*Harrods is a famous department store in London.*

*The Scottish people sometimes wear a type of traditional clothing known as kilt on special occasions.*

**Crime-** mugging; catnap; hate crime; rape; date rape; battery; joyriding; domestic violence

*Kidnaps, muggings and murders have increased in recent years*

*Youth centres are aimed at keeping at keeping young people away from criminal activities such as carjacking and joyriding.*

*Racist attacks targeting Muslims have increased in recent months*

**Law-**marriage; divorce; custody; lawsuit; sue; alimony; deport; litigation

*Nobody is above the law, be they royalty or commoners.*

*The celebrity finally acknowledged paternity of the child after revelations by a private investigator.*

*The politician sued the newspaper for defamation.*

**Food/Drink-** diner; pub; bed & breakfast; sausages; cornflakes; scrambled egg; hamburger; it's his bread and butter; alcoholic drinks; soft drinks; lemonade; that single mother is a tough cookie; football is not my cup of tea; turkey is popular, especially at Christmas.

*This roasted lamb is absolutely delicious. Must congratulate thechef.*

*The guests drank a toast to the newly married couple.*

*Fish and chips are very popular with people around here.*

*They had scrambled eggs and mashed potato for breakfast.*

**Education-** pre-school; comprehensive schools; public schools; mission schools; polytechnic; Oxford; Cambridge; Harvard; MIT.

*The parents sent her to a mission school to acquire an all-rounded education.*

*American, Australian and British universities are recognized worldwide for their quality education.*

*The research culture is very much a part of university life.*

*Ethnic minorities are well accommodated in public education.*

**Family-** single parent families; nuclear family; stay-at-home-mum; adopted kids; lesbian couples; same-sex marriage; a match made in heaven; walk down the aisle

*Family values have been eroded since the change in traditional moral values.*

*The couple decided to live separately due to irreconcilable differences.*

*After the birth of her second child, she chose to be a homemaker.*

*There are many children today from mixed parentage and intercultural relationships.*

**Geography**-the Commonwealth of Australia; the different states of USA; the bush; the outback; the Scottish Highlands; creek; beaches

*The family had a picnic by the creek.*

*In summer they flock to the beach.*

*The Lake District is said to be breathtakingly beautiful.*

*The Niagara Falls is a much visited place by tourists in Canada.*

*Mismanagement at the company has been exposed, but many believe it's only the tip of the iceberg.*

**History**- aborigines; white settlers; slavery; the Crusades; knights; castles; native Americans; colonization; civilization; Rome

*History shows how colonizers treated the indigenous people in the countries they occupied.*

*The teacher told the pupil not to build castles in the air.* The expression refers to having plans or dreams which are very unlikely to happen. A castle is a large, fortified building where a British aristocrat lived.

*Rome was not built in a day* is used to say that a difficult task will take longer to complete and therefore requires patience.

A knight in the Middle Ages was a warrior who fought to defend his king and country. Thus, a *white knight* refers to a person or organization that rescues a company from being bought over by another company at an unfair price. Incidentally, the term *black knight* refers to the latter type of company.

**Holidays/Festivals**-There are many holidays associated with religious and national festivals.

*He took his family to see his parents in Boston for Thanksgiving.* Thanksgiving is celebrated by Christians, especially, in Canada and USA for all the things they are grateful for.

*The housewife bought a healthy turkey for Christmas.*

*Customers queued up outside some department stores on Boxing Day to snap up items at reduced prices.*

*The television channels broadcast carols from various churches*

*The Ramadan fasting month is now familiar with many people in the West.*

**Iconic buildings**-the White House; 10 Downing Street; Sydney Opera House;

*The Statue of Liberty proclaims the spirit of liberty among Americans.*

*The Buckingham Palace is the official residence of the British monarchy.*

*Visitors can watch Shakespeare's popular plays at the Globe Theatre.*

*Before leaving Sydney they visited the Sydney Opera House.*

**Language**-politically correct/euphemistic language; different vocabulary in American, Australian and British English

*As the person was financially challenged (not 'poor'), he lost his possessions and became a homeless person.*

*The native Americans (not 'Red Indians') have not really integrated well.*

*We are running out of petrol, is there a petrol station nearby?*

*Universities in USA start their semester in fall.*

*The Foreign Secretary in UK is the equivalent term for the Secretary of State in USA.*

*The UK Prime Minister met with his German counterpart Chancellor Angela Merkel.*

**Leisure activities**-going to the zoo, fun park; going on a rollercoaster; swimming; boating; skiing; cycling; jogging; bowling; visiting museums

*Join a wildlife safari and see your favourite animals.*

*The pubs are usually crowded on Saturday nights.*

*The wax museum was really entertaining.*

*Our tour guide gave an excellent description of the history of the castle we visited in South Wales.*

**Literature**- drama; novel; poetry; short story; epic; books

*The works of Shakespeare are used as texts in many countries.*

*"The Necklace" is a great story translated into many languages.*

*"To Kill A Mocking Bird" shows the prejudice and injustice towards black people many years ago in the US.*

*What a Jekyll and Hide this fellow is!*

**Money**- a penny saved is a penny earned; a penny for your thoughts; penny-wise and pound-foolish; a dime (American/Canadian); penniless

*Most countries in Europe transact using the euro.*

*Money makes the world go round.*

*The USD is currency which is accepted worldwide.*

*Travellerscheques are safer to carry when travelling abroad.*

**Music**-jazz; keyboard; guitar; drum; bass

*The Beatles were hugely popular around the world at one time.*

*The rock singer died of drug overdose.*

*The tickets to the opera had been sold out quickly due to the peak tourist season.*

*Kenny Rogers was well known for country music.*

**Personality**- famous people in various domains

*Martin Luther King was a famous African American civil rights leader. He delivered one of the greatest speeches in history- I have a dream.*

*The teen took a photo with the TV talk show host.*

*The sports personality was stripped of his medal as he was found guilty of doping.*

*Tiger Woods is not the same golfer he once was.*

*Shaquille O'Neal is synonymous with basketball in US.*

**Pets/Animals**- Love me, love my dog; a wolf in sheep's clothing; kangaroo, koala

*The old lady's constant companion was her feline friend.*

*She was as cunning as a fox.*

*Some countries have laws to protect animals from being abused.*

*The family rushed their pet dog to a veterinary clinic.*

**Religion**- Roman Catholic; Protestant; Methodist; Islam; Judaism

*The pastor denounced the burning down of a black church.*

*Mosques are fairly visible in Western countries today.*

*Multicultural policies have encouraged many different houses of worship in Canada.*

*Religious intolerance is not tolerated by the authorities in European countries.*

**Social occasions**- party; dating; catching a movie; entertaining guests; fundraiser

*She looked elegant for the Saturday night party.*

*Who are you going with to the prom?*

*Let's go Dutch, I can't give you guys a treat today.*

*He threw a grand bash to announce their engagement.*

**Sports**- baseball; ice hockey; EPL; futsal; beach soccer; football; yachting; golf

*He would spend hours watching the sports channels.*

*Hamilton is the Formula One champion.*

*Many FIFA officials are now facing bribery charges.*

*Racism and hooliganism in football must be dealt with firmly.*

*Muhammad Ali was a boxing legend.*

**Transportation**- the tube; a tube station; carry coal to Newcastle; caravan; highway

*The hitchhiker hitched a ride from the passing van.*

*The family passed through Cardiff en route to Swansea.*

*The students rented a car for hire and travelled all over the countryside.*

*They enjoyed the inflight entertainment during their flight to Vancouver.*

**Vacation**-cruise; campsite; budget hotels; B& B; summer holiday; sandy beaches; sunny weather

*Their vacation was ruined due to strikes by the transport union.*

*The cruise took them to ten different European ports*

*The resort was located away from the bustling city.*

*The river cruise was just so exhilarating.*

The cultural references mentioned in the target book identified may be further explained, especially those included under "Language for Aesthetic Use." Shakespeare's "Sonnet 18" has references to summer. Phrases or sentences where the word appears may be given, for example, 'summer holiday.' More information may be provided about some of Shakespeare's more popular works.

References to Malaysian festivals may be complemented with information about some festivals in primarily English speaking countries, e.g. Easter, Thanksgiving and Halloween.

A reading passage on saving turtles may be followed by information on how there is what is known as Department of Animal Rescue which shows the great concern some nations have for the welfare of animals.

Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech may be mentioned while on the topic of "Dare to Dream." On the segment dealing with a radio interview, students may be asked to name which foreign English TV channels they watch. Do they watch CNN, BBC, AlJazeera, CCTV?

Stephen Hawking is mentioned under "Special People" because of his disability. Can our

students think of other people, who despite their disability, have contributed to humanity, both in the English and non- English speaking world.

Short stories in the text book may be followed by a brief discussion on some of the stories in English the pupils themselves have read. Questions may be asked about the items worn by the people in the pictures accompanying the story/passages.

When famous names are mentioned in sections, students may be asked to briefly state what they know about them, for example, who is Christopher Reeve, Helen Keller, etc.

Emphasis on multiculturalism may follow a picture with the caption "Faces of Malaysia." It may be mentioned that primarily English- speaking countries are not monocultural anymore, but increasingly multicultural , e.g. Australia, Canada, UK and USA.

The chapter dealing with peace can be used to evoke reactions and responses from the pupils about peace icons from the West and the East. This promotes an understanding of the culture of peace and tolerance which is so essential today.

#### CONCLUSION

Linguocultural teaching has immense benefits for our young citizens. Such a methodology enables them to extend their language proficiency to meet their needs for the global lingua franca in their daily life, acquisition of new knowledge and for professional interaction and social integration in their workplace later. Cultural knowledge makes us all the more wiser, mature, broadminded and tolerant.

Linguocultural teaching should not be misconstrued as an attempt to transmit Western values and indoctrinate our students with alien values, beliefs and ideology. Foreign influences need not make our youths forsake their traditional values, their cultural and religious identity. In fact, developing cultural awareness may lead them to think critically. This methodology will groom our young citizens to become global citizens, tolerant of people of other faiths, ethnicities and nationalities as envisaged in the Malaysian Education Blueprint.

Our text books, be they in American English or British English, may help to promote

sociocultural competence through texts which show similarities and differences in our way of doing things, for example, personal conversations, business deals, advertisements, semiotics, etc. Such an approach promotes cross cultural understanding and adaptability in a globalized, borderless world. Culture teaching may arouse the curiosity of the second language learner to know more about other countries and become an international person (Shang, 1991) Suitable sitcoms may be used for intercultural awareness. Certain short stories and poems which are in the prescribed text books may be further exploited for their cultural knowledge. Shang stated that Japan was trying to make the learners more international by including the culture component in the teaching of English. From her teaching experience, she found the Culturgramseries beneficial. Although teaching the language is our primary duty, incorporating cultural knowledge and global awareness will help to ensure our students are well rounded and have a universal outlook. Language teaching cannot be divorced from imparting cultural knowledge of the target language speakers. Just as we teach the grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary of the target language, culture knowledge also has to be involved (Baker, 2003). Tomalin (2008) has identified two major reasons for considering teaching cultural skills: the international role English plays and globalization.

To conclude, the present researchers concur with Hamad (1999 who asserts that the teaching of culture is integral to teaching a foreign language, and should therefore not be ignored. He, however, cautions that maintaining a balance between both the target language culture and native cultures is essential as all cultures have their own peculiarities and the differences are for teachers and learners to take cognizance of.

#### REFERENCES

- Annie Lee; Lyla Roberts and Magdalene Chew. (2002). *English Form 4*. Johor Bahru. PGI Cipta.
- Baker, W. (2003). Should culture be an overt component of EFL instruction outside of English speaking countries? The Thai context. *Asian EFL Journal* December 2003.

- Brown, H.D. 2014.*Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. New York: Pearson
- Cakir, Ismail. (2006). Developing cultural awareness in foreign language teaching. *Turkish online journal of distance education*. July 2006, 154-161.
- Culture(<https://coerll.utexas.edu/methods/modules/culture>) retrieved 4 April, 2016.
- Hamad, Abdullah. (1999). The problem of culture in language teaching. *Islamic Education Quarterly* 16 (2), 37-46.
- Kostomarov, V. and Evgenil, V. (1983). *Language and culture*. [coerll.utexas.edu/methods/modules/cultures](http://coerll.utexas.edu/methods/modules/cultures). Retrieved 10 August, 2015.
- Ponterotto, D. (1994). Metaphors we can learn by. *Forum*. 32 (3), 2-7.
- Shang, S. (1991). Incorporating culturegrams into the EFL classroom. *Forum*. 29(4), 39-40.
- Tomalin, B. (2008). Culture-the fifth language skill (<http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/articles/culture-fifth-language-skill>) retrieved 4 April, 2016.
-