Chapter 20
Integrating Culture in Language Preparatory Programs:
From the Perspectives of Native and Non-Native English Instructors in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to investigate the role of culture in English Language Preparatory Programs in Turkey. Specifically, the chapter attempts to gain insights on what types of culture teaching activities native and non-native English instructors use in their classroom, find out if there is any difference between the two groups of participants and lastly, identify to what extent they implement culture in their teaching practices.. The sample population of this study were 95 (44 native and 51 non-native) EFL instructors working in the preparatory program. Data were collected from a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The findings revealed that both groups of instructors agreed that language and culture are closely related and that culture should be integrated in classrooms frequently to help students to become intercultural speakers as well as become more competent in how to develop a relationship with people of other languages and cultures.

INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are two concepts that cannot be separated from each other. Language is a phenomenon that derives from and is interlinked with society and culture. When communicating, we not only utter and transfer specific patterns of sounds and words in order to convey messages but also include the social and cultural background information that we acquired while learning our mother tongue (Byram & Risager, 1999; Kramsch, 1993; Liddicoat, 2002; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Sercu 2002).

Before getting into the details about the relationship between language and culture, it is obvious to describe what culture means. The term 'culture' is difficult to define. It has been attributed different meanings in different eras and there are varying accepted scholastic interpretations of what the word is supposed to mean. According to Williams (1983), as a result of these shifts, three main uses of the term have emerged:

... a reference to the intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development of an individual, group or society; a label for a range of intellectual and artistic activities and their products; and finally a designation for the entire way of life, activities, beliefs and customs of a group or society. Of these three the final interpretation is the most explicit. (p. 80)

Ruhly (1976) described a given culture as having both visible (the surface or external) and invisible (sub-surface or internal) features. She continued:

Culture is like an iceberg - 9/10ths of it lies beneath the surface. This hidden area underlies our behavior, influences our perceptions and is outside our immediate frame of reference - until we plunge beneath the surface - or perhaps like the Titanic, encounter it unexpectedly. (p. 17)

Morain (1986) identified culture as 'the view of the world shared by members of a group, the patterns of behavior which derive from that view, and the utilitarian and expressive forms which evolve from both" (p. 3). The *tangible aspects* of culture range from the inspiring to the mundane. *Intangible aspects* of culture include people's values, ideas, and dreams as well as the expression of these in law, custom, story and song.

In addition, DeFleur, Kearney and Plax (1992) defined 'culture' as an *umbrella* term – ''one very broad and inclusive concept covering many. Accordingly, a number of types of culture fit under that umbrella. (p. 372) One is the *general* culture that brings certain uniformity to the ways of life of people in even a diverse society. Two additional categories are *specialized* cultures, which characterize an enormous number of organizations and groupings within the society, and *co-cultures*, which are the particular practices of our various racial, ethnic religious, and national groups''.

Apart from various definitions cited above, culture has been closely linked to language learning. To exemplify, in the early stages of language development, language is acquired in a social, behavioral and cultural context, which naturally makes it possible for children to associate and internalize language and culture together. Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) explained this process by saying that "the primary concern of caregivers (while teaching a first language to a child) across cultures is not to provide grammatical input, but to ensure that their children are able to display and understand behaviors appropriate to social situations" (p. 276).

Buttjes and Byram (1990) emphasized the connection between first language acquisition and cultural awareness saying that "most of us are less aware of the intricate and subliminal processes by we are all socialized into our native first cultures" (p. 3). Our subjectivities and identities have been shaped as members of specific genders, social classes, religions and citizenries long before we can be aware of these formative influences. Here language plays a crucial role from early childhood onward.

In that sense, language is widely acknowledged to be inextricably intertwined with culture and it derives from a given society that possesses its unique culture. Therefore, during communication, while

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