

## Teaching and Learning of English in the Context of Culture

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### Abstract

The learning of a second language entails conscious analytical efforts. It encompasses several components such as syntactic, semantic and communicative competence. Learning second language does not only mean to get command on vocabulary, pronunciation and grammatical structures but to incorporate cultural elements which are inseparable from language. Second language learning plays a crucial role in paying respect towards one another's culture. The disconnection of the learner and teacher with cultural roots of second language may lead into a confused state. It is advisable to think how much of cultural knowledge suffices to understand and to teach effectively.

**Keywords:** L2, culture, socio-cultural roots, semantic-structure, strategies

### Introduction

The present paper explores the deep relationship between language and culture keeping in mind that it is advisable to know how much of cultural knowledge of L2 suffices to teach and learn effectively. It also suggests some of the strategies to facilitate teaching and learning second language. English is a second language in India. Government of India emphasized teaching and learning of English from 1<sup>st</sup> standard. Many different methods and approaches for teaching English as second language have been practical to develop communication skills in learner, for instance, Grammar and Translation method, Audio Lingual method, communicative Approach. However, it does not help to improve process of learners. Because learning second language does not only mean to be conscious of vocabulary pronunciation and grammatical structures of cultural elements play a vital role. Now, it is generally accepted that for the effective communication, the teacher and learner of second language should incorporate and understand cultural elements which be the heart of the meaning and situation as well. As we know culture not only focuses on who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds. Second language learning gives an exposure to understanding of culture and society of a target language. But, the question is always there that how much of cultural knowledge of L2, the teacher and learner must acquire to be effective in communication. This paper is an attempt to find out the answer in the context of teaching and learning situations.

### Deep relationship between culture and language:-

In the age of multiculturalism, second language learning, plays a crucial role in playing respect towards one another's culture. English language is important in order to be able to enjoy the English-speaking youth culture, for example music, film and TV-programs and in order to be able to communicate with people from other cultures. Students can use it when travelling, working aboard, studying, etc. which help them to shape the view of the world. It is a medium to form a picture of society. Many cultural and social tenants are hidden in language. Language learning assists to gain certain ideas about the thinking, background and cultural aspects of speaking community. It becomes necessary to study cultural aspects of a target language. It was Saussure who first proclaimed that language is a social fact. His concept of language is a network of relationship in which the value of each element ultimately depends on the value of the other. For Saussure language comprises a set of signs: a signifier – speech sound; and signified – of meaning. He says that language is not complete in any speaker, it exists perfectly only with a society. He thought semantics should be regarded as a social fact, not psychological. Nowadays in language pedagogy, it is accepted that language and culture are intertwined. It is not possible to teach a language without culture and culture is the necessary context for language use. This can be explained by taking into consideration Hudson's conclusion on language and culture. He says, "Some cultural concepts are learned through language, so language is an important instrument of socialization". We find values presupposition about the nature of life in normal use of language which is aimed to teach and learn L2. Accordingly as a teacher and learner, we have to understand to what extent cultural background influences language learning and teaching. It leads us to study a language in its socio-cultural context which highlights an awareness of the necessity for interdisciplinary approaches to language, culture and society. It is necessary to understand the functions which cultural demands perform in the language. As we know there is no doubt that the influence of mother tongue is always present in L2 learning. It becomes necessary to investigate the importance of the learner's native language (L1) which makes impression on a second language (L2).

In other words, it becomes clear that teaching and learning second language without its socio-cultural roots may mislead the communication. If the teacher and learner have to study some well-known statements such as “The proper study of mankind is Man’ (Pope), ‘The child is the father of the things’ (Pythagoras) etc. They should be able to recognize the patriarchal culture of the society in which the word ‘man’ stands for all human being. Here we have to understand that the meanings of an utterance do not depend entirely on its grammatical forms but in addition to that certain socio-cultural elements such as the attitudes, values, conventions and prejudices should be known. Thus, the cultural knowledge of L2 deepens and enlightens the understanding of learner and teacher as well. In the same way, we may face many problems which crop up while using grammar - translation method of second language teaching if we are not familiar with culture of the target language. Here vocabulary in the target language is learned through direct translation from the native language and readings in the target language are translated directly and then discussed in the native language, for instance, the house = ‘ghar’. But sometimes we find difficulties while translating, customs, objects and culture – specific concepts which are associated with different cultures, for instance, the English words brown, monkey, carpet are untranslatable in to French.

### **Strategies to facilitate teaching and learning L2:-**

The learning of second language involves efforts to acquire syntactic, semantic, and sociolinguistics competence sociolinguistic competence enriches the appropriate language use based on the knowledge of socio-cultural conventions and social context. To ease our L2 learning many strategies can be utilized. According to John Schumann (1978), “the most important influence on L2 learning is the relationship between the social group of the L2 learners and the social group of the speakers of the target language. Successful learning means ‘acculturation’ becoming part of the target culture.”

It is always fruitful to learn about cultural norms and values by asking questions for clarification in class or but side of class. There are five steps recommended by Cohen to obtain native like sociolinguistic competence. They are as follows.

#### **1. Assessment of students - sociolinguistic awareness –**

In this step the teachers determine the learners level of awareness of the speech act to be taught. The aim of this step is to develop awareness of the diversity of language in the many situations encountered in everyday life and in familiar contexts. Students will be expected to reflect on their sense of cultural identity.

#### **2. Presentation and discussion of dialogues focusing on socio-cultural factors affecting speech acts:-**

Here the teacher presents learners with examples of the speech act in use and learners are to guess details with regard to participants, such as their social status or role-relationship, as well as to the particular speech act, for instance, whether an apology could be considered an offense or not.

#### **3. Evaluation of situations that might require apologies or complaints:-**

In this step, learners are given a variety of typical situations in the target culture and they have to evaluate how contextual variables affect the choice of the linguistic form of the speech act.

#### **4. Role playing:-**

In this step, learners perform a role play as a final practice. Here, as highlighted by the authors, the important thing is to supply learners with a lot of details about the role-relationship between the interlocutors as well as about the situation.

#### **5. Feedback and discussion:-**

The final step of the approach help learners to be aware of similarities and differences between speech act behavior in their own culture and in the target culture. These steps will assist the teacher and learner to achieve mastery in a target language.

### **Conclusion –**

Thus, from the above, it becomes clear that to teach and learn second language does not only need grammatical and semantic knowledge of L2 but also attention on cultural aspects of language use in essential. So, language teacher and learner should go beyond syntactic, semantic knowledge to achieve sociolinguistics competence of a target language to be effective. This can be done with the use of certain strategies to facilitate and understand how much of cultural knowledge suffices in language use.

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### **Conflicts of interest**

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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