

*Cultural Awareness in the Language Classroom*

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The number of English language learners in Azerbaijan is increasing rapidly with the door of our country opening wider and wider to the outside world. Language skills have become increasingly important due to the growing globalization and flexibility of today's world. Learners of English are aware of the special benefit that come with knowledge of a world-class language. Many English teachers find inspiration to continue their efforts in the same awareness of importance of English. Cross-cultural encounter is becoming a commonplace for most of the population of our country, and the imperatives for understanding and effective intercultural communication are upon us.

Azerbaijan University of Languages is concerned with training foreign language teachers, professional interpreters and translators. Apart from the knowledge of foreign language our graduates will have to be able to communicate effectively in the target language whatever the cultural content. English is used as a contact language among speakers who come from different cultural backgrounds. Native speakers of English constitute only about 25 per cent of all the people using as a Lingua Franca.

Apart from excellent knowledge of and about the target language, foreign language specialists need a theoretical understanding of cross-cultural communication and the competence required to achieve it. (Byram, 1994). To be able to facilitate communication across cultures without feeling frustration and committing errors they need to acquire the sociocultural competence that will enable them to interpret the complex nature of the target culture. Many well-known linguists and applied linguists point out the complexity and multi-layered nature of intercultural communication. It should be noted that the major element of change implicit within the notion of communicative competence is a shift from the profession's enduring focus on language to a focus on the users of that language. Communication is a cultural act. Intercultural communicative competence is defined as the general linguistics, social and psychological abilities that make a successful interaction with individuals from other cultures possible.

It should be said that besides all the efforts, applied linguistics continues to fail to provide theoretical models upon which pedagogy to enable effective communicative competence can be fully developed.

The process of raising intercultural awareness should lead toward understanding and appreciation of the existing diversity and may consist of several stages. Cross-cultural training should be incorporated in foreign language teaching and learning.

Cultural misunderstandings can cause confusion and irritation. Sometimes it can even bring to breakdown in communication. The significance of nonverbal behavior in cross-cultural communication should be emphasized. It should provide strategies for combining culture and culture study. Consequently, cross-cultural training requires content pedagogy different from traditional instructional practices. Cross-cultural training should contain stimulation games, case studies, ice-breakers and other exercises. Special nature films to provide an entry into controversial topics can help the language learners to recognize and unlearn stereotypes.