

論文：

Bringing the Intercultural to Cultural Studies through Literature

Jim Rebstock

Abstract

Often Cultural Studies programs focus on foreign cultures as information to be acquired, much like the foreign languages themselves. But like the languages being studied in the programs, culture is an evolving, changing thing, inextricably linked to language. This paper looks at the use of foreign language literature to better understand the culture from which it comes, and also to use so students can understand themselves and their own culture better.

Keywords: literature, culture, intercultural communication, intercultural competence, foreign language

Bringing the Intercultural to Cultural Studies through Literature

Cultural Studies programs have been part of the higher education landscape for several decades now. In Japan, what are called Cultural Studies might more closely resemble Area Studies in other parts of the world. This is due to the fact that foreign languages, especially but not restricted to English, are a major component of the programs. But, however the programs are styled, there is consensus on the need for such programs and what the goals of such programs should be. “(G)lobalization and international exchange opportunities have increased,” (Demircioglu & Cakir, 2016). Therefore, students need “the ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on specific attitudes, intercultural knowledge, skills and reflection” (Deardorff, 2006, cited in Demircioglu & Cakir, 2016).

What is meant by the term, Cultural Studies? Safonova, a university educator in Russia, defines it as:

“Cultural studies as a university subject is a multidisciplinary course... transformed and designed in order to help university learners:

- deepen their knowledge on... specific features of intercultural communication in a globalized world...
- act as a cultural mediator in cross-cultural or intercultural communication”

(Safonova, 2017). Mazari and Derraz, university faculty in Morocco, give the objectives of a course as:

“the ability of learners to appreciate similarities and differences between their own culture and the communities where they speak the target language, to identify with the experience and perspective of native speakers of the target language, and then to use this competence to develop a more objective view of their own culture and their way of thinking” (2015).

But how can learners become efficient intercultural communicators? Many programs around the world focus on acquiring language as a mechanical process, developing proficiency, usually oral (Warford & White, 2012). As Mazari & Derraz (2015) point out, “(l)anguage and culture are not acquired by the children of a society as two separate things.” They continue, “(t)he interdependence of language and culture in most human activities implies that the first serves as a vehicle in which the other is learnt.” Porto, et al. (2017) posit “(l)anguage teaching can and should contribute to educational processes, to the development of individuals, and to the evolution of societies.”

In the last several decades the emphasis on communicative approaches and the emphasis on communicative proficiency in language courses has become prevalent, especially for programs trying to cater to students who do not aspire to become language teachers or scholars. Students want to study languages for business and career opportunities, or for travel.

Literature and “‘Big C’ culture”, (Tomalin & Stempelski, 1993, cited in Zacharias, 2005), were abandoned as not meeting the new requirements of these business and travel-minded students. But as pointed out by Warford and White (2012), there are problems with a more mechanical approach and proficiency as the ultimate goal in the language classroom. “The acquisition construct, by nature, suggests that the ability to communicate is a linear, internal process of morphosyntactic development.” They continue, “(p)roiciency, the other dominant focus of FL and L2 classrooms, likewise does little to enhance a discussion of what it takes to communicate capably across, or for that matter, even within cultures.”

In fact, Tomalin and Stempelski (1993) draw a contrast between types of culture, “‘Big C’ culture as achievement culture and the ‘little c’ as behavior culture.” Moran, (2001, cited in Zacharias, 2005), states, “culture is ‘the great achievement’ of people as reflected in their history, social institutions, works of art, architecture, music and literature,” which seems to be the more traditional conception of culture, or Culture. Culture is a complex and evolving concept according to Hoff (2017). However we conceive ‘culture’ as a concept, it is impossible to escape from its presence or even influence. “Since any communication takes place in a social and cultural context, it has become evident that it cannot be enough to promote the four skills and the ability to communicate information. To negotiate meaning we also need to be aware of the social and cultural function of a particular communicative situation” (Narancic-Kovac & Kaltenbacher, 2006).

In the 1990’s culture made a comeback in the language classroom based on ideas such as Tomalin and Stempelski’s, and Intercultural Communication began to be taught. But here we begin to see ideas like the ones expressed in a Chinese classroom, “(a) successful intercultural communicator understands various types of cultures” (Zhao, 2011). This approach almost requires learners to become encyclopedias of culture. However, theories of Intercultural Communication continued to progress and be refined until we arrive at the place where all models of Intercultural Communication “include awareness (of both self and others), an open-minded attitude, intercultural knowledge, and skills that lead to effective communication and behaviour as an outcome” (Demircioglu & Cakir, 2016).

Intercultural Communication has continued to be

incorporated into foreign language programs, especially English. Gomez (2012) points out, “(t)he development of intercultural competence has become a central issue in the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) over the last two decades.” Porto et al. (2017) state, “foreign language education can make a specific contribution to citizenship education through the concept of ‘intercultural citizenship education (ICE)’.” In fact, according to Habegger-Conti (2015), the Council of Europe in its Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR), which states goals and standards for language programs taught in Europe, lists a number of goals focusing on respect and inclusion:

“Cultural citizenship- promoting respect between persons of different cultural background and strengthening democratic involvement- is fundamental to the aims and objectives of the Council of Europe language policy: ‘To promote mutual understanding and tolerance, respect for identities and cultural diversity through more effective international communication’” (R(98)6: qtd in the CEFR 1.2, pg. 3).

Keeping in mind that not all language programs or teachers are on board with teaching from an intercultural perspective, how can educators incorporate intercultural communication into their classes? One way is certainly to treat culture as specific information to acquire and foreigners as interesting specimens. “For instance, having introduced some basic knowledge of Christmas, teachers can guide students to celebrate the festival the way in which American people do” (Zhao, 2011).

Or, educators can incorporate foreign language (FL) literature into the lesson. Literature, as a representative of Big C culture, fell out of favor in foreign language classes as being inflexible, uninteresting, dusty, old, and not useful to a communicative approach to teaching language. Students are not interested in reading old books full of formal, flowery language written for elites long ago (Dogaru, 2012). Warford and White (2012) relate that students “were openly hostile about having to study literature and culture, claiming that communication should be the sole focus of learning an FL.” Theirs was not the only example (Hattie & Yates, 2014; Mori, 2015; Habegger-Conti, 2015). But foreign language literature offers certain benefits.

To begin with, “(l)iterature integrates language

skills” (Zacharias, 2005). Widdowson, (1971, cited in O’Sullivan, 1991) observed that “literature is an example of language in use.” “However, when it, (literature,) becomes a subject of study, it may be seen as an activity involving and using language” (O’Sullivan, 1991). Rezanejad et al. (2015) “believe in the power of literature in making language learning a pleasant experience for the students.” But they also state, “(l)iterature is a tool that can help students to learn how to use language and how to use it differently.”

Narancic-Kovac and Kaltenbacher (2006) see foreign language literature as a multi-functional resource. “In a way, literature is a double blessing in this context, as it enables teachers to address issues such as intercultural awareness, learner autonomy, critical thinking, citizenship, rights and responsibilities, etc. simultaneously with more strictly foreign language learning issues such as skills, accuracy, vocabulary or pragmatics.” Ibragimova et al. (2017) provide a detailed list of reasons why literature is useful in a FL classroom:

“(1) literary texts include various language norms and (2) they are the important sources of socio-cultural information and culture-oriented linguistics. (3) They develop lexical and grammar skills in receptive and productive language activities. (4) A literary piece influences readers’ morality in one way or another, i.e. it has a disciplinary effect. (5) It stimulates critical thinking over the world and events around.”

With the spread of Reader Response theory and readers moving from a more passive consumer role to a more active role of creating meaning in dialogue with the text and the author, educators are grasping an opportunity to use foreign language literature in a more active, student-centered way in the classroom (Hoff, 2017). Hoff (2017) states “reading of FL literature must be understood as a multidimensional form of intercultural communication that entails navigating conflict, complexity and ambiguity.” In a 2016 paper, Hoff makes the same statement and then points out “FL literature gives readers the opportunity to communicate with literary voices from other cultural, social and historical contexts.”

So, what does literature bring to a language classroom? For one thing literature can teach empathy for others. Fjallstrom and Kokkala (2015) found their students had no trouble empathizing with characters

who were not the main characters in a story. According to Aerila et al. (2016), “(r)eaders of multicultural literature from majority groups, in turn, can increase their understanding of diversity and different cultures and learn that despite differences, people also have many similarities.”

Hoff (2017) found that FL literature promoted understanding. She also believes that readers must examine their own emotional responses and must be encouraged to compare and contrast texts. Porto et al. (2017), in discussing Byram’s political engagement hierarchy, state that students can interact with others through different texts and “reflect critically on their own assumptions, and those of others.” But Aerila et al. (2016) stress that “(i)t is essential to discuss what has been read.” Then readers can be open-minded about differences. This examination of the students’ own feelings and perceptions is essential to understand not only L2 culture but the students’ own culture as well. “It is impossible to underestimate the power of the C1 (culture 1) cultural lens, as well as the difficulties that L2/second culture (C2) learners have in substituting new perspectives for those that have long served as the foundations for literacy” (Warford & White, 2012). Tran and Seepho (2016) make the point that “learner awareness is one of the necessary conditions for the learning process to take place.”

Which brings the discussion back to culture. All kinds of reading materials have “diverse levels of cultural expression” (Gomez, 2012). Warford and White (2012) point out, students read through their own cultural lens. They also point out, texts cannot be seen as groupings of unrelated words “separated from the culture from which they originate and for which they are destined.” So culture can be seen coming from different directions, as it were, being received by the reader from the text, being projected onto the text by the reader, and formed into some sort of hybrid concept by the confluence of different cultures, that may or may not resemble the actual culture represented in the text.

“Literature was first conceived and taught as offering a privileged and prestigious access to distinct national ‘cultures’ and languages. Today, it is perceived in education as some variety of cultural studies, where culture is thought of as hybrid, contested and in constant (re)construction, and significantly linguistic in its workings, constructed interactively between people, particularly through language use” (Dogaru, 2012).

Celce-Murcia (2001, cited in Dogaru, 2012) says that “the ultimate goal of cultural learning is not to convey information about a culture nor to promote the acquisition of culturally influenced ways of behaving, but rather to help learners see their culture in relation to others so as to promote cross-cultural understanding.”

This is the goal of education ultimately, that the student should come to know herself or himself better. Aerila et al. (2016) set their aim as producing students who act for a more “equitable society.” “Literature education means using fiction to support the reader’s personal growth, with emphasis on the development of reasoning skills, values, and identity as well as the general understanding of human and social reality.” Zacharias (2005) lists several ways in which reading literature develops the whole student; motivation and interest, cognitive dimensions, and affective dimensions. Literature develops the self and allows travel through time and space (Habegger-Conti, 2015). Narancic-Kovac and Kaltenbacher (2006) put it simply:

“It is obvious that reading literature is a first-rate way of developing intercultural awareness/competence because it not only works at a cognitive but also, often very subtly, at an emotional level. Apart from the factual knowledge about the other culture that can be drawn from it, literature enhances personal response by providing gaps (Leerstellen) that the reader has to fill with his/her own culturally determined imagination.”

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