

Book Review: Culture and Cultural Interaction in Foreign/Second Language Teaching

Edited by Gülnur Aydın

Note: The Turkish title of the book is *Yabancı/İkinci Dil Öğretiminde Kültür ve Kültürel Etkileşim*.

Context is needed for communication to take place. Byram (1988) states that language does not have a context-free function; indeed, he is of the view that language refers to the context of culture. In this context, using language in the context of a certain communication and culture comes to the fore in foreign/second language teaching; specialization in different communication situations and contexts becomes more important than specializing in language structures. Reflecting cultural characteristics in language teaching and carrying out teaching activities in a cultural context gain importance. As the editor, Gülnur Aydın states in the foreword, the most fundamental reason for the emergence of the book is the necessity of transferring culture to language teaching environments. Moreover, the editor states that the intellectual preparation of the book started in a workshop held at a university in 2019 with the discussions in the context of language teaching and culture among the academics who are experts in the field. This book, which started to be designed at the workshop, went through the preparation phase and was published two years later. The book begins with the editor's foreword; it consists of ten chapters in total.

Part 1: *Basic Concepts of Culture Teaching*. This work highlights, as author Gülnur Aydın states it, "the concepts that produce terminology related to the cultural dimension of language" (p. 4). The basic concepts of culture teaching are introduced. Culture and types of culture as well as concepts of enculturation and acculturation are examined. While cultural knowledge is discussed within the framework of the concepts of distance, difference, diversity, awareness, sensitivity, equivalence, and borrowing; interculturality, on the other hand, is examined within the framework of the concepts of interaction, communication, and competence. These concepts give the reader the necessary tools to understand different texts on culture and cultural interaction. Aydın opposes the idea of culture being imposed in a straightforward manner. In her view, cultural transfer ignores and disregards the acquisitive nature of culture learning. She believes that "the right way is to use such expressions as cultural interaction and cultural sharing since they help create mutually reciprocal experiences" (p. 5). This view also explains "cultural interaction" used in the title of the book.

Part 2: *Culture Teaching and its Purposes*. In this work, Nurettin Demir discusses teaching of culture and its aims. Culture teaching is taken in relation to foreign language teaching as well as to different languages and different cultures. He discusses different ways to teach culture and explains how cultural competence can be developed. He focuses on the reflection of cultural studies in foreign language teaching. Useful information is given about culture in general and different cultural dimensions and aspects specifically. The author, using a

number of examples, tries to explain the elements of difference between languages, cultures and perceptions. He gives more examples as he tries to make a point stating that expressions such as related to kindness, greeting styles, color names and so forth differ in different societal contexts. However, the author also seems to like dwelling on multidimensional and different topics and subjects; therefore, it appears that from time to time he drifts away from the stated aims of culture education which were apparently the original focus of the chapter.

Part 3: *Cultural Contents*. Fatma Açık deals, firstly, with the cultural contents of Razi's (2012) "Cultural Element Inventory" treating them under 7 headings: intellectual values, lifestyles, behaviors, media, artistic values, family and science. She also details some of the elements which she sees as important part of Turkish culture in these contents. For example, she gives *halay*, *whirling (semah)*, *zeibek (zeybek)* and *similar elements*, the category of Turkish dancing types, under the heading of lifestyles. She gives explanation on how cultural contents could be best presented. Finally, the author draws our attention to the importance to using texts that reflect social rules and communicative aspects of language, and emphasizes the high value that brings using texts containing cultural elements, as this will help put theory into practice.

Part 4: *Determination and Presentation of Socio-Cultural Knowledge According to Language Levels*. Nezir Temur and Aliye Altinkaya Duman propose a model to present cultural contents based on different language levels. Thus, they discuss position of culture and cultural contents that appear progressively through all the levels, beginning from the basic one to the advanced one in the context of language proficiency. They present a syllabus based on socio-cultural concepts and different areas of cultural focus. Moreover, they list a table detailing some of the outcomes and important vocabulary items related to socio-cultural knowledge. They also mention some cultural teaching tools and cultural activities such as drama, role playing, dance, song, painting, film, bulletin board, and use of native speakers. The assumption here is that concretizing theoretical knowledge through activities will be useful for teaching activities planned by instructors.

Part 5: *Cultural Approaches in Language Teaching*. In this chapter, Nermin Yazıcı and Çağrı Kaygısız provide information on intercultural communication and language performance underscoring its main points. In addition, information about cultural components of language, Big-Culture (Big C) and little-culture (little c) concepts can also be found. The communicative approach is discussed in the context of cultural and linguistic competences. Along with the reflections of this approach on the teaching environment, educational results are presented to the attention of readers.

Part 6: *Cultural Content and Visuals in Turkish Textbooks for Foreigners*. The author Mesut Gün focuses on cultural content and visuals in Turkish teaching books for foreigners. He examines textbooks under the titles of daily life, interpersonal relationships, values and education, literature, culture and music, traditions and folklore, social life, geography and space, according to classification by Okur and Keskin (2013). In line with the main conclusions, the author states that “principles of cultural transfer should be determined and books should be created to convey especially Turkish culture in the best way, according to the determined principles” (p. 196). Although the author’s contributions on cultural content are valuable, inconsistency between aims and results of the research, failure to reflect the purpose of the research in its findings and conclusion part, and the fact that he included evaluations on only one set of books in the conclusion part, despite having examined 3 book sets, can be considered as inconsistency.

Part 7: *Cultural Transfer and Education in the Scope of Intergenerational and Intercontextuality*. This chapter was written by Nebi Özdemir, who defines culture as “the body and product of interactions” (p. 201). Özdemir analyzes cultural transfer and education within the scope of intergenerationalism and intercontextualism. While addressing the concept of cultural transfer, he states that the terms “cultural sharing and experience” can be used instead of cultural transmission, which has connotations involving one-way content, attitude and behaviors. He reveals that cultural transfer and education is a multidimensional cultural science that can be planned, analyzed with an interdisciplinary method and approach. He presents information on cultural transfer and education in oral, written and electronic culture. Among the other topics discussed are cultural changes and the reflections of these changes on education, cultural transfer, and the relationship of education with cultural changes and cultural context.

Part 8: *Language Teaching Environments as a Meeting Area of Cultures*. The author Gohar Seyedi emphasizes that the basic principle of language teaching is culture and states the importance of transferring basic cultural elements. In this context, she focuses on benefits of culture teaching and difficulties experienced in culture teaching. Emphasizing development of the ability to use appropriate communicative behaviors and expressions in different communicative situations, she gives examples on the subject. She makes explanations about social science approach, interpretive approach, critical approach, and dialectical approach, which stand among mainstream intercultural communication approaches.

Part 9: *Intangible Cultural Heritage in Foreign/Second Language Teaching*. Bahadır Gülden first introduces Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, accepted by UNESCO, and gives information about Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) elements. He mentions ICH elements with examples of in-class and extra-curricular activities. Stating that these elements can be determined as the cultural criteria of teaching Turkish as a foreign/second language, he discusses in which ways they can contribute to teaching. His statements that these elements offer opportunities for acculturation and intercultural communication can be considered as an

indication that national elements can also be utilized at a higher universal level.

Part 10: *Language Museums in the Scope of Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Sunay Akkaya, at the beginning of the chapter, explains Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in detail. She includes five areas envisaged for protection under this convention which are “oral traditions and expressions, performance arts, social practices, rituals and feasts, knowledge and practices about nature and universe, handicraft traditions”. Strongly convinced that language museums have an important role in terms of teaching language in practical ways, Akkaya emphasizes that ICH elements can be used in foreign language teaching to create a teaching environment based on examples of language museums around the world. In this sense, she gives examples of a number of activities taking place at different language museums throughout the world in the context of ICH museology. She reveals how such activities of language museums get structured visually and in writing.

Hands-on activities with their examples, listed in the 8th, 9th, and 10th parts, demonstrate how theory can be effectively turned into practice, and which can be considered useful tools for teachers to make use of in language teaching environments. Although the editor’s foreword states that the target audience of the book are learners and instructors interested in foreign/second language teaching, its contents seem to aim mainly at instructors. The work is enriched with elements of common knowledge of universal value and is supported by current studies in the field of foreign/second language teaching and cultural relations. It is a study that deals with culture and culture-specific concepts in terms of their own qualifications and reflections on foreign/second language teaching. It is significant in the sense that it emphasizes the importance and necessity of culture and cultural interaction in foreign/second language teaching. It can serve as a guide to help identify cultural elements to be used in different communicative situations/contexts to highlight cultural dimension of language learning and teaching and to help language instruction in the context of culture learning.

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