

Aspects of intercultural communication in Foreign Language Teaching in Sri Lanka

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Foreign language teaching in the present day strives to promote an intercultural approach to language teaching in order to create an awareness of the interplay between language and culture. It is noteworthy that there is a remarkable increase in the demand for learning foreign languages in Sri Lanka. Among the most sought after languages are Japanese, Hindi, French and German followed by Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Italian and Russian. Albeit the teaching methodology adopted by each language may vary, the aim of all learners is to acquire competency in the target language in the shortest possible time.

This paper attempts to discuss the importance and effectiveness of integrating intercultural communication to foreign language teaching in Sri Lanka, examining the conditions, opportunities and limitations in an intercultural approach to teaching foreign languages. Further, this paper examines how one's own cultural background influences language learning ability with examples drawn from Sinhala native speakers. Since the introduction of the communicative competence approach to foreign language teaching a few decades ago, the attention has shifted from imparting purely linguistic skills to the much broader field of teaching a language within its socio-cultural dimensions. The latest theories in this discipline emphasise the need to expose learners to all socio-linguistic variants of the target language virtually from the very first lesson. However, since by definition, foreign language teaching takes place outside the target-language speech community, learning confined to the classroom environment offer students less opportunities to practice the different linguistic registers with native speakers. The greater the geographic distance between the speech communities, the more difficult the task becomes.

An understanding of one's own language and culture is required to observe similarities and differences in the target language. Thus intercultural communication also helps learners to increase an awareness of their own culture. However, data collected from teachers and students of foreign languages in Sri Lanka, do not reflect a significant awareness among the teachers of the effectiveness of integrating intercultural communication in foreign language teaching. It is expected that an understanding of the intercultural barriers in language teaching would contribute to minimizing the learning difficulties of students of foreign languages in Sri Lanka.

Key words: intercultural communication, foreign language teaching, teaching methodology, learning difficulties, linguistic skills, language and culture

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