



Meanings of The Phenomenon of Culture and Integrating Culture Into English Classes

(Kültür Olgusunun Anlamları ve Kültürün İngilizce Sınıflarına Entegre Edilmesi)

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ABSTRACT

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Culture is a distinctive trait of the human being as s/he is the one having the required competence to generate the entity of culture, which mainly involves the use of mind and language. Culture functions as the mental and social adaptations of the human being to meet the challenges of his/her environment. All elements in culture, material objects, patterned behaviours, interpersonal relations, and shared beliefs, values, ideas, and feelings are symbols representing various meanings. The culture is indeed a polysystem of meaning systems, the technological, the social, and the ideological. The culture as a polysystem is heterogeneous and dynamic due to the societal processes of inheritance, adaptation and invention. The intra- and intersystemic interactions between centres and peripheries make culture an energetic process of improvement in a constant state of change. The shared ideas, symbols and behaviours within culture are the results of collective problem-solving mechanisms and these elements are continuously transmitted from generation to generation. Thus, culture is a set of learnt and taught phenomena produced and reproduced across generations and language is the basic tool for the continuity of the process. This article analyses the multifaceted meanings of culture as a social, symbolic, systemic, and language-related phenomenon. The article also focuses on the integration of culture into English language teaching. Viewing the issue from the perspective of English as a lingua franca, it is suggested that local cultures of learners and non-native speakers of English be incorporated into English classes.

Key Words:

Culture; meanings of culture, characteristics of culture, language and culture, culture in English language teaching, English as a lingua franca

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu makale kültür olgusunu çok boyutlu bir bakış açısıyla incelemekte ve kültürün sosyal, sembolik, dizgesel ve dille ilişkili anlam ve özelliklerine ışık tutmaktadır. Makale bunun yanı sıra İngilizce dili öğretimine kültürün entegre edilmesi konusunu irdelemekte, bu konuda yenilikçi tavsiyeler sunmaktadır.

Makalede kültür öncelikli olarak varlıkların organik yapısının ötesine geçen anlam ve özellikleriyle ele alınmış ve kültürün konu olarak sosyal bir aidiyet gösterdiği ve sosyal bilimler alanlarıyla çok yakından ilişkili olduğu

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vurgulanmıştır. Sosyal bir olgu olarak kültür toplumun bir parçası olarak insana ait bilgileri, inanç, değer ve düşünceleri, adet ve gelenekleri, kuralları, sistemli davranış biçimlerini, materyalleri ve maddi ve manevi tüm ilişkileri içermektedir. Kültürün sosyal antropoloji düzleminde de tarihsel, akılsal, yapısal, sembolik birçok tanımı yapılmış, bu tanımlar genel olarak insanların düşünceleri, eylemleri, sosyal ilişkileri ve maddi üretimleriyle ilgili olmuştur. Aynı zamanda sosyal antropolojik çalışmalar tüm kültürlerin eşit olduğuna, hepsinin kendi öncelik ve değerlerine uygun olarak gelişim gösterdiklerine ve hiçbir kültürün diğerinden daha iyi, daha gelişkin ya da daha az ilkel olamayacağına ilişkin önermeler de ortaya koymuşlardır.

Kültür sosyal anlamlarının yanı sıra semboller bütünü olarak da tanımlanmış ve bu bağlamda kültüre ait düşünsel, ilişkisel ve maddi boyuttaki her ögenin aslında bir anlamı sembolize ettiği belirtilmiştir. Kültüre ait en çarpıcı sembolik varlığın dil olduğu belirtilmiş ve dilin kendine özgü olduğu ve her an oluşuma açık üretimsel ve yaratıcı yönleriyle de kültürlerde değişiklik yaratan özellikleri olduğu ifade edilmiştir. Sembollerin ortak kararlarla alınan anlamlarla ilişkili olduğu, bağlamlara ve sosyal etkileşimlere göre de şekillendiğine değinilmiş ve bir kültürdeki sembollerin başka sembollerle anlamlı hale geldiği, dolayısıyla kültüre ait öğelerin birbirinden bağımsız değerlendirilemeyeceği vurgulanmıştır.

Kültür aynı zamanda çoklu bir dizge olarak da tanımlanmış ve bu dizgenin teknolojik, sosyal ve ideolojik dizgelerden oluştuğu ifade edilmiştir. Kültürün bir çoğul dizge olarak aktif, dinamik ve hem kendi içinde hem de diğer dizgelerle sürekli yoğun bir etkileşimde olduğu belirtilmiştir. Dönemlere göre, merkezde olan kültürel öğelerin yanı sıra merkezde yer almayan, dizgenin çevresinde yer alan kültürel öğeler de olabilmektedir ve merkez ve çevre arasındaki bu gerilimli ilişkiler kültürü geliştirmektedir. Kültürlerde teknolojik öğeler merkezde yer alarak sosyal sistemleri, sosyal sistemler de düşünce sistemlerini etkileyebilmektedir.

Kültürle ilgili ele alınan bir diğer yön de kültürün insana özgü oluşu olmuştur. Kültür sosyal alışkanlıklara bağlı bir olgudur. İnsan akıl yoluyla çevresine adapte olmuş ve akılsal adaptasyonlarını sentezleyerek kültürü kurmuştur. Bu bağlamda, insan akıl yoluyla sembollerle temsil edilen idealler, değerler ve kurallar sistemini oluşturmuş ve yine akıl yoluyla bu sistemlere adapte olmuştur.

Bu bağlamda insanın ayırt edici özelliklerinden biri aklın yanı sıra dildir. İnsan dil sistemini kurmuş ve sisteme yüklediği anlamları dille ifade etmiştir. Dil insanın üretim, icat, yaratıcılık ve kavrama becerilerinin tamamını ortaya koyduğu sadece insana özgü karmaşık bir sistemdir ve kültürün ayrılmaz bir parçasıdır. Dili kültürün temel belirleyicilerinden biri yapan bir başka şey ise kültürün nesillerden nesillere aktarılan sosyal bir miras olması ve bu aktarımın temel olarak dille yapılmasıdır. Dil kültürün en kompleks, en dinamik ve en resmi anlam sistemidir.

Makalenin son bölümünde kültür pedagojik bir öğe olarak ele alınmış ve İngilizce dili öğretimine kültür olgusunun entegre edilmesiyle ilgili olarak yenilikçi bir bakış açısı sunulmuştur. Bu bölümde öncelikle dil ve kültürün ayrılmaz bütünlüğüne değinilmiş ve kültürün her zaman İngilizce dil öğretiminde çok önemli bir yere sahip olduğundan ve müfredat içeriklerine kaynaklık ettiğinden söz edilmiştir. Ancak uygulamada öğrenime entegre edilecek kültürün daha çok ana dil kullanıcılarının kültürü olduğu varsayımı hakimdir. Oysa günümüz dünyasında İngilizce global bir dile dönüşmüştür. Bugün İngilizce, ana dil kullanıcılarından ziyade, farklı ana dillere ve farklı sosyodüsel ve sosyokültürel geçmişlere sahip ana dili İngilizce olmayan konuşmacılarla etkileşim için kullanılmaktadır. Dolayısıyla İngilizce sınıflarında AngloAmerikan kültür hakimiyeti, global arenadaki ana dili İngilizce olmayan kullanıcıların alanın dışına itmekte ve bu gerçeği yok saymaktadır. İngilizce sınıflarında öğrencilere kendi kültürlerinden ve kendi kültürel kimliklerinden söz etme yetisi kazandırılmalıdır. Zira İngilizce dil öğreniminde kültürel farkındalık insanın öncelikle kendi kültürünün (kendi tutumlarının, kendi değer, inanç ve algılarının) farkında olmasını gerektirir çünkü bu yolla öğrenciler kültürlerarası iletişime hazır hale geleceklerdir.

İngilizce uluslararası ortak dil olduğundan dil sınıflarındaki kültür olgusu sadece ana dil kullanıcılarının değil, hem öğrencilerin hem de ana dili İngilizce olmayan kullanıcıların kültürlerini kapsamalıdır. Dolayısıyla hem uygulamada hem de materyallerde dünyadaki farklı İngilizcelerin ve kültürlerin temsil edilmesine ihtiyaç vardır.

Öğrencilerin kültürlerinin ve ana dili İngilizce olmayan kullanıcıların kültürlerinin İngilizce dil sınıflarına dahil edilmesi öğrencilerin yerel konular ve sorunlar üzerine derin düşüncelerini de sağlayacak ve onları varsa bu sorunlara yönelik çözüm önerileri sunmaya teşvik edecektir. Öğrencilerin kültürlerine ve global kültürlere odaklanılması öğrencilerin kendilerini değerli ve güvenli hissettikleri insancıl ve eşitlikçi düzlemler yaratacak, onların global vatandaşlar olarak ufuklarını genişletecek ve lokal ve “glokal” konulara etkileşimsel, düşünsel ve dayanışmacı yöntemlerle odaklanmalarını sağlayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kültür; kültürün anlamları; kültürün özellikleri; dil ve kültür; İngilizce dil öğretiminde kültür; ortak bir dil olarak İngilizce.

Introduction

Culture is a phenomenon with multifaceted meanings open to different interpretations. The word “culture” derives from the word “colere” meaning “to till, cultivate or inhabit”. The word “cultivation” refers to either the act of growing a particular crop or development especially through education and training; therefore, culture as a term implies *improvement* (O’Connor, 2022).

If we take culture as the *improvement* of human mind and spirit, it is useful to look at the tripartite association that Eliot (1948) brought forward (Mambrol, 2020). Is culture the development of an individual, a group or a society? Eliot (1948) states that the culture of the individual is dependent upon the culture of the group and that the culture of the group is dependent on the whole society. Along with its being a social notion, culture is also a symbolic, systemic, language-related and pedagogical phenomenon. This article aims to analyze the meanings of culture from a multifaceted viewpoint and discuss how it should be integrated into English classes.

Culture: A Superorganic Entity

If we are to distinguish the natural phenomena to be studied as subject matters, it is not easy to determine the realm of the cultural phenomena. The division of the scientific subject-matters according to their ‘organic nature’ may aid us to clarify the status of culture as a disciplinary area of research (Anderson, 1984; Rolston, Kroeber & White, 2003). According to the aforesaid division, the phenomena of nature fall into three categories which are the *inorganic* where the chemical and physical sciences study the phenomena of matter and energy, the *organic* where the sciences of biology and psychology study living organisms and their organic behaviour and the *superorganic* where the social sciences study cultural and historical phenomena. However, the superorganic nature of culture does not create a clear-cut distinction, i.e., the inorganic, the organic and the superorganic are interrelated.

As mentioned above, the cultural phenomena are the main themes of social sciences such as sociology, social anthropology, ethnography etc. and among these, social anthropology has heavily influenced the gradual development of definitions regarding the concept of culture.

Culture: A Socio-Anthropological Notion

The modern technical use of culture as a socially patterned human thought and behaviour was originally proposed by a British anthropologist, Edward Taylor, in 1871 in the work titled *Primitive culture*: “Culture or civilization is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society” (2010, p.8). As seen above, culture was introduced as a diverse field of study so the further attempts to define

culture aimed to clarify the concept of culture either by listing the general characteristics of the concept or listing and explaining the cultural characteristics of specific geographical settings. The topics to be studied in the cultural field were originally categorized by the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1872 (Tucker, 2014). The result was seventy-six culture topics including profound areas of research such as language. These catalogues were used to schematise the stages of cultural development.

Unlike the pre-modern approach, the 20th century scientists' assumptions were based on cultural relativism whose postulates were first introduced by Franz Boas in 1920 and two of these postulates set good examples for the attempts of early anthropological studies for objectiveness (Arthur & Davies, 2010):

All cultures are equally developed according to their own priorities and values; none is better, more advanced, or less primitive than any other.

Cultural elements assume meaning only within the context of coherently interrelated elements internal to the particular culture under consideration (pp. 20-21).

Throughout history, there have been attributes to the concept of culture but the problem to decide on what is to be stressed has been a crucial point in building the pertinent theoretical framework. Among the definition-oriented attempts, the study of the American anthropologists, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn led to one hundred and sixty different definitions, a few of which are mentioned below (Boroch, 2016; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952).

According to their historical definition, culture is the social heritage or tradition that is passed on to future generations and according to their behavioural definition, culture is shared, learned human behaviour, a way of life. Their normative definition defines culture as the ideals, values or rules for living and the functional definition identifies culture as the way human solves problems of adapting to the environment or living together. According to the mental definition, culture is a complex of ideas or learned habits that inhibit impulses and distinguish humans from animals and in line with the structural definition, culture consists of patterned and interrelated ideas, symbols and behaviours. Finally, in the symbolic definition, it is stated that culture is based on arbitrarily assigned meanings that are shared by a community (Boroch, 2016; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). These definitions underline three culture-specific features: thoughts of people, activities of people and material products they produce and they all represent different, yet, interrelated meanings.

Culture: A Unity of Symbolic Manifestations

Culture is an integrated whole of manifestations which can be represented in the form of material products (tools, shelters, artifacts etc.), the organized societal relations expressed by

patterned behaviours and/or the abstract phenomena of ideas, feelings, beliefs, values, and knowledge. All these aspects share one thing in common. They are all symbols and signify meanings. Here the symbol refers to the expression to which meaning is attached. The symbolic representations stand for variable world conditions which can be real or unreal. Therefore, cultural traits (material objects, behavioural regularities and values and beliefs) are connected with the bridges of equivalence relationships between the signifier and the signified (Temel Eğinli, & Nazlı, 2018).

The most striking example of symbolic entity in culture is the language where words attain special features: The relation between the word and the meaning is arbitrary as there is no particular reason in the establishment of equivalence (Duan, 2012; Saussure, 1974). The other characteristic is the displacement of words, that is to say, words come into being at any place and time regardless of the presence of the item they signify. Another aspect of words as symbols is creativity which means that words can be reproduced to indicate new arrangements. It is also a fact that cultural features of language such as self-production, invention and creativity are factors causing changes in cultures (Rabiah, 2012).

Not only language but also all the other aspects of culture have a symbolic character requiring to be analyzed in an interpretative way rather than experimental (Carter & Fuller, 2015). It is because the symbol is a variant assuming different meanings in different contexts and it is dependent on the user's intention. The culture therefore involves meaning-making processes. That is why Geertz (1973) points out that the concept of culture is essentially a semiotic one. With the term semiotic, Geertz (1973) implies the sign-governed aspect of culture by which diverse cultural elements attain a symbolic identity. Accordingly, the cultural element's symbolic identity, which is formed by the meaning/s attached to it, is based on societal negotiations.

Consequently, in order to state that a unity of meanings is cultural, the members of the society must agree on the kinds of meanings that the symbols should assume. Moreover, the symbols are meaningful if only they are interpreted through their relationships with other symbols. Therefore, while dealing with culture, the elements of culture must be taken as interrelated entities rather than a conglomerate of distinct items (Sarı, 2010). Indeed, what is proposed here is a systemic approach to culture.

Culture: A Dynamic Polysystem

Culture is an organized system which must be understood in terms of the relationships between its elements and the unifying principles that govern these relationships. The parts forming culture are not elements per se but systems within the polysystem of culture (Cattrysse, 1997; Even-Zohar, 1997). The main subdivisions of the cultural polysystem can be distinguished as technological,

sociological and ideological systems. The technological system is made up of material, mechanical, physical, and chemical instruments, and the techniques of their use. The sociological system constitutes the interrelations signified in collective patterns of behaviour. Under this category, we find other subdivisions such as kinship, political, and military systems. The ideological system is composed of ideas, beliefs, knowledge expressed in articulate speech or other symbolic forms such as literature.

Culture is a polysystem (Even-Zohar, 1997). It is a dynamic entity, i.e., there is a continuous action and struggle within and between the systems. The intrasystemic tensions occur between the centre and the periphery and while a cultural entity is in tension with its centre, it may also be in tension with the periphery of another system. The changes occurring between the centre and the periphery develop the polysystem. Therefore, culture is a system of systems which have got heterogeneous structures and subdivisions of their own.

The technological culture may play the primary role in cultures. Then, if we are to enrich this statement with the postulates of the polysystem, the center of the cultural polysystem may well be the technological culture because man in the core of culture is dependent on the mechanical means to survive (Combi, 2016). Man must have food and shelter and he must defend himself against enemies. As social systems reflect the organized efforts of man in using the instruments of subsistence, offense, defence, and protection, the social system may be placed in the periphery of the cultural polysystem. Ideological or philosophical systems are organizations of ideas, beliefs, and values which express technological forces and they are reflections of the social systems. This system, then, is the last peripheral layer. The technology in the center interacts with the social system and this interaction forms an energy affecting the content and orientation of the ideological (Epstein, 2018).

Culture as a polysystem is a human-specific concept, i.e., among all the other creatures in nature, it is the human possessing culture. An analysis of the characteristics of the man regarding culture will help us to identify the specific qualities of this complex phenomenon.

Culture: A Human-Specific and Language-Related Phenomenon

Culture as a learned behaviour is not instinctive but rather habitual. The instinctive drives are in fact encoded in the genetic structure of the man and underlie his habitual behaviours (Marquez, 2017). For example, a human being, no matter where s/he is, bears the impulses to survive, i.e., s/he is encoded with the impulse of eating but according to the context, the rituals pertaining to the satisfaction of this impulse differ. The context is culture. Turkish culture is characterized with the habitual behaviour of eating different kinds of food diachronically, but it is not the case for the cuisine-related habits of the Chinese culture characterized with the synchronic food service. Man,

therefore, has got the perfection of forming habits based on instinctive drives.

Culture is then, based on habits (Goode, 2000). But the habit mentioned here must not be regarded as an individual habit. Individual habits may be idiosyncratic but the habits of culture are habits shared by a society. The habits of culture are common. The man as a social being has got the imminent competence of adaptation to social life. The society, however, is not adequate to explain culture because the dictionary meaning of society is ‘any group of people (or less commonly plants or animals) living together in a group and constituting a single-related, interdependent community’. Animals are also found to live in a societal context, but they are cultureless (Murdock, 1965).

Man’s uniqueness is indeed dependent on his ability to attach meanings to the items and the events of the external world, in other words, he has got the ability to symbol and he can originate and apply meanings upon things (White, 1940). The ability to symbol brings forward the mental aspect of the human being. The man’s adaptation to the environment is mainly mental whereas the adaptation of the animal is physical. Keller (1915) with her well-known definition highlights the mental aspect of culture by defining the term as the ‘sum or synthesis of mental adaptations’ (Stocking, 2002). Thus, the intelligence of man makes it possible to set a system of ideals, values, and rules signified by means of symbols as well as learn and adapt to them.

However, it must be noted that it is not only intelligence that centralizes man in the system of culture. Man possesses language and the language as one of the elaborate characteristics of man represents the actual results of the mental power (Sapir, 1963; Spencer-Oatey, 2012). The language flourishes as a system of symbols whose meanings cannot be grasped merely through senses. One cannot differentiate between the holy object and the ordinary object by using the senses of sight, taste, smell, and touch. Therefore, the man’s ability to manipulate words is due to the specific processes of production, invention, creativity and comprehension, which form a totality to explain the man as the only owner of culture. Also, the language is a significant determinant of culture because culture is a form of social heritage transmitted from generation to generation. The language is a basic tool for the continuity of such transmission process. The language as the most complex and the most formal meaning system is the cornerstone of culture as culture is dynamic and flows through ages.

Culture: A Pedagogical Phenomenon Revisited in English Language Teaching

So far, culture, a profound notion with multifarious dimensions, has been analysed in various ways and it has been represented as a superorganic entity, a socio-anthropological notion, a unit of symbolic manifestations, a dynamic polysystem, and a human specific and language-related phenomenon. With these diverse meanings and functions in human life, it has a significant place in

education as well. In this section, culture will be explored as a pedagogical phenomenon and revisited in the context of English language teaching.

It is a well-established fact that culture and language are inseparable. Language is strongly influenced by culture, and language significantly influences the culture and the way of thinking of people living within. Culture has been deemed to be a vital aspect of English language teaching to be utilized as a source of content in the curriculum. Some examples include Brown (2007), Byram (1997, 2009), Kramsch (1993) and Kumaravadivelu (2003). Kramsch (1993, p.3) identifies three ways how language and culture are bound together:

First, language expresses cultural reality (with words, people express facts and ideas but also reflect their attitudes). Second, language embodies cultural reality (people give meanings to their experience through the means of communication). Third, language symbolizes cultural reality (people view their language as a symbol of their social identity).

Another example is Byram (1997, 2009), who developed a new conceptual model that identified the qualities of a competent intercultural speaker. According to Byram (1997, 2009) intercultural competence comprises knowledge of others, knowledge of self, skills of interpreting and relating; skills of discovering and/or interacting; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviours; and relativizing one's self.

Although inclusion of culture in the English language curriculum has been a widely acknowledged topic in ELT, in practice, most of the cultural content has been about the native speakers of English with the assumption that those who want to learn the language would interact with native speakers of that language (Akbari, 2008). This hypothesis may be true for those who intend to live in the US or the UK or work or interact with native speakers of English but the reality of most English speakers is different. English has now turned into a global language and most of the communication is carried out between people who are non-native speakers of English with different L1s and different sociolinguistic and sociocultural backgrounds (Bayyurt & Akcan, 2015; Bektaş Çetinkaya, 2020; Galloway & Rose, 2014; McKay, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2001; Selvi & Yazan, 2021). In these communicative settings, people try to communicate their own cultural backgrounds, not that of the target language. Typically, an emphasis on the Anglo-American culture in the English classroom would exclude the global users of English from the arena and be far from the reality particularly in EFL classrooms. In English classrooms, it is now necessary for learners to be able to develop the competence to talk about their own cultures and their own cultural identity (Akbari, 2008; Baker, 2012; Bayyurt, 2006; Bayyurt & Akcan, 2015; Bektaş Çetinkaya, 2020; Galloway & Rose, 2014; Kemaloglu-Er & Bayyurt, 2019; Kemaloglu-Er & Deniz, 2020; Selvi & Yazan, 2021).

Cultural awareness in English language teaching primarily necessitates being cognizant of one's own culture, i.e., one's own attitudes, values, beliefs, and perceptions (Ho, 2009) as this would make learners ready for intercultural communication. As English is now accepted to be an international lingua franca, the culture in the English classroom does not only refer to the cultures of native speakers of English but those of all speakers speaking the language of English. Thus, English language classes should be dynamic settings where teachers prepare learners to interact with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Kemaloglu-Er & Deniz, 2020). Also, there is a need for ELT materials to be more inclusive of different Englishes and cultures around the world (Galloway, 2013; Vettorel, 2021; Vettorel & Lopriore, 2013).

It is a fact that incorporation of one's own culture into the English classroom would encourage learners to critically reflect on local issues and find ways to solve them if any. By focusing on learners' and non-native speakers' cultures, classrooms would become humanitarian and egalitarian settings where learners would feel valuable and confident (Kemaloglu-Er, 2021). In such classes, learners would use English as a means to broaden their horizons as global citizens and focus on local and "glocal" issues in interactive, reflective and collaborative ways.

Conclusion

Culture is social, it is composed of group habits and these habits are shared by the members of the society. Thus, culture is a unity of socially patterned behaviours and social possessions, i.e., culture is a way of expressing social identity. The group habits are maintained by social forces so the society not only defines the ideal behaviour but also constrains the contrary one. Habits only survive if only they bring satisfaction. So, culture, where group habits unite, is a way of satisfying both the biological and the social drives. It functions as a way of coping with the external world and other human beings.

Culture consists of regularities in behaviour which are not instinctive but habitual. Instinctive drives determine our general capacity for culture and they play a role in the cultural universals but the cultural differences among societies are due to the differentiated learned patterns. Learning is one of the most significant characteristics of culture. Culture is not only learned but also taught. The acquired habits are inculcated to the succeeding offspring, i.e., culture comprises the transmission of the learned processes of habit formation from one generation to another.

The relation between the taught and the learned is not absolute; culture exhibits a constant state of change. This is because of the historic nature of culture and as a polysystem, culture is dynamic. The culture of one's society as a polysystem has internal interactions. It also interacts with the other societies' polysystems. These interactions generate a positive intermixing of ideas, images values,

modes of social and political organizations, objects, techniques and know-how. Thus, systemic factors have enabled cultures to make progress.

Because culture is a way of mental adaptation to the environment, it is a means of solving problems. Problem solving by either creativity or imitation brings forward novel arrangements leading to changes in society. The main point in dynamic but sustainable cultures is the correct balance among inheritance, adoption, adaptation, and invention.

Culture is a semiotic phenomenon; it is composed of material objects, behavioural patterns, values, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings which have a symbolic character. All these cultural elements attain meanings by means of negotiated agreements in society. Different human societies agree upon different meaning systems and these systems must be interpreted within the target context. This is the relativistic way of approaching culture. Culture, a sign-governed pattern of communication, is established by meaning systems, the most significant of which is language.

Culture and language cannot be separated. In English language classrooms culture should be an indispensable part of the curriculum. In choosing the type of culture to be included, one should pay attention to the fact that English is an international lingua franca of today's world and most learners learn it to communicate with speakers from different L1s and sociolinguistic and sociocultural backgrounds. Thus, rather than merely emphasizing the cultural aspects of native speakers of English, the local cultures of learners and non-native speakers should be integrated into the English classes for a democratic, humanitarian and egalitarian way of teaching. All cultures should be accepted to be equally developed according to their own priorities and values since none is better, more advanced, or less primitive than any other.

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