

# Intercultural Interaction, Utilization of Cultural Elements and Second Language Education: The Sample of French Institute in Izmir

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## 1. Introduction

Communication has always been important within the communities living in the world and learning a foreign language and interacting with other communities have become a need. This is mainly because it has been an essential desire for people to follow and transfer the developments occurring in different communities and so as to learn a foreign language. Therefore, new and better approaches have been sought to teach foreign languages for centuries. The intercultural approach has gained popularity and importance in teaching of foreign languages in today's world. This can be explained with the fact that language and culture are inseparable components.

Anyone attempting to study a foreign language is required to improve themselves in the target language as a whole. That is, learning and communicating in a foreign language means getting to know about the life styles, customs and traditions as well as art and literature of the target community. Therefore, the target culture should be taught within the classroom so that cultural transfer can be achieved.

On the other hand, what makes up human communities are known to be the components that constitute a language. Therefore, it would not be wrong to state that "language is the cement which holds the cultural construction together and also language is the sun lightening every part of the cultural construction."<sup>[1]</sup> As a result, it can be concluded that learning a language completely can be achieved with the help of the interaction method only.

"Learning about other value systems, different perceptions and ways of thinking is a natural outcome of learning a new language. In this process, it is not plausible to expect to find the exact equivalents of the native concepts within the target language or culture. That is because a foreign language is just like a door that opens to a different world with different ways of thinking and value systems. It is an inevitable requirement to get to know about the differences in manners and behaviors of the individuals in order to learn the language of that community. Today, people tend to learn more than one foreign language which introduces them to different worlds, value systems and which broadens their horizons. This enables people to communicate with other cultures, improve their ways of thinking and change their approach towards the outside world. This also provides them with self-awareness since they get the opportunity to consider their own culture in comparison with the others."<sup>[2]</sup>

As in many other countries in the world, the Turkish education system provides students with foreign language instruction starting from primary school until their university education. Various new approaches and techniques are utilized within this process. However, the biggest mistake is to handle the language and culture separately and so to teach just the grammar and vocabulary claiming that this will be enough to communicate in that language. This paper aims to investigate the contribution of the intercultural instruction to language learning in the French courses of the French Culture Center in Izmir.

## 2. Research

### 2.1. The Population of the Research

The study involves the instructors who work in the French Institute in Izmir in order to determine the significance of the cultural interaction from the perspective of the Culture Centre.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Nermi Uygur, *Kültür Kuramı, Yapı Kredi Issue*, 1996, İstanbul, p. 19

<sup>[2]</sup> Şeyda Özil, *Language and Modern Culture is in the Facts and Problems*, 1991. İstanbul, p. 96

## 2.2. The Method of the Research

The research on foreign language teaching has a socio-cultural aspect; thus, human behaviors and cultural construction gain importance for such research and require qualitative research techniques. Qualitative research is a dynamic research method and so differs from quantitative research which considers the phenomenon from the same perspective.<sup>[3]</sup> This paper aims to determine the opinions of the instructors who work at the French Institute about the importance of the cultural aspects of foreign language education.

Therefore, the focus group interview which is an important data collection technique has been used. During the interview of the focus group, the researcher presents the questions that are prepared in accordance with the research topic. The answer of each question is taken from the participants. The answer that is given by an individual within the group is heard by the others and this gives a chance of creating their own idea considering the answer they hear. For the interviews of the focus group, an interview form containing open-ended questions is used. In this work, the focus group interviews were held in three sessions. Four people attended each meeting and twelve people were interviewed totally. The interviews were tape-recorded and some notes were taken at the same time. The recorded data were transferred to the computer for transcription and a content analysis was carried out. As a result, some important findings related to the educators' and hence Izmir French Institute's approach to foreign language and cultural interaction have been revealed.

### 2.2.1 Sample

With a specific purpose, the experienced trainers who work in the French Institute in Izmir were chosen, as they were thought to represent the population. In other words, a purposive sampling (intentional sample) was carried out. "This sample technique involves the person who is supposed to give the right answer and so the researchers determine the participants who are not randomly chosen."<sup>[4]</sup>

### 2.2.2. Data Analysis

A content analysis was applied to the data obtained from the interviews. Content analysis refers to all the methodological tools and techniques applicable to a wide variety of discourses.<sup>[5]</sup> In the analysis phase of this research, the data obtained from the interviews were evaluated with a content analysis and for this they were coded. Coding is the process of naming the meaningful sections of the data. It requires placing the ideas under categories, researching, conceptualizing, comparing and correlating. The concepts which are used in the coding come from the researcher or the relevant literature or from the data.<sup>[6]</sup> Expressions used by the participants were coded for the analysis in accordance with the relevant literature. Once all the data were coded, the emerging concepts were organized under certain categories. The data categorized according to the themes have been presented with example quotations.

### 2.2.3. Validity and Reliability

Detailed explanations are given in order to increase the validity and reliability of a qualitative research. The strategies that are used for validity and reliability are explained by Lincoln and Guba (1985). They use persuasiveness, transmissibility, consistency and provability instead of internal validity, external validity, internal reliability and external reliability.<sup>[7]</sup> The studies to ensure the validity and reliability of the second part of the research are summarized below in this context:

In this research, for raising internal validity, during the period of data collection, data resolution and interpretation, the researcher worked to ensure consistency. To provide the transferability; the model of the research, data sources, data collection tools, data collection process, analysis and interpretation of data, regulation of findings were defined in detail. Reliability of the content analysis technique depends on the coding process. This is related to the reliability of the coder and coding category. The reliability of the coder can be achieved if the same text is coded in the same way by the different

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<sup>[3]</sup> A Hamdi İslamoğlu, Research Methods in Social Science, Beta Issue, 2011, İstanbul, p.185

<sup>[4]</sup> Remzi Altunışık, Recai Coşkun, E. Yıldırım, S. Bayraktaroğlu, **Search Methods in Social Sciences-SPSS Applied**, Improved 2. Issue, Sakarya Bookstore Issue ,2002,

<sup>[5]</sup> Nuri Bilgin, **Content Analysis** ,Ege University of Literature Faculty Issue, Izmir, 2000,p.1

<sup>[6]</sup> Hüner Şencan, **Validity and Realibility in Social and Behavioral Indication**, Seçkin Issue, 2005, p.532

<sup>[7]</sup> Nuri Bilgin,**Content Analysis in Social Sciences: Techniques and Sample Works**, Political Bookstore, Issue 2, Ankara, 2006, page 16.

coders or by the same coder in the same way in different times. Reliability of the categories depends on being clear.<sup>[8]</sup> Coding of interview data set was done separately by the researchers. By coming up with similar codes and themes the internal reliability as well as the consistency of classification procedure were achieved. In order to ensure the availability of the research, the data sources were defined in detail.

## 2.2.4. Findings

### The Duty of French Institute, IZMIR

The first theme emerging from the data is the duty of the French Institution. While some of the participants say that their essential duty is to teach the French language and culture, the others state that they aim to spread the French culture. One participant expresses his/her opinion: Izmir French Institute does not have a single responsibility. While their main task is to teach the French language and culture, they also need to organize events cooperating with different institutions and organizations and make people who study French there feel themselves in a small France.

*Table 1. Coding of Participants' Feedback about Izmir French Cultural Center's Tasks*

THEME	Tasks
CODE	Spreading French Language and Culture Introducing French Language And Culture Teaching French Language And Culture

### Teaching Cultural Awareness with the help of the Foreign Language Education Books and Teaching Materials

% 95 of the participants approve the objective of creating a cultural awareness with the help of recent books and materials and they state that students will be more interested and more productive thanks to this cultural awareness. % 5 of the participants express that the books and the materials prepared by French writers are used in their courses and so it is not suitable for Turkish people. As a solution to this problem, the appropriate parts and the subjects are carefully chosen to have a proper program for the students.

*Table 2 Coding Of Participants' Feedback about the Existence of Cultural Elements In The Materials That Are Used In Foreign Language Teaching*

THEME	Usage Of Cultural Elements
CODE	The presence of motivating effect Raising interests related to language Increasing productivity in study

### Ensuring Cultural Transmission through in-Class and Extracurricular Activities

Some of the instructors working in Izmir French Institute are French and the others are from Turkey but they were born and raised in France. This is an advantage in terms of ensuring the transfer of French culture in the classroom and through extracurricular activities. In addition, participants agree that audiovisual materials are quite helpful in providing cultural transmission.

"Acquisition videos are quite helpful for the cultural transmission in the foreign language. Students are bored with working on texts." Participant 8

<sup>[8]</sup> Nuri Bilgin, **Content Analysis in Social Sciences: Techniques and Sample Works, Political Bookstore**, Issue 2, Ankara, 2006, page 17

Table 3. Coding of Participants' Feedback about Ensuring Cultural Transmission through in-class and extracurricular Activities in Foreign Language Teaching

THEME	Activities
CODE	Short Films Videos The advantages of Residing in France

### Problems of Cultural Differences Encountered in Educational Programs in the French Cultural Center, Izmir

All of the participants report that they have no difficulties. Participants state that the examples related to the French culture on the subject are given in class activities. However, in some cases differences related to daily behaviors may occur within or outside of the class; therefore, it is suggested that the instructor should provide an explanation.

"For example, a student who is late for the class and trying to enter the class quietly not to disturb the people is expected to give a salute to the teacher." Participant 3

Table 4 Coding of Participants' Feedback about Difficulties in Izmir French Institute with the Studies Related To the Cultural Interaction

THEME	Interaction Oriented Education
Code	No studies which include custom themes such as French kitchen No negativity in the studies and activities The lectures giving culture-oriented samples

### Intercultural Interaction Oriented Foreign Language Education

The participants indicated that the intercultural interaction must be included in foreign language teaching. Moreover, there are positive changes in the education system. The students have a chance to get scholarships to live in a foreign country while studying the target language.

Table 5: The Coding Of Perspectives To Intercultural Interaction Oriented Education

THEME	Intercultural Interaction Oriented Education
Code	Increase in scholarships Development of the education system Use of the target language in the target country

### Performed Studies to Provide Interaction between the Culture of Taught Language and Target Group (student)

The aim of this section is to find out if France born teachers who grew up in France have received any particular training regarding their practices in bridging the gap between two given cultures. The responses of teachers reveal that practices were designed in order to transmit culture to students. Moreover, there exist festivals and cultural events organized by the French Institute, Izmir. There is also a training program which is more general in its scope and which mostly deals with the techniques regarding the lectures of language teachers.

"We are providing information about French Culture by directing students to activities like theatres and movies as well as a course which is organized by French Institute, Izmir." Participant10

Table 6. The Coding of the Comments about the Connection between the Language and the Culture of the Target People Attending The French Institute (Students) and the French Language and Culture

THEME	Studies Focusing on Intercultural Communications
Code	Seminar Cultural Activities Festivals The absence of training which provide intercultural communication The existence of general training designed for educators

### 2.2.5 Conclusion

In a developing world, all countries have their own borders; however, information, communication and interactions have no limits. Interacting and living within a different culture is the result of a globalizing

world. The most important component providing interaction of cultures is language. Therefore, one of the obligations in this rapidly developing world is to learn a foreign language. Learning a foreign language is related to various components of which language is composed. Indeed, a language is not only related to grammar or vocabulary but to other components such as functions within a given culture in a community. Indeed, culture is the essential part of these components. Throughout language learning process, cultural transmission also occurs. Hence, within the body of this research, focus group interviews were conducted with some French teachers working for the French Culture Center in Izmir and the results are demonstrated below.

#### **If cultural elements are used;**

- The language learning process tends to be more efficient for students.
- The learning process turns out to be much more productive for both students and teachers
- Students' level of self-awareness is heightened.
- It is observed that students develop rapidly.
- Cultural transmission occurs as an upcoming of the cultural bridge between students and teachers

Based on our discussions with the same group of teachers, the recommendations can be summarized as follows:

- In order to provide progressive cultural communication; student and teacher exchange quota should be increased between France and Turkey
- The number of scholarships which allow students to conduct their studies abroad should be increased
- More importance should be attached to intercultural-interaction oriented approach and accordingly more emphasis should be laid on foreign language classes.
- Foreign language training teachers should involve culture elements in their lectures so as to make the language learning process culturally prolific.

## **References**

### **References**

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