

An Introduction to English Language Teaching

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Lecture 14:

- **Culture and the Language Teacher**





Intercultural phenomena



Intercultural phenomena include culture shock, cultural adaptation, cultural adjustment, and the fact that people from other cultures may interpret similar situations differently. When we teach EFL, part of our job should be to prepare students for challenges they may meet when they travel or move to a country where English is spoken. The process of adapting to a new culture is called “acculturation.” Acculturation, according to Brown (1994), has four stages:

- (1) excitement (about being in a new country),
- (2) culture shock (feelings of frustration and hostility),
- (3) recovery (adjustment and emergent comfort in the new culture),
- (4) adaption (bridging cultural barriers and accepting the new culture).

Discussion of Stages

1. Stage One can be much like the “honeymoon” phase of a relationship. All cultures have good and bad aspects. However, in a new environment, we tend to overlook the negative and see only the new, fresh, and exciting. Once the novelty fades, individuals move into Stage Two, culture shock. People may start to make unfair comparisons between their host culture and the culture of their own country. The tension of being in an unfamiliar culture can take its toll, and people may want to withdraw.
2. Stage Two is perhaps the most difficult stage of the acculturation process. Teachers preparing students for work, travel, or exchange programs abroad may wish to raise their students’ awareness of this phenomenon and emphasize that these stages are real; everybody who enters a new culture will encounter at least some challenges. An awareness of these stages can prepare travelers to understand that feelings of frustration and hostility they may experience during Stage Two are due to difficulties they are having adjusting, not deficiencies related to the host culture.

Discussion of Stages



3. Stage Three individuals become more familiar with their new environments. They make friends, feel more comfortable using the target language, and appreciate the differences between their own culture and the new one.
4. Stage Four, the newcomer will adapt and accept the new culture. They start bridging cultural barriers and accepting the new culture.

Benefits of Adapting to another Culture



The benefits of cultural adjustment include:

- A fuller sense of security
- The possibility of more success in the workplace
- The possibility of establishing meaningful relationships with people from the culture
- The possibility of gaining fluency in the language of the host country
- A deeper understanding of one's own culture
- A deeper understanding of oneself

Cultural Concepts to Teach

Teachers can teach concepts that not only can bring about appreciation for people and culture but also can be useful for students when the students are placed in cross-cultural communication situation.

1. **Cross-cultural communication Includes Adapting Behavior:** Knowing how to adapt one's behavior to cope with the target culture is key to successful communication with people from the target culture. This includes one's nonverbal and discourse behaviors. Nonverbal behavior includes:

- kinesics (facial expressions, gaze and eye management, gestures, touch, and posture and movement).
- Proxemics (the use of space, such as the distance people sit or stand from each other).

Discourse behaviors include the appropriate ways people interact in social settings, such as how to greet, make promises, approve, disapprove, show regret, apologize, request, complain, give gifts, compliment, invite, refuse an invitation, offer and thank.