

**«Շիրակի ուսուցիչների միություն» գիտակրթական կենտրոն  
ՅԿ վերապատրաստող կազմակերպություն**

**Ավարտական հետազոտական աշխատանք**

**Թեմա** Cultural approach to language learning

**Կատարող** Լիանա Մուղնեցյան Ներսեսի  
/անուն, ազգանուն հայրանուն/

ՀԱՊՅ ԳՄ ավագ դպրոց, անգլերեն լեզու  
/դպրոց մասնագիտություն, ըստ վերապատրաստման խմբի/

**Ղեկավար՝** Կարինե Ալեքսանյան  
/անուն, ազգանուն /

**ԳՅՈՒՄՐԻ 2023թ.**

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# Cultural approach to language learning

## Introduction

Introduction Foreign language teaching, which has felt like a necessity since the beginning of international relations, has become even more important nowadays. Foreign language also gives the opportunity to acquire knowledge at a higher level, to reach the knowledge, culture and accumulation of the members of that language and to deal with the speakers of the target language. Therefore, while learning a new foreign language, we should learn the culture of the country where that language is spoken. We cannot learn literally by separating cultural items and learning only the target foreign language structurally, by learning the theories and grammatical rules of words.

In this article we focus on which extent learning target language's culture play a part and the effects of cultural factors on student motivation when acquiring the target language. The intense interest in foreign language teaching in many countries around the world places great pressure on educators. Many teaching methods and approaches such as the grammar translation method, communicative methods, functional language teaching that have been used for many years led to the fact that the language cannot be fully taught. For this, some educators have claimed the inclusion of cultural teaching materials in addition to these. . It is not at all a correct approach to keep the language completely separate from culture while acquiring a language, to fully teach and understand it. Learning the cultural meaning and feelings of the target language will also bring the learner's sympathy towards the target language as well as the student's learning motivation to the highest level. Students cannot abstract themselves from learning many expressions such as idioms, proverbs, metaphors, similes, whatever language they learn.

The fact that language and culture are inextricably linked together has become one of the topics that have been increasingly emphasized day by day in foreign language teaching. The aim of learning a foreign language is to communicate through that language. But a structurally learned language to communicate cannot be said to have given too much to the speaker. Since the cultures in which humans are trained are different from each other, knowing each other's culture will facilitate communication, avoid possible misunderstandings and problems that may arise. That is

why, when teaching a foreign language, teaching the culture elements of that language should be kept in the foreground. Cultural understanding has a crucial role in intercultural interactions.

From the first day, teachers are expected to bring in the class posters, pictures, maps, and other realia in order to help students develop 'a mental image' of the target culture (Peck, 1998). Thus, they incorporate students into the learning process. In addition, using materials such as the internet, specific intelligent board applications, song and poetry, rhymes, newspapers and magazines and films can make learning easier and provide learners with knowledge about the target culture. Thanks to the many international project organizations many students and teachers are able to go abroad and obtain knowledge about the lifestyles where the target foreign language is spoken.

## *Culture and Language Relation in Foreign Language Teaching*

Learning a language is not only learning the alphabet, the meaning, the grammar rules and the arrangement of words, but it is also learning the behavior of the society and its cultural customs. Language and culture have a complex relationship. Language is complexly intertwined with culture. Language communicates through culture and culture also communicates through language. That is, communication is not only the use of symbols that “stand for” beliefs, feelings, identities, or events, it is also a way of bringing beliefs, feelings, and identities into the present context.

According to the linguistic relativity principle, the way in which we think about the world is directly influenced by the language we use to talk about it. To speak is to assume a culture, and to know a culture is like knowing a language. Language and culture are homologous mental realities.

A particular language points to the culture of a particular social group. We can say that language learning is cultural learning, so language teaching is cultural teaching due to the interdependence of language and cultural learning.

In fact, language teaching means, inevitably, language and cultural teaching.

Learning a language is therefore learning the behavior of a given society and its cultural customs. Language is a product of the thought and behavior of a society. An individual language speaker’s effectiveness in a foreign language is directly related to his/her understanding of the culture of that language (Taylor, 1979), and it is possible to consider teaching culture through learners’ own languages, which can be used in a specific way to interpret the other culture (Ager).

By studying a language via its cultural dimensions, learners open their minds to new attitudes and styles, often different from their own. Learning a foreign language is a known factor in promoting peace, inclusion, and is a legitimate countermeasure to xenophobia. At the end of the day, learning a foreign language is a way to develop our critical thinking.

**Culture in Second/Foreign Language Learning** It is observed that language is used in a cultural phenomenon to exchange ideas and opinions or share experiences. It is so much interrelated that without understanding properly the cultural setting and social behaviour of a language use, it leads to misinterpretation and breakdown in the language communication, or it may result into errors and misunderstanding because language is not simply sending or receiving information but it functions as a social behaviour in certain cultural context. There are difficulties which are very complex to understand for foreign or second language learners according to required context to

interpret and communicate (Emitt & Komesaroff, 2003). Research in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) indicates problems faced by the learners in communicating language in context. A number of language instructed programmes focus on the development of skills, i.e. (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) but the teaching of cultural context has not been introduced in any of the language learning programmes. However, the understanding of target culture not only develops competence in communication but also raises awareness regarding the use of language in intercultural communication.

When we teach language, we should be helping people participate in ways of life. This goes beyond knowledge of subject matter, and it goes beyond any simple type of well-being. Language learning can immerse students in others' worlds. In our rapidly changing, increasingly interconnected contemporary world, we need a more dynamic conception of culture than has typically been used to design language teaching and learning. Language teachers have always known that learning an additional language requires learning about another culture. This is, in fact, one of the primary reasons for learning languages—to experience a different culture from the inside, so as to empathize with a broader range of others and to enrich one's ability to appreciate varied human experiences.

Learning a language does of course require mastery of vocabulary and syntax. But language teachers sometimes underestimate the value of teaching culture, such that the potential of language learning for creating cultural understanding is not realized (Rao, 2002).

Language pedagogy shows how culture can be central to language learning and how language learning can engage the whole student. This r language teaching method is a resource for practitioners working to make language learning deeper and more enriching human experience. There are two interrelated dimensions. First, how cultural activity can undergird an approach to language learning that more effectively integrates language and culture and contributes to educating the whole student. Second, the vision for language learning as intercultural communication. Intercultural communication, culture, innovation, activity, dialogue, and critique: these terms build an account of how language teaching and learning can live up to their potential as an educational and a human enterprise. Educating the “whole person,” when teaching language, requires engaging with the cultural ways of life within which that language lives. People use language to participate in and to create social, emotional, and ethical activities. Ignoring this and treating language as a decontextualized set of facts and techniques misses the opportunity to

engage the whole student. Effective intercultural communication happens when language learners have the ability to interact effectively in a new language with members of different cultures (Byram, 1997). Speakers must be aware of their own and others' cultures, and they must have the linguistic and pragmatic skills necessary to navigate another culture (Guilherme, 2000; O'Dowd, 2003).

### *Multilingual education in intercultural world*

Language learners ideally can use their knowledge of phonology, lexicon, grammar, and pragmatics to understand and interact empathically with diverse others, as whole human beings engaging whole others. As Hornberger (2009) argues, multilingual education offers "the best possibilities for preparing coming generations to participate in constructing democratic societies in globalized and intercultural world" (p. 197). To create language pedagogy that facilitates more effective intercultural communication, we must have an adequate account of culture. Traditional definitions of culture posit patterns of human behavior that include symbols, languages, traditions, beliefs, and values shared by members of a social group (Byram & Feng, 2005; Fantini, 1999). Groups that live within bounded areas do often share practices, ideas, and values, but in recent times, it has become clear that culture cannot be construed as something shared within a contiguous, homogeneous group. Anthropologists have shown that culture moves and mixes, flowing and hybridizing, such that any group and any locale contains heterogeneous practices, ideas, and values (Appadurai, 1996; Street, 2005). Preparing language learners to understand culture and engage with others is not just a matter of teaching them stable, homogeneous skills but also prepares them to deploy heterogeneous linguistic and cultural repertoires such that they can effectively navigate contested spaces (Rymes, 2014). The heterogeneous, changing nature of culture is even more important in the contemporary technology-mediated world. Globalization and new technologies have opened dramatic new opportunities for language teaching and learning (Thorne, 2003). Technology brings learners together for web-enabled interactions, provides innovative learning platforms, and offers many new ways to encounter other cultures and languages. However, we must design ways to benefit from the potential of language learning technology while tying it to a more holistic vision of education that includes learning culture. To help language learners develop repertoires that facilitate intercultural engagement in the contemporary world, researchers and language teachers must move away from static conceptions

of language and culture and acknowledge constant innovation. Cultures change, languages change, and the media through which we communicate also change. We are preparing language learners to navigate this innovation, hoping to expand their repertoires so that they can participate appropriately and effectively in new contexts. Activity systems become sedimented as many people use similar tools to accomplish similar ends, with roles and tools often becoming institutionalized. Activity systems are dynamic and internally contradictory, and they change over historical time. Productive change can occur through dialogue and critique. Dialogue allows the heterogeneous voices participating in an activity system to engage with each other and create new understandings and practices. Critique allows participants to engage with contradictions, pushing the system forward by overcoming some of them while inevitably creating new ones. This can support both research and practice as we work together to help language learners participate more effectively in others' worlds. We might also go beyond mere well-being to work toward a world that embraces contested, respectful, dynamic intercultural communication.

*Culture is a difficult term to define.*

The first word that comes to our mind when it is generally called "culture" is "society". Whether it is written or verbal culture, we have to talk about a community. Here are some of the different understandings of culture; 1. "Culture... 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 society" Tyler (British Anthropologist) 1870; and cited by Avruch 1998. 2. Culture, which may be seen as an organized activity, learned or created by members of a community, may incorporate the experiences as well as images passed on from earlier generations, learned from a social group, or may originate from individuals themselves (Zegarac, 2007).

'Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behavior and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behavior.' (Spencer-Oatey 2008, p. 3) According to the definition of culture in general terms, there are two dimensions. The first one covers artworks belonging to the society, literature and elements of daily life. The second includes concepts such as behavioral forms and beliefs shared by members of society, and ways of thinking. In other words, culture is to consciously or unconsciously realize that thoughts and values shared by a broad base are true or



false. In short, culture is the whole of the material and spiritual characteristics that a society produces in its historical process and transfers to other generations, and it is a collective peculiarity that reflects the religion, lifestyle and thinking style of that society. The ability to convey emotions and thoughts to others, to understand what is read and to think straight is dependent on the ability to use the language (İşeri, 1996). From another point of view this can be seen as "one who does not know a foreign language, does not know its own language" (Goethe). So the culture is one of the important means. Language, Sapir (1970) noted, "a guide to social reality" and a "symbolic guide to culture". Thanks to language, every subject related to culture can be transmitted to other generations, both verbally and in written. According to many linguists, language and culture cannot be distinguished from each other as mentioned above. Whether explaining written or verbal culture, the language is spoken and its community are mentioned. Language is one of the basic elements that constitute a nation apart from being a basic means of communicating between people. Language, which has such an active role in the lives of societies, has an important share in cultural transfer and cultural relations. This issue is particularly felt in the foreign language teaching and learning process. In fact, it is possible to say that language is culture and culture is language when you think in broad sense. In order to be able to speak a language, it is important to know the culture in terms of effective and healthy communication. In terms of intercultural communication, it means that language knowledge must pay attention to how communication is carried out in the target culture and the sociocultural aspects that are important for enhancing the cultural awareness of the students (Byram, 1989). Halliday (1978) defines language as a "social indicator" of culture, and says that every language reflects concepts such as lifestyle, way of thinking, and so on. Issues such as "how the Chinese talk in certain situations", "what the British think in what context" and "how the Japanese respond" can only be related to the culture of that country, and learning the phrases expressed in this context also obliges them to learn the culture of the country concerned.

### *Usage of Cultural Elements in Foreign Language Teaching .*

It is known that the learning environment that aims to increase motivation with high motivation of the learners affects the learning positively, while the factors which are supposed to negatively affect the motivation with low motivation cause to be defined as failures such as not reaching the academic targets. There are pioneering studies under the heading of "Attitudes and motivation in second language learning" based on the social-psychological approach of Gardner and Lambert (1972) at the starting points of studies on the role of motivation in language learning in general up to 90`s in general. According to the approach, language learning is different from learning any other lesson; language is a part of the identity of the individual and is used in social relations that are in the foreground of your identity. Therefore, beyond learning the rules or certain skills, it requires learning and embracing in some settings the social and cultural behavior of the community to which the language belongs. In this context, it is thought that the success of foreign language learning is closely related to the person`s approach to the language-speaking community. After 90`s, an innovative approach to the role of motivation in language learning is seen (Brown, 1994, Crookes & Schmidt, 1991, Dörnyei, 1994a, 1994b; Oxford & Shearin, 1994, Skehan, 1991). This approach, which they call "motivational renaissance" by Gardner and Trem'blay (1994, p. 524), focuses on the perceptions of teachers about motivation in empirical research and the reflection of these perceptions on classroom practices and in the recent years researches on motivation theories of educational psychology and second language education tries to fill the gap between practices. Over time, these and similar approaches to language motivation in foreign language teaching have varied according to the student and teacher profile, learning environment, different settings and cultures. But in general, a common point is seen when different approach of motivation research and education psychology that all of the students are motivated to learn in a suitable environment and it is possible to provide this environment in the classroom (McCombs & Pope, 1994). It is clear that in the learning environment, student motivation tends to increase positively, especially when the culture of language is used, the student can express himself / herself on the target language, and when the technical background is set in a ready-made learning environment or a class. These combinations and regulations constitute an important place in foreign language education. In addition to this, another important point in practice is that some important features of the use of cultural items during the target foreign language learning should be considered by the trainers. According to Straub (1999), students who know their own cultures

can be more objective while evaluating the target culture knowing their values, traditions, rituals and lifestyles in the culture. According to the age and level of the student, such activities can be given in different forms. Particularly for children who are new to the school and who are new to the environment, the subjects of their own culture, such as national sports, religious or national holidays, ceremonies, important days, and songs must be learnt. After they have been sufficiently processed, similar subjects in the culture of the target language can be processed and cultural interaction can be provided in foreign language learning. 'Beginning foreign language students want to feel, touch, smell, and see the foreign peoples and not just hear their language' (Peck, 1998). At any rate, the foreign language classroom should become a 'cultural island' (Kramsch, 1993; Singhal, 1998; Peck, 1998), where the accent will be on 'cultural experience' rather than 'cultural awareness' (Byram & Morgan, 1994, pp. 55-60).

Students or guests who have been to the country where the foreign target language is spoken may be asked to bring information about the target culture. Both in-class and out-of-class activities should be held to help students become more knowledgeable about the target foreign language culture and their own cultures, with comparative projects, research, etc. that will help them compare the two cultures. In addition to these, groups within the class can be created about the music, weddings, clothing, distinct gestures and mimics, weather conditions, important days, architectural structures and touristic sites, historical heroes and activities can be organized in the classroom and cultural items can be utilized in foreign language teaching. Whether it is a group or a project activity, such activities will enable the student to learn or reinforce his or her own culture during the target culture search. Language is not culture-free. If one is to communicate effectively in a foreign/second language, one cannot ignore the cultural context which gives the words broader meanings. There is no argument about the importance of linguistic competency which is constituted with the knowledge of pronunciation, writing system, vocabulary and grammar syntax for the language production. What is often neglected is cultural competency, that is a kind of knowledge of all the other systems of ideas and beliefs shared by members of a community and transmitted through language (Bentahila & Davies, 1989). This knowledge of socio-linguistic rules is crucial in order to use the target language without creating misunderstandings. One may produce perfectly grammatical yet embarrassingly inappropriate sentences without this knowledge. Or one may have a sizable amount of vocabulary and have a good knowledge of linguistic competency yet produce only silence (Noguchi, 1987). Cultural rules about when certain

speech acts can be performed appropriately may differ. For example, there may be routine formulas such as greeting, leave-taking, thanking, apologizing and so on in any given speech community, yet one needs to be aware that it does not mean these speech acts are necessarily performed according to the same or even similar rules across communities. This is often problematic because one tends to transfer the socio-cultural knowledge of uses of language from one's native language to the new one. Certainly, there are many positive aspects of language transfer. The danger then is that "people may fail to recognize the source of the differences, and may wrongly attribute aspects of people's behavior to their own personalities instead of realizing they are simply conforming to different cultural norms." (Bentahila & Davies, 1989, p.103).

Language is learned, which means it can be culturally transmitted. Pre-school children take on their first language from their exposure to random words they encounter in and out of their homes. When they reach school age, they learn their first language or another language. If it is the first language, the children are taught writing and reading, the correct ways to construct sentences, and how to use formal grammar. However, the child gained initial knowledge about the essential structure and vocabulary of the first language before the child started school.

Conversely, culture is transmitted in a large part, by language, through teaching. Language is the reason why humans have histories that animals do not have. In the study of animal behavior through the course of history, alterations to their behavior were the result of the intervention of humans through domestication and other types of interference. The culture of humans on the other hand is as different as the world's languages. They are likely to change over time. In industrialized countries, the changes in the language are more rapid.

Oral instruction, and not imitation, is how we learn the culture. There could be some imitation if the learner is still young. With language, we have a better way to understand methods of social control, products, techniques, and skills. Spoken language offers a vast quantity of usable information for the community. This helps to quicken new skill acquisition and the techniques to adapt to new environments or altered circumstances.

The advent of writing increased the process of cultural dissemination. Diffusing information became much easier thanks to the permanent state of writing. And thanks to the invention of printing and the increase in literacy, this process continues to evolve and speed up.

Modern techniques for fast communication transmission across the globe through broadcasting and the presence of translation services around the world help make usable knowledge to be accessible to people anywhere in the world. Thus, the world benefits from the fast transference, availability, and exchange of social, political, technological, and scientific knowledge.

The integration of culture in language teaching is based on the assumption that one cannot be explored without the other; they are interrelated (Kramsch, 1998; Lesow-Hurley, 2000; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002; Sellami, 2000). However, it is not unusual to hear comments related to the teaching of culture referred to as being implicitly covered, perhaps through the teaching of idiomatic expressions, typical food, seeing a movie or learning about cultural celebrations such as Valentine's Day. However, it is uncertain whether this type of perspective helps our students learn how these cultural manifestations are connected with the language and further investigation is needed to reveal the way in which students mirror the target culture in relation to ours.

Foreign and second language teaching education has committed itself to a ceaseless search of better and more effective ways to facilitate learning, so that learners reach the goal of becoming qualified users of the language. We have also witnessed that this field has not constrained its exploration to only abstract and linguistic features; the goals that we are currently pursuing go beyond the abstract analysis of a language. It has broadened the horizons towards the many layers that languages possess. Interdisciplinary approaches have enriched this professional field, and disciplines such as Cognitive Psychology, Literature, Anthropology, Sociology, Cultural Studies, History, and Communication have been essential partners in redefining and recreating our views on language theory and pedagogy. Critical theorists have contributed with their research (Bourdieu, 1986; Delpit, 1988; Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 1991; Pennycook, 1998) by unveiling that classrooms are not simply spaces filled with chairs, a board, some students and a teacher, but a cultural mirror where social dynamics and power relationships are present; a space where meaning negotiation reflects the complexity of human relationships. As a result of this interrelationship with other disciplines a claim has been laid on the role of culture in foreign language education. Over the last two decades, socio-cultural theories have addressed this issue

with an increasing call for attention to the way that language teachers are dealing with the inherent relationships between language and culture. Kramsch (1993) points out that many approaches to language teaching have focused on linguistic features while the connections between discourse and culture have been insufficiently explored.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the intimate and inseparable relation between culture and language and the implementation of instructional approaches and techniques for teaching second language through culture to enhance students' linguistic understanding. Language is not only the product of culture, but also is the symbol of culture (Gleason, 1961). Culture must be incorporated essentially and basically as an essential component of second language learning and teaching. Only after cultural issues become an inherent and natural part of the language curriculum and instruction, can students be successful in their target language learning. Second language teachers, therefore, should pay more attentions to the varieties of cultures, identify key cultural items in every aspect when they design a language curriculum, and apply appropriate teaching strategies to learning activities in order to help students to bridge and overpass the culture gaps. Language is a means of expression. We express our feelings, emotions, thoughts, needs, desires etc. in words, symbols and gesture which is considered as language. Language can be defined as verbal, physical, biologically innate, and a basic form of communication. Culture is the characteristics of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts. Thus culture finds its expression in language; so, learning a new language without familiarity with its culture remains incomplete.

When foreign language learners that have been taught the culture alongside the language encode their messages, they will not do so from a void, but from a deep understanding of what they are saying, its implications and history. They will be able to do much more than communicate simple needs and ideas, and they will be much better equipped to interact within the target language culture and truly give something back and participate in it. Kumagai (1994) cites that scholars and researchers in the field of applied linguistics as well as language teachers have been addressing the need to incorporate cultural knowledge into second and foreign language teaching (e.g., Lafayette, 1988; Moorjani & Field, 1988; Patrikis, 1988; Robinson, 1985; etc.). A great deal of research has been done by sociolinguists, communication theorists and anthropologists concerning the strong linkage between the way the language is used and the cultural values which

dictate this use (e.g., Hall, 1978; Hymes, 1962; Loveday, 1982; Scollon & Scollon, 1981; etc.). Alyasery (2018) cites that culture is the full range of learned human behavior patterns. The term was first used in this way by the pioneer English Anthropologist Edward B. Tylor in his book, *Primitive Culture*, published in 1871. Tylor said that culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." Of course, it is not limited to men. Women possess and create it as well. Since Tylor's time, the concept of culture has become the dominant focus of anthropology. Culture is a powerful human instrument for survival, but it is a fragile phenomenon. It is constantly changing and easily lost because it exists only in our minds. Our written languages, governments, buildings, and other manmade things are merely the products of culture. They are not culture in themselves. Therefore, archaeologists cannot dig up culture directly in their excavations. The broken vessels and other artifacts of ancient people that they expose are only material remains that mirror cultural patterns--they are things that were made and used through cultural knowledge and skills.

Language without culture is unthinkable, so is human culture without language. A particular language is a mirror of a particular culture. Brown (1994:165) describes the relation between language and culture as follows: 'A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the importance of either language or culture'. In a word, culture and language are inseparable (cited in Jiang, 2000: 328). When it comes to the essence of teaching and learning, as Gao (2006) presents it, the interdependence of language learning and cultural learning is so evident that one can conclude that language learning is culture learning and consequently, language teaching is cultural teaching (p.59). Gao further states that foreign language teachers should be aware of the place of cultural studies in foreign language classroom and try to enhance students' cultural awareness and elevate their communication competence. Wang (2008), likewise, asserts that 'foreign language teaching is foreign culture teaching, and foreign language teachers are foreign culture teachers'. According to Tomalin (2008), the international role of the English language and globalization are the two main reasons to teach culture as a fifth language skill, in addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing. 'What the fifth language skill teaches you is the approach and technique to adapt your use of English to learn about, understand and appreciate the principles, ways of doing things and unique qualities of other cultures. It includes understanding

how to use language to accept changes, to be flexible and tolerant of ways of doing things which might be different to yours. It is an attitudinal change that is articulated through the use of language. Cultural influence on vocabulary language is the transporter of culture and vocabulary is the basic component of language. The cultural difference will inevitably displayed on the vocabulary, and the explanation of vocabulary will also reflect the national or cultural change. If we consider the color as an example in many countries the white color is used as a represent of virtue, piety and pure and that's why a girl wear white clothes on the day of marriage party as a symbol of goodness, chasteness and faithfulness. On the other hand if we consider this white color in china is completely opposite in their culture and they use it only in funeral when one of the family member is dead. This is also opposing Arabic culture which leads people to wear black clothes in their funeral ceremonies. If an American guy orders hot dog in Arabian restaurant, no one will understand that he is asking a hot sandwich. Thus, learning a language implies not only the knowledge of its grammar rules and the denotative meanings of words but it implicates much more, such as the culture phenomena, the way of life, customs, food and habits, history and everything that is contained of culture. In a word, culture is a comprehensive combination with abundant implication, and each factor in it may be exhibited on words. Learning vocabulary, while paying attention to cultural factors, is essential and crucial. Otherwise one will be apt to mockery and irony.



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