# *Interwoven: Culture, language, and learning strategies*

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## Abstract

Culture, language, and learning strategies form a grand tapestry, which is this article's theme. The authors explain each part of the tapestry, provide ideas for teaching all parts in a smoothly united way, and explore key cultural issues (i.e., cognitive flexibility, ethnocultural empathy, intercultural understanding, and needs of intercultural trauma survivors). The article discusses cultural types, cultural communication styles, and related strategies, and it identifies publications that draw together culture, language, and strategies. The article offers new insights and abundant examples for teachers, teacher educators, and researchers.

*Keywords*: culture; cultural learning strategies; cultural communication styles; strategy instruction

## 1. Introduction

Culture and language are interwoven, as shown in Figure 2. Language is part of a vast web of culture, and, as Kramsch (1993, 1998) put it, language is a social practice that expresses cultural reality. This article reveals how learning strategies, culture, and language work together. It is written for teachers, researchers, graduate

students, and program administrators in the broad area of second language acquisition. Readers who are interested either in ordinary classrooms or in immigrants' needs regarding language and culture will find much of value in this article. The contents of the paper are symbolized by Figure 1, which shows the closely woven, colorful tapestry of culture, language, and learning strategies. In the best of all possible classrooms, the threads of this tapestry will not and cannot be separated.
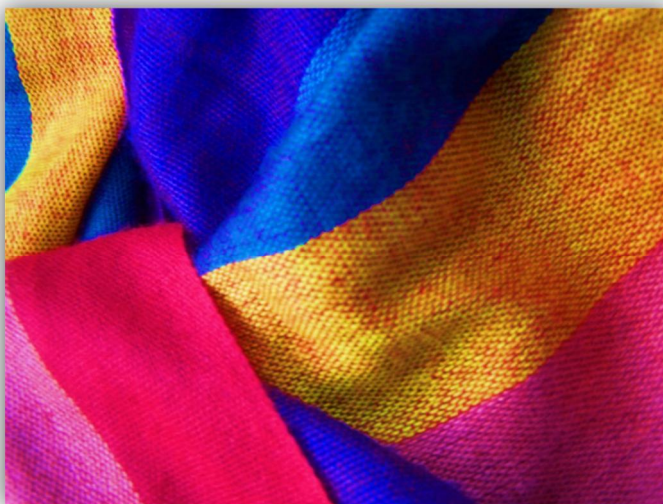


Figure 1 The tapestry of culture, language, and learning strategies. Photo by R. L. Oxford

As noted above, the tapestry contains culture, language, and learning strategies, and these elements intertwine. For the last three or four decades in our field, more books about language teaching, language learning, and language learning strategies[1] have been published than about culture teaching, culture learning, and culture learning strategies.[2] In this article we try to bring these elements together and redress the imbalance.

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[1] Some books and guidebooks for language learning strategies include, among others, Chamot, A. U. (2004), Chamot and Harris (in press), Cohen (2014a, 2014b), Cohen and Macaro (2007), Griffiths (2008, 2013), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990, 1996, 2011, 2017), Oxford and Amerstorfer (2018), Wenden (1991) and Wenden and Rubin (1987).

[2] There are limitations on what many language teachers encounter about teaching culture and about culture learning strategies. Works on anthropology and cross-cultural communication by E. T. Hall (1976) and Hofstede (2001) are very helpful but do not focus, like J. K. Hall's (2012) book, on how to teach culture. J. K. Hall's book seems to mention culture strategies in the sense of communication strategies; the term "culture learning strategies" appears rarely, if at all. Cohen and Ishihara (2014) write about pragmatics, i.e., the nexus of language and culture, and about strategies for pragmatics, but culture learning strategies are not the main focus.

The sections included in this article concern the following issues: Section 1 focuses of the tapestry of culture, language and learning strategies. Section 2 provides guidance for what to do before overtly teaching any learning strategies. This guidance includes recognizing cultural issues such as cognitive flexibility, ethnocultural empathy, intercultural understanding, and needs of intercultural trauma survivors. Culture teaching and strategies for culture learning are the keys to Section 3. Section 4 offers detailed cultural examples, such as cultural types, cultural communication styles, and related learning strategies. Section 5 highlights culture-related strategy instruction using the *CRITERIA* format (Oxford, 2017). Section 6 presents published frameworks and standards that combine culture, language, and strategies, and the conclusion is in Section 7. The appendix presents rich, varied teaching techniques for culture-language relationships and learning strategy use.

## 2. The tapestry of culture, language, and learning strategies

Culture and language form a tightly woven tapestry, rich with vibrant colors, shadows, and highlights. When an individual is learning culture and language, the tapestry also includes learning strategies, that is, conscious, learner-regulated thoughts and actions for developing specific skills and general proficiency.

### 2.1. Language

As we know, *language* is a system involving complex communication, either spoken or written, to express ideas and feelings. Pragmatics, or the appropriate use of a language in situational contexts, is the nexus of language and culture. In this article, we sometimes use the terms *target culture* and *target language* to refer to what the person is trying to learn at a given time.

### 2.2. Some fundamentals of culture

*Culture* is often seen as the human-made part of our environment (Oxford, 2014) or the software of the mind (Hofstede, 2001) – the shared attributes (i.e., common history, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, and artifacts) of a group (Boulding, 2000). However, sometimes culture is used to refer not to the shared attributes but to the people, in large or small groupings, who share the attributes. For example, culture can refer to a social stratum, like the Brahmin (Brahman) class of India, and to the "small culture or micro-culture" of a specific family/clan or organization, or even a school class (Holliday, 1999). Cultural groups might not be contained within certain geopolitical boundaries. This is especially

true at times of mass migration, in particular the permanent or temporary movement of people due to political or cultural oppression, war, and extremes of climate. Examples are the Kurds and the Rohingya. From a more abstract perspective (Kramsch, 1998), culture has three layers: (a) *social* (i.e., current, synchronic), (b) *historical* (i.e., across time, diachronic), and (c) *imaginative* (i.e., future-oriented imaginings, dreams, and hopes embedded in the culture), with all three layers funneled together simultaneously in a given place and time.

The "cultural iceberg" model (American Field Services Intercultural Programs, 1984) is simple and attractive, so it is amazing how many language teachers do not know about this model or, if they are aware of it, do not mention it to their students. In the iceberg model, visible culture and invisible culture constitute an important distinction. Food, celebrations, and clothing are part of the visible tip of the cultural iceberg, and below the waterline are invisible, often unconscious feelings, beliefs, or attitudes. For virtually any aspect of visible culture it is usually possible to discover its correspondingly deeper, invisible elements. For instance, above the water line (in the visible culture), we might see or hear about "burkinis," the modest swimming attire desired by some burka-wearing Muslim women. Burkinis have much deeper (invisible) meanings and implications than merely the garments themselves. Clashing, often invisible, issues include the role of women in a patriarchal society, generational views about women's role, male anxiety or anger about women's empowerment, female modesty/immodesty in relation to religion, and (for non-Muslims perhaps) fear of the religious "other." In teaching Arabic, instructors should help learners recognize and face deep cultural issues like these, rather than paying attention to only stereotypical aspects of culture. The unconscious (invisible) aspects in the cultural iceberg, such as attitudes and values, are the most powerful because they are generally unquestioned and because they drive the conscious aspects. Culturally responsive students understand the conscious elements of their culture and are enthusiastic about exploring – or at least willing to explore – the unconscious elements of the target culture and their own culture.

## 2.3. Learning strategies and how to teach them

Learners benefit from employing strategies, defined earlier as conscious, learner-regulated thoughts and actions for developing specific skills and general proficiency (Figure 2 offers a more detailed definition). A few examples of learning strategies are: (a) using background knowledge about culture and language to predict what will come next in a story or a news program; (b) collaborating with someone else to learn culture and language; (c) combining intuition, logic, and facts with cultural experience to communicate more effectively in the language; and (d) asking a native speaker questions to understand the target culture.

Learning strategies . . .

a) are conscious, teachable, intentional, self-chosen, and self-regulated thoughts and actions for learning the target culture and language;

b) have several interlocking purposes: improving performance on immediate tasks, developing specific skills, and improving autonomy and long-term proficiency;

c) support cognitive, emotional (affective), social, motivational, and metastrategic regulation (e.g., planning, organizing, monitoring, and evaluating) of learning (Oxford, 2017b); and

d) are flexibly and creatively combined into strategy clusters (strategies used simultaneously) and strategy chains (strategies used in sequence) to meet the learner's needs and fit the context and the task.

Figure 2 Longer definition of learning strategies (adapted from Oxford, 2017b)

Strategy instruction usually involves finding out students' current learning strategies, choosing a new strategy (or a combination of strategies) that students need the most for current tasks, demonstrating and naming the strategy for the students, explaining why it is helpful, asking students to try out the strategy in an authentic task, asking students to decide how useful the strategy was, and reminding students to use it again (i.e., transfer it to new, relevant tasks). This pattern is sometimes called *fully informed, overt strategy instruction*, because the teacher gives learners full information about the strategy. Teachers can adapt this sequence to create simple, organic steps to meet students' needs. Sometimes strategy instruction is rapidly offered to one or two learners, rather than a whole class.

Chamot (2018) recommended differentiating strategy instruction to meet students' needs based on diversity in cultural, socioeconomic, and educational background; personality factors; motivation and willingness; target language proficiency level; and strategy knowledge. Not every learning strategy will work for every learner. Psaltou-Joycey and Gavriilidou (2015), and Cohen (2014) created teachers' guides taking into consideration many crucial factors for tailoring strategy instruction to learners' individual and group needs.

## 3. Paving the way to strategy instruction (what to do before overtly teaching strategies)

Most of this section is designed to help teachers pave the way to strategy instruction. This means setting the scene by providing a welcoming, culturally-open atmosphere before overtly teaching any learning strategies. What if the teacher is not ready for conducting strategy instruction? What if the students have just arrived and have no way of grasping strategy instruction yet? In 3.1, we explain that the teacher can set the scene by creating an atmosphere of support, kindness, and understanding and by helping students develop confidence and cultural competence. Three basic cultural competences are the focus: cognitive flexibility, ethnocultural empathy, and intercultural understanding. Working on these competences first

makes it much easier for strategy instruction to occur successfully. In 3.2 we concentrate on the needs of trauma survivors. If students are traumatized from famine, war, and mass migration, they need special help before strategy instruction can begin. This is perhaps the only time strategy experts have ever said, "Whoa! Some teachers should hold off on strategy instruction until the students are ready!," but keep in mind that the scene-setting we are proposing is for the purpose of preparing the atmosphere and the students so that strategy instruction will be successful and helpful when it comes. Scene-setting or paving the way is an early, crucial stage, yet it is often forgotten. Jumping into strategy instruction without that early stage can be problematic if teachers and/or students are often unready.

When teachers stop to pave the way before conducting overt strategy instruction, they cultivate a highly positive, nonthreatening, and welcoming environment for students. In such an environment, students can thrive. In such an environment, some students in a given class simply start using good learning strategies on their own. That is fine. These students will become even more strategic when the stage is set for everyone and when overt strategy instruction does begin.

## 3.1. Three needs

Given that language classrooms across the globe are becoming increasingly multilingual and multicultural (sometimes now called plurilingual and pluricultural), learners need to control and manage their emotions within the context of multiple interactions with peers and teachers from different social and cultural backgrounds. Thus, strategic learning is crucial both for emotion regulation and academic achievement in the target language. Within 21st-century classrooms, there is indeed an urgent need for language learners first to just fit in interculturally in order to be able to learn (Matsumoto, Yoo, & LeRoux, 2007; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009).

The three competences (three needs) noted at this section's opening are crucial for anyone teaching or learning another language and culture. *Cognitive flexibility* is the ability to create new categories and see more than one cultural perspective. *Ethnocultural empathy* refers to the ability to understand the feelings of individuals who are ethnically and/or culturally different from oneself. However, ethnocultural empathy goes beyond merely understanding those people's feelings; it involves an emotional response that is congruent with the perceived welfare of the individuals; we feel their feelings and care about them. It involves the ability to walk in another's shoes or "feel with" a person quite different from oneself. *Intercultural understanding* is defined as people's ability to understand, appreciate, and be open to various aspects and forms of cultural and social diversity. All of these three competences are highly interconnected and encompass self-awareness and strong interpersonal competence. Kramsch

(1993), mentioned earlier, stressed that since language is social practice, culture is at the heart of language teaching and learning. Thus, the three competences should naturally be developed along with language competence.

### 3.1.1. What teachers can do to set the scene: Cognitive flexibility

The following teaching techniques can be used to enhance learners' *cognitive flexibility* (see Figure 3). Please note that these teaching techniques help create a positive ethos in the classroom, but they do not represent specific strategy instruction. However, when the classroom encourages cognitive flexibility, quite often learners develop creativity and power when using learning strategies.

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*Encourage perspective-taking* among learners.

*Promote learners' self-awareness* by helping them to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and work toward improving the latter.

*Enable* learners to initiate their own learning and take the lead.

*Allow* learners' creativity to flow.

*Highlight* the importance of group work and enhancing a team spirit.

*Open up opportunities* for inquiry and trial and error.

*Support* learners' lateral thinking.

*Encourage* a range of perspectives and expanded perspectives.

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Figure 3 Setting the scene for cognitive flexibility as a step toward strategy instruction: Some teaching techniques

### 3.1.2. What teachers can do to set the scene: Ethnocultural empathy

Ethnocultural empathy can develop when the teacher focuses attention on it and uses relevant teaching techniques. These techniques, while not themselves constituting learning strategy instruction, can foster the kind of atmosphere that helps students in the classroom to care about each other and about people from the target culture and other cultures. As suggested earlier, such empathy helps students feel what someone in another culture is feeling. Ethnocultural empathy (across cultural groups) has been studied to determine how similar or different it is from basic empathy (within one's own cultural group). Rasoal, Jungert, Hau, and Andersson (2011) found that the two forms of empathy were correlated, that largely similar predictors were found for the two constructs, and that a confirmatory factor analysis failed to confirm two separate constructs. Figure 4 presents some teaching techniques that can sow the seeds for strategy instruction, particularly related to ethnocultural empathy. These techniques are not the

same as strategy instruction. Instead, they create the environment necessary for students to relax and care about people from other cultures.

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*Include stories* in instructional practice, both in the form of personal anecdotes and students' own stories to share with the rest of the class.

*Provide ample opportunities for communication practice* so that learners can find the appropriate words to convey their emotions and feelings.

*Encourage* peer support and collaboration.

*Initiate discussions* on learners' experiences with different cultures and a reflection on the similarities and differences between one's native culture(s) and the target culture(s).

*Use literature* – in any form, such as novels, poems, and plays – in the language classroom.

*Display empathy*, creating a caring and trusting environment, where learners can open up to each other, identify their shared values and treat cultural differences as a doorway that invites learning about other cultures.

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Figure 4 Setting the scene for ethnocultural empathy as a step toward strategy instruction: Some teaching techniques

### 3.1.3. What teachers can do to set the scene: Intercultural understanding

The third need is the competence of *intercultural understanding* inside and outside of classrooms. Figure 5 presents some teaching techniques to pave the way for strategy instruction fostering intercultural understanding. Naturally, paving the path is not the same as overt strategy instruction; instead, it prepares the classroom ambiance to understand other cultures more deeply. This positive atmosphere allows students to be prepared to develop and use learning strategies for intercultural understanding.

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*Make and highlight connections* between language use and cultural values.

*Respect differences* between languages and cultures.

*Respect differences* that students from various native languages experience.

*Use* problem-based learning and/or scenario-based learning to help learners understand other cultures, especially the target culture, by means of debates, role plays, discussion groups or literature.

*Provide assistance* about main points, which can be missed across cultural lines.
*Initiate* explicit, candid discussions about examples of understanding people from another culture.

*Help* students become aware of negative situations (e.g., bullying, rudeness, sarcasm, physical aggression and violence, all the way to war) that might result from the lack of intercultural understanding.

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Figure 5 Setting the scene for intercultural understanding as a step toward strategy instruction: Some teaching techniques

## 3.2. Focusing on trauma survivors

Here we discuss the varied learnings that are needed by trauma survivors for regaining emotional control and for learning the target language and culture. Let us discuss terminology first. We use the term *trauma survivor* rather than *trauma victim* to refer to refugees, immigrants, and others who have been able to live, persist and carry on despite multiple traumas. For instance, Nadia Murad (2018) is a young woman from Iraq's Yazidi minority. Like many thousands of other Yazidi women and men, she was caught up in the Islamic State's effort to exterminate her people. She was captured, enslaved, raped, tortured, and humiliated by the Islamic State. Her mother and many others were killed. Nadia escaped and somehow found her way to Germany. Due to her migration history, she necessarily became a learner of culture and language. She became a spokesperson at the United Nations to describe the plight of Yazidi women. She urges us not to call her and other Yazidi women "victims" but instead "survivors" of trauma who want to take back their lives. Nadia's argument seems to fit countless other refugees and immigrants, even those whose traumas have not been as fierce as hers. Therefore, we respectfully use the term *trauma survivors* here.

Contemporary classrooms often include many learners who have fled their home country due to its unstable socio-political and financial condition. Mass migration means that different cultures encounter each other constantly, and unfortunately often not positively. Newcomers who have entered a country as immigrants, refugees, or terrorism survivors have challenges to cope with: they are already physically, emotionally, and socially traumatized, and simultaneously they have needs regarding orientation, resettlement, interculturalism, and language. Various second language learners (in London and many other major cities) include diverse, traumatized refugees or immigrants from distant areas (e.g., northern Iraq, where Nadia came from) who are struggling with the language of their new country and have inadequate housing and funds; and individuals who come from the local community but do not know its language well and have financial issues and discrimination issues. All these people bring to the language classroom their own cultural perspectives, along with traumas and anxieties about fitting into the majority culture. Even inside the language classroom, these students, especially trauma survivors, might be overwhelmed by things they observe for the first time, such as new teaching styles, books, freedom to express their opinion in public, and all sorts of cultural expectations in dress, food, religious behavior, and family interaction. Additionally, these people need learning strategies for language and culture.

Figure 6 contains some techniques that teachers could use to address the emotional, social, and linguistic needs of trauma survivors in the classroom. The

techniques, except perhaps the technique *Teach organizational skills* are not directly aimed at strategy instruction. Instead, the purpose is to provide a supportive socioemotional, cultural, and linguistic environment for trauma survivors. Strategy instruction can be incorporated into that environment when students have sufficient confidence and understanding. We think it will not be long.

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*Foster* social immersion in the classroom.

*Highlight* the pros of student diversity in the classroom.

*Mix students* from different backgrounds.

*Create opportunities* for collaboration when culturally feasible.

*Assign peer mentors* to assist refugee and immigrant students.

*Explain* the importance of sharing cultural experiences and learning from each other.

*Consider* learners' new contexts and whole environments.

*Incorporate* new contexts into lessons (i.e., make their new lives part of what is going on in class in order to facilitate learning, adjustment, and listening strategies).

*Teach organizational skills* explicitly as students may not know how learning could be achieved.

*Focus on the "whole person"* by identifying unique strengths and talents and by accentuating the positive traits to motivate students.

*Give* all students the same materials and affordances even if the refugee students have difficulties with the target language.

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Figure 6 Setting the scene to support trauma survivors as a step toward strategy instruction: Some teaching techniques

## 4. Ways to teach culture and selected culture learning strategies

Teaching culture in the students' target language is often very difficult but might be effectively accomplished by a creative, lively teacher who uses visual images, nonverbal language (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2017), and music to bring learners into the target culture. Teaching culture and language together can focus on pragmatics, that is, the use of the language appropriately in situational contexts (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014). An occasional question is how to teach culture if certain students are xenophobic. Of course, they are often the ones who need cultural exploration the most. All students, and especially xenophobic ones, should be offered opportunities to get to know the culture through artistic means (music, art, literature, dance), through the media (emailing, tandem learning, online news), and through meeting and working with people from the culture (through field trips, long-term peer-to-peer project work, interviews, video-making). Figure 7 presents some culture learning strategies. Some of them help build up still further the cultural competences mentioned earlier. These learning strategies can be translated, simplified, and culturally adapted.

*I . . .*

 *compare and contrast* large and small cultures.

 *compare and contrast* roles of men and women in your culture and the target culture.

 *compare and contrast* how you feel in your own culture and the target culture.

 *apply* the right medium for learning a culture (e.g., use a notebook, use a smartphone, use *YouTube*).

 *analyze* why certain aspects of culture seem surprising to you.

 *analyze* ways that such a response, if unhelpful, could be minimized.

 *ask* about culturally acceptable ways to talk about emotions in the target culture.

 *notice* feelings about one's own small and large cultures.

 *apply* new knowledge about these aspects of culture.

*Note.* "I" is used to make the learning strategy more personal

Figure 7 Some basic learning strategies for understanding cultures

## 5. Detailed examples: Learning cultural types, cultural communication styles, and related learning strategies

Here we discuss cultural types, communication styles, and relevant learning strategies, as well as ways to teach these. Incredibly, many language teachers do not know about cultural types or cultural communication styles, and this creates an area of poverty at the center of much language learning and teaching. The first author, though having a master's degree in a foreign language and years of experience in teaching languages and directing language-related programs, was shocked to learn about these massively important cultural elements for the first time only when she started doing research on cultural aspects of peace in her fifties. What if she had known earlier? What if many other language professionals could now learn about these crucial cultural factors and could help their students to develop much better cultural understanding? The tragedy of ignorance would be removed, and the teaching of language and culture would be revolutionized.

### 5.1. Cultural types

A key cultural variable related to attitudes, behaviors, and communications is *cultural types*. The collectivist cultural type represents 70% of the world's cultures, and the individualist cultural type represents 30% (Triandis, 1995). Table 1 is a definitional comparison of collectivism and individualism. Collectivism focuses on the individual only as part of the group (even regarding achievement), and it promotes harmony, tightly-knit relationships, collaboration, and strong hierarchies. In contrast, individualism focuses on the individual, accepts less harmony, and encourages

independence, competition, and lack of hierarchies (except politics and business). However, the picture of collectivism and individualism is not black and white for at least two reasons. First, sometimes individualist values coexist with collectivist values within a given culture. Second, many countries contain individuals and sub-cultures whose values contradict those of the dominant culture.

Table 1 Comparison of cultural collectivism and individualism (based on Oxford, 2013a)

| Collectivism | Individualism |
|---|---|
| Individual as part of the group, even regarding achievement | Individual as more important than the group, including regarding achievement |
| Harmony | Less emphasis on harmony |
| Tightly knit network of relationships (family, clan, work group, or other); reliance on relationships | Independence; self-reliance |
| Collaboration | Competition |

## 5.2. Cultural communication styles

*Communication trends* are different within collectivist and individualist cultures (Oxford, 2013a, 2014). Collectivist cultures value *high-context* communication, while individualist cultures are known for *low-context* communication (Hall, 1976). High-context style involves communication that is indirect, nonlinear, polite, hierarchical, and face-to-face when possible. Low-context style calls for communication that is direct (often blunt), linear, and less concerned with politeness, hierarchies, or face-to-face exchanges. Face is very important in high-context communication, but it has a much smaller role in low-context communication (see Table 2 for details).

Table 2 Comparison of high-context communication and low-context communication (based on Oxford, 2013a)

| High-context communication | Low-context communication |
|---|---|
| Relates to collectivism | Relates to individualism |
| Indirect and ambiguous communication, with messages coming from the context (e.g., physical context, traditions, body language, social status, and unspoken understandings) rather than from what is said | Direct and often blunt; most of the information is in the explicit code, that is, it is openly expressed without the need for many contextual cues |
| Strong emphasis on politeness and eloquence | Less communicative emphasis on politeness |
| Eloquence a major value | Eloquence generally unimportant in ordinary communication |
| Nonlinear communication, not based directly on logic or facts, and includes many politeness rituals; sometimes people from low-context (individualist) cultures see this as going in circles | Linear communication based on the belief that truth is objective, factual, linear, logical, and deterministic (either/or, yes/no); sometimes people from high-context (collectivist) cultures see this as rude and aggressive |
| Not good to express overt disagreement | Overt disagreement acceptable |

| | |
|---|---|
| Hierarchical communication (honoring a central authority figure) | Hierarchies less necessary in communication |
| Face-to-face relationships emphasized for bonding | Emphasis is not on bonding, so face-to-face communication is sometimes less needed or even undesired |
| Face (honor, including avoidance of shame) is prominent; concern for saving one's face and saving others' face | Face plays less of a role; concern, if any, is saving one's own face |

## 5.3. Relevant learning strategies for cultural types and cultural communication styles

Based on the discussion in the two previous subsections (5.1 and 5.2), Figure 8 presents useful learning strategies, which can be translated, simplified, and otherwise adapted.

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*I . . .*

*choose* to explore the target culture's type (collectivist or individualist).

*read* about collectivist and individualist cultures and the communication styles that relate to them.

*take notes* about these readings using a table or a Roman-numeral outline.

based on readings, *list* questions for the mentor/informant about the target culture, especially related to collectivism or individualism, whichever is relevant to the culture; use everyday terms, not technical terms like *collectivism* and *individualism*.

*seek* a mentor/informant from the target culture.

*ask* the mentor/informant about the target culture in everyday terms, flexibly using my list of questions.

*identify* differences between collectivist and individualist cultures with specific examples based on answers from the mentor/informant (and any differences).

*focus my attention* to recognize signs of high-context communication or low-context communication in target language conversations, films, and video.

*find media* (e.g., movies, *YouTube*) *and focus* to see examples of the target culture, if it is not close at hand; look for emotional, social, and other factors, cultural types, and cultural communication styles.

*depict* (creating pictures, collages, or photos) my own illustrations of aspects of collectivist (or individualist) practices in the target culture; if desired, picture aspects of relevant cultural communication styles.

*identify* when and how to adjust my communication style if needed in target language communication.

*identify* my feelings when encountering a cultural communication style drastically different from my own.

*read* about differences between collectivist individualist practices about face (shame, honor).

*find examples* of "facework" differences in collectivist and individualist cultures as I read culturally authentic books and magazines or watch movies or *YouTube.*

*apply* new knowledge about individualist and collectivist cultures as I continue to learn the target language and culture.

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Figure 8 Useful learning strategies for understanding cultural types and their communication styles (based on Oxford, 2013a)

## 5.4. An example of strategy instruction for cultural types and cultural communication styles

The best way to teach strategies involves integrating strategy instruction into authentic learning tasks for culture and language. Figure 9 provides an example of strategy instruction, specifically for learners when the target culture's type is collectivist and its communication style is high-context. This example can easily be adjusted for learners when the target culture's type is individualist and its communication style is low-context.

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Background:

a) This is strategy instruction for students who are learning a language associated with a *collectivist culture.*

b) These steps assume that the students have already encountered at least some general information about identifying collectivist and individualist cultures.

c) Halfway through the strategy instruction process described in this table, students are introduced to the characteristics of such cultures and the typical communication styles of such cultures.

NOTE: The strategy instruction ideas below are comfortably adaptable for use in strategy instruction for students whose target culture's style is *individualist* (naturally with a low-context communication style).

These strategies are woven into language learning in the steps below.

*Step A: Introducing the strategies for identifying collectivist cultures*
The teacher looks at a globe and world map and mentions learning strategies in the process. To help students review, the teacher *brainstorms* a few collectivist cultures, such as Korean and Japanese, and then points them out on the globe or map (*using resources*). Then the teacher *lists* these collectivist cultures on the board or screen. The teacher reminds the students of the strategies just used: *brainstorming*, *using resources*, and *listing*, and explains that these strategies often go together in a cluster or a sequence. The teacher asks students to explain why these strategies were useful to them.

*Step B: Practicing the strategies for expanding the list of collectivist cultures*
The teacher invites students, in pairs, to go up and look at the globe or map if they wish (*using resources*) in order to find the location of collectivist cultures. The teacher asks the pairs to use the strategies of *brainstorming* and *listing* on large sheets of paper at least 7 collectivist cultures that were not named by the teacher (examples: many cultures in the Far East, Africa, South America, the Middle East; indigenous cultures, like the Maori, in different parts of the world). Students compare lists and consolidate them.

*Step C: Extending the listing strategy in order to make comparisons*
The teacher asks the students, in the same pairs as above, to use the strategy of *making a comparison chart.* It could be a tabular chart with the left side listing the 7 collectivist cultures named earlier and the right side listing 7 individualist cultures, or it could be some other kind of chart (Oxford, 1990). The teacher asks the students how this strategy helps them organize and remember information.

*Step D: Looking back and thinking ahead*
The teacher asks the members of the whole class to use the strategy of *reflecting together* on what they learned, how the strategies helped, and which strategies could easily be transferred to other learning activities.

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At this point (if it has not happened before), the teacher explains the characteristics of collectivist cultures, individualist cultures, and their corresponding communication styles. In order to understand the target collectivist culture for the target language (e.g., learning the mainstream Chinese culture and the Mandarin language), students must also learn about individualist cultures.

In pairs or in the whole class, students might *compare characteristics of collectivist cultures with those of individualist cultures* OR *go more deeply into collectivist culture* through a variety of classroom activities, such as game-playing, role-playing, drawing, outlining, video-watching, etc. To make these activities successful, the teacher might ask the students to use certain learning strategies, with a focus on only a few strategies that are the most helpful. A very useful selection of strategies might come from these: *taking notes, making a chart to compare, using a semantic map, analyzing, synthesizing, inferencing (e.g., figuring out the culture's beliefs by means of its proverbs; figuring out how to act by means of watching videos), taking one's emotional temperature (e.g., identifying emotions, such as feeling more comfortable with one communication style more than another or being anxious about the culture and the language), using deep breathing, relaxing with meditation, asking questions for verification, asking questions for more information, and using symbols (e.g., a question mark to indicate what needs to be asked).* Many other strategies are found in Oxford (2011, 2017b). Alternatively, students might be encouraged to use their own favorite strategies.

Either way, after every three or four activities, the teacher might lead a strategy discussion, with the students talking about which strategies worked the best for them, how they used the strategies, and how they might transfer the strategies to other activities later.

Figure 9 Example of strategy instruction when the target culture is *collectivist* and therefore uses *high-context* communication (based on Oxford, 2013a)

## 6. Culture-related strategy instruction using the *CRITERIA* format

The acronym *CRITERIA* (see Table 3) stands for cooperation, respect, integrity, tolerance of ambiguity, exploration, reflection, intercultural empathy, and acceptance of complexity (Oxford, 2017b). The elements represented by the letters are connected with various learning strategies. Some letters are linked with just one strategy, others with two strategies, and just one ("E") with three strategies. For example, the strategies for the letter "E" are: "*Watch videos, read, and use other resources to explore the culture. Take notes to refer to later. Have a friend on social media from the culture.*"

The *CRITERIA* acronym lends itself to cognitive flexibility, emotional self-regulation, and the search for understanding across cultures. An interesting idea is to ask students to role-play a situation in the *CRITERIA* acronym and then act out several learning strategies that could relate to those situations. Consider "T" for *tolerance of ambiguity* (in Table 3): A specific, culturally confusing or mystifying situation has occurred, and students could identify it and act it out. Then they would choose and act out a number of relevant learning strategies to educate themselves in dealing effectively with the situation. Strategies named for the letter "T" are "*analyze the situation and, if necessary, ask for help.*" Students can act out those strategies, but they can also creatively generate and act out other strategies. Teachers can ask

individual learners (or small groups of learners) to suggest their own favorite culture-related strategies for each letter of the acronym. Teachers can incorporate the acronym into strategy instruction in multiple ways, such as teaching the strategies related to one letter of the acronym at a time. Tasks involving the acronym *CRITERIA* assume strong proficiency or else simplification and adaptation.

Table 3 Intercultural competence and related learning strategies useful for strategy instruction (Oxford, 2017b)

| Letter in the word *CRITERIA* | Parts of overall sociocultural competence | Strategies relevant to each part |
|---|---|---|
| C | *Cooperation* – ability to work with people whose cultural values are different from one's own. | *Seek a native speaker of the L2.* *Ask questions, if appropriate, about a native speaker's culture.* |
| R | *Respect* – regard, esteem, or consideration for other cultures and for cultural diversity; rejection of xenophobia, discrimination, and marginalization. | *Show respect by using culturally appropriate turn-taking and other aspects of pragmatics.* |
| I | *Integrity* – honesty, honor, and fairness in dealing with other cultures | *Research the signs of honor and fairness in the friend's culture* *Be sure to communicate by employing this knowledge* |
| T | *Tolerance of ambiguity* – ability to face new, often confusing cultural situations without becoming overly stressed, even when these situations include uncomfortable moments. | *If a confusing cultural situation emerges, analyze the situation and, if necessary, ask for help.* |
| E | *Exploration* – willingness to actively explore cultures. | *Watch videos, read, and use other resources to explore the culture. Take notes to refer to later.* *Have a friend on social media from the culture.* |
| R | *Reflection* – ability to reflect, leading to cognitive flexibility and cultural adaptability. | *Keep a long-running journal about what I am learning about other cultures.* |
| I | *Intercultural empathy (also called ethnocultural empathy)* – an emotional response elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of a person or group from another culture; ability to understand or "feel with" the other. | *Envision myself as someone I know from another culture and experience that person's feelings and thoughts.* |
| A | *Acceptance of complexity* – an important counterweight to the human desire to oversimplify the cultural data and accept stereotypes. | *Overcome stereotypes by recognizing that they are merely generalities, often negative ones, and by focusing on complex characteristics of specific, authentic people from the culture.* |

For the *CRITERIA* acronym (or other modes for teaching culture strategies) to be helpful, the setting must offer at least some chances for communication across cultures. Consider differences in communication possibilities in the following examples of second and foreign language learning. For a student who is learning English as a *second* language in the UK, the US, Australia, or New Zealand,

English is the most frequent vehicle of daily communication in those countries, so there are many face-to-face opportunities to use the language. However, for a student who is learning Swahili as a *foreign* language in those countries, Swahili is not the primary mode for everyday communication mode for most people there, so those countries offer comparatively few in-person possibilities for using Swahili, especially in small towns. When there are not many face-to-face chances to use the target language and learn the target culture, social media offer unparalleled, technology-based, global opportunities for engagement in language and culture. These opportunities can be used by individuals or by whole classes.

## 7. Publications involving combinations of culture, language, and strategies

A classroom combination of culture, language, and learning strategies is very important. Fortunately, some published frameworks and standards provide guidance about the triad of culture, language, and strategies. One of the best known is the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment,* or *CEFR* (Council of Europe, 2001). The title refers to language, but the content clearly emphasizes the interaction of culture and language. The 2001 *CEFR* contends that greater language knowledge facilitates intercultural respect, tolerance, cooperation, and communication and reduces prejudice and discrimination. In this powerful document, *sociocultural competence* is described as involving

- attitudes of curiosity and openness;
- knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in various cultures;
- ability to interpret a text or event from another culture and relate it to one's own culture;
- ability to acquire new cultural knowledge and interact across cultures under real-time constraints;
- and critical cultural awareness.

The need for learning strategies is explained and illustrated throughout the 2001 *CEFR*. The time period including the *CEFR*'s development and publication is known for significant professional awareness of learning strategies and learner autonomy in Europe and many parts of the world.

More recently, the latest (provisional) edition of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion Volume with New Descriptors* (North, Goodier, & Piccaro, 2017), like the 2001 *CEFR,* overtly demonstrates the relationship between culture and language. It includes the following competences in which culture plays a significant role: sociolinguistic competence, pragmatic competence, and plurilingual and pluricultural competence. It also embraces multiple aspects of linguistic competence

(e.g., vocabulary, grammar, phonology, and orthography), which – unless they are being treated as an academic memory exercise – must exist in a cultural-linguistic nexus. The 2017 (provisional) *CEFR* looks distinctly different from the 2001 *CEFR* and was surely written by a different team. The 2017 (provisional) *CEFR* could have strengthened its comments about the value of learning strategies, but at least it mentions strategies for both learning and performance.

Another recent and intriguing work published by the Council of Europe (Beacco, Byram, Cavlli, Coste, Cuenat, Goullier, & Panthier, 2016) again brings together culture and language. It is called *Guide for the Development and Implementation of Curricula for Plurilingual and Intercultural Education*. This publication explains the unified meanings of plurilingual and intercultural competence, that is, the ability to: (a) use a plural repertoire of linguistic and cultural recourses for communication and interaction in different cultures, (b) understand otherness, (c) mediate between or among members of two or more social groups, and (d) question assumptions of cultures, including one's own. This guide offers ways to develop these interwoven competences but surprisingly does not emphasize learning strategies.

The *European Language Portfolio* or *ELP* (see Cavana, 2012; Council of Europe, 2018a, 2018b) is a document allowing language learners to record and reflect on their learning of multiple languages and their intercultural experiences. It also supports the development of learner autonomy, which is ordinarily connected with learning strategies. The *ELP* is linked to the *CEFR*. The *ELP*'s values are in synchrony with those of the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML). The *ELP* contains three components: a language passport, a language biography, and a dossier (Council of Europe, 2018b). The Council of Europe stopped officially registering portfolios in 2014, but individual learners continue to use the *ELP* system.

The *World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages [ACTFL], 2017) include the development of cultural understanding along with language skills. The standards are called the *5 C's*: cultures, communication, connections, comparisons, and communities. Though only one standard is called "cultures," strands of culture are quietly present in all the standards. An alert teacher or professor would likely notice the standards' linkage of language and culture. Chamot (2004) developed an excellent, learning-strategy-based pattern for teaching language by using an earlier version of the 5 C's, although ACTFL surprisingly failed to integrate these valuable ideas about learning strategies into its documents about standards.

## 8. Conclusion

Let us return to the tapestry metaphor, which contains culture, language, and learning strategies. The appendix interweaves all three factors in a lively, strategic

exercise. All parts of the tapestry should be intertwined in every language class. Developing an understanding across cultures often means interacting with others in their language rather than one's own, and learning how to do these things necessitates learning strategies. Besides the metaphor of weaving, other metaphors also exist: (a) culture, language, and learning strategies combined as the nucleus of a cell; (b) learning strategies as a bridge to cultural and linguistic understanding; and (c) a journey on the Culture and Language (C&L) Railroad, with learning strategies as the fuel. We hope that this article has provided insights about relationships between culture and language learning, strategy instruction, and the importance of setting the scene for strategy instruction.

Thinking more broadly about our theme, in fostering competencies in culture and language, we are seeking nothing less than the creation of peace cultures (Boulding, 2000, 2008; Oxford, 2014) and, in fact, peace at multiple levels (Ghaith & Shaaban, 1994; Kruger, 2012; Medley, 2016; Oxford, 2013b, 2017a), from inner peace and interpersonal peace all the way to global peace. These aims can be achieved only through learning to interact beyond our own language and culture. Learning strategies can profoundly help in this lifelong process.

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APPENDIX

*Teaching techniques to highlight culture-language relationships and foster learning strategy use: A strategic exercise for the classroom*

Column A in the table below displays a variety of teaching techniques (instructional activities) emphasizing culture but also linking culture and language. These teaching techniques can often be enhanced by interweaving learning strategy instruction. Strategy instruction is noted in Column B, which leaves space for readers to insert the strategies they might like to teach with regard to the activities in Column A. The authors would like to express their gratitude to Vee Harris for several suggestions.

| *Column A*<br>Teaching techniques (instructional activities) for culture and for culture-language relationships | *Column B*<br>Strategy Instruction: Which relevant learning strategies to teach the students? (write below learning strategies that relate to Column A techniques/activities). |
|---|---|
| *Invite* guests from the target culture to come to talk about their lives and experiences. | |
| *Encourage* students to ask questions of the guest and make comparisons with their own culture. | |
| *Ask* students to talk about what surprises them in the target culture and which culture, theirs or the target culture, they would prefer? | |
| *Encourage* use of technology (e.g., *YouTube*, *Twitter*, *CNN*, *Google Images*, *BBC*, or online newspapers), art (all kinds), dance (varied), and music (e.g., hip hop, rock, pop, indigenous, or orchestral music) to uncover differences in cultures, with a special emphasis on comparing the target culture and the students own culture. | |
| *Ask* students to note down three differences and three similarities to the way people behave, dress, eat, or talk to each other in the target culture compared to their own culture (suggested by Vee Harris). | |
| *Ask* students to identify ways in which the target literature they are reading now differs from literature in their own culture (suggested by Vee Harris). | |
| *Play* a *YouTube* video of a pet rabbit in class, and *ask* students to discuss attitudes about animals in the target culture. For instance, people in France might eat rabbits (suggested by Vee Harris). | |
| *Encourage* students to read used comic books, comic strips, and graphic novels, as well as condensed, illustrated classics in the L2 (*Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare's play, was recently read by Sheltered English students in Alabama by means of condensed books, as reported in one of our graduate classes). | |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Help* learners to pay close attention to menus, applications, and business forms, which are practical, useful, and rich with the target culture and the target language. | |
| *Facilitate* student-to-student pen pal systems to increase competence in the target culture and the target language. Though students can send letters in handwriting, most likely they will use email or Facebook.[3] We know instances in which Spanish language students have written native Spanish speakers, as well as situations in which students of English as a second language have written to native English speakers who happen to be studying Spanish. | |
| To make student-to-student exchanges more culturally specific, *guide* students in creating a "matchbox" in which they put ten tiny things that represent their culture. For instance, an English child might include a stamp of the queen's head, a tea-bag, a small photo of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle, a trinket of the Queen's Guard, and other things. *Help* students exchange their matchboxes with members of the target culture. *Facilitate* email discussions across the cultures (adapted from a suggestion from Vee Harris). | |
| *Foster* tandem learning outside of the target language as a way to improve speaking and listening while enhancing cultural knowledge. A student whose native language is X and who is studying language Y meets on Skype (or some other way) with a student whose native language is Y and who wants to learn language X. They teach their native languages to each other while sharing personal and cultural experiences. | |
| *Use* local, regional, national, and international maps as a source of culture-based discussions in the target language. Map activities (how to get from one place to the other and what will be found there) build reading, writing, speaking, and listening, especially if vocabulary supports are provided. | |
| *Encourage* students to journal in the target language about cultural events. | |
| *Expand* students' competence in the target culture and the target language and their peace communication competence by using peace activities. There are so many that we simply refer you to Oxford (2013b, 2014, 2017a). | |

*Note.* Certain activities as noted were suggested by V. Harris (personal communication, 6 June 2017), while others came from both of this chapter's authors

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[3] Facebook has problems for pen-pal writing: shortness of messages and lack of privacy. However, it might be a start.