

## From Being Aware of other Cultures to Feeling Empathy for them

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### Abstract:

This article focuses on increasing Chinese students' ability for cultural empathy through the incorporation of culture instruction into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. The exploration of the significance of intercultural empathy and its fundamental notions is the first topic covered in this article. Additionally, the challenges that Chinese students have when strived to cultivate cultural empathy are studied as part of this study. In the end, it makes an attempt to provide some direction and some strategies.

### Keywords

Communicating across cultures, having empathy, problems, and ideas

## Introduction

Grammatical competence, communicative competence, language proficiency, and attitudes toward one's own culture or another culture are some of the components of learning English as a foreign language (EFL). In spite of this, there are a number of deeply ingrained myths about the nature of language teaching and learning that have survived throughout the course of time. These preconceived notions have an effect on both the content and the practice of the curriculum, which has the effect of gradually and quietly undermining cultural education.

Misconceptions that have been around for a long time concerning the nature of language acquisition and instruction have for a long time dominated the field of instruction of foreign languages. The idea that learning a language is largely a matter of decoding words is one of these common misunderstandings. This idea has resulted in the development of a great deal of different approaches to the instruction of foreign languages. The vast majority of Chinese teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) have, over the course of time, come to the realization that teaching other languages also involves teaching

foreign cultures, and that raising students' cultural awareness is an essential first step in building their ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries. In addition, culture is now taught either overtly or covertly in schools that focus on a different language. On the other hand, it is not quite obvious what is meant by the term "cultural awareness" and how it connects to the process of teaching and learning a language.

An examination of the differences between intercultural empathy and awareness

Sensitivity to other cultures can be seen as the bedrock upon which effective communication is built. It involves being aware of one's own culture in addition to being familiar with the culture of another group. To put it another way, it is the capability to take a step back and recognize not just the norms, beliefs, and ways of thinking of our own culture, but also those of other civilizations. When engaging in conversation with people whose cultural origins are distinct from your own, it is essential to demonstrate an understanding of other cultures. Various people have various ways of perceiving, interpreting, and evaluating things; as a

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result, what is accepted in one culture may be wrong in another one. As a direct consequence of this, communication breakdowns occur whenever individuals communicate ideas. Because he is Chinese, the first thing that comes to his mind when he thinks of an American is probably someone who works constantly, dresses casually, eats fast food, drinks Coca-Cola, and does business over lunch. This demonstrates that people's understandings of specific activities, such as lunch and dinner, can differ significantly from one culture to another depending on factors such as language and history. In China, where personal connections are highly prized, meals like lunch and dinner, as well as rituals like drinking tea, hold important social meaning. People congregate in these places to socialize, unwind, and, most importantly, form more personal connections with one another.

The most typical reason for our mistaken projection of our own behavioral expectations onto other people is because we misread what they are saying or doing.

Because we do not have sufficient awareness of other cultures, we frequently misread the spoken words

and nonverbal clues of the people with whom we engage in conversation.

However, simply being aware of one's own cultural awareness is not adequate on its own. To effectively improve their communication abilities, language learners in cross-cultural situations, and notably Chinese FL learners with an eastern cultural heritage, should make every effort to develop ideas and principles of empathy. This is especially important for Chinese FL learners with an eastern cultural background.

"Putting oneself in another's shoes" or "understanding others by entering their world" are both examples of what is meant by the phrase "empathy," which comes from the Greek word "empathia." Intercultural empathy is our word for the empathy that is involved in learning a foreign language and communicating across cultures; it refers to the ability to place oneself in the shoes of the target language learner and effectively transmit one's understanding of that culture. This empathy is developed through the process of learning a foreign language and talking across cultures.

Cross-cultural effects aren't usually thought about in modern empathy

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activities because traditional Chinese beliefs have a big effect on how people think about empathy in China. Because of this, intercultural empathy has been suggested as a subject for study. As Ibrahim (1991) says, "communicating empathy in a culturally consistent and meaningful manner" is very important when you are dealing with a group of people from different cultures.

How important it is to be sensitive to other cultures

Being sensitive to other cultures is a skill that comes in very handy in many situations.

It is the most important thing that must be present for cross-cultural conversation to work. Empathy not only lets us feel what someone else is feeling, but it also makes us think about those feelings and compare them to our own. Understanding what the other person is thinking and doing is the key to good conversation.

When a communicator gives up their own cultural frame of reference and puts themselves into another culture while keeping their own view of the situation, something active will happen. People from China think that British drivers are on the "wrong" side of the

road. "Left" is the right word, not "wrong."

If someone can't give an objective reason for action, they probably won't be able to understand it. It's important to note, though, that cultural empathy does not mean agreeing with, caring about, or being connected to a certain society.

"Seeing the world through someone else's eyes, hearing what they might hear, and feeling and experiencing what they are feeling" is what empathy means. "Mixing your own thoughts and actions with those of the client" (Ivey, Ivey, & Simek-Morgan, 1997) is not the same thing. Instead, it means having a good understanding of the beliefs and values of a society. This means that people who are culturally sensitive keep their own cultural identity while also being aware of and respecting the cultural beliefs and values of others. In this way, you can feel empathy for someone even if you don't share their opinions or points of view or come from the same culture as them.

Secondly, intercultural empathy is needed to communicate and build ties with people from other cultures. People who communicate across cultures often have different levels of empathy. By using their own and other people's

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cultural knowledge and consciously putting themselves in a different culture, people can learn to understand and be understood by others from different cultures. People may want to learn about the lives of people from different backgrounds in order to understand and care about those who are different from them.

Intercultural empathy is a sign of how competent someone is because it shows that they understand how people in the target culture feel so that they can better deal with the psychological hurdles that the target culture creates.

#### 4. Problems with understanding other cultures

As was already said, intercultural empathy means knowing and accepting the differences that come up in the target culture, rather than rejecting your own culture (though there are some things that all cultures have in common). Based on this knowledge, we can say that the following main things are mainly responsible for the growth of intercultural empathy:

1) Students don't know much about the target culture and don't interact with people from that culture; 2) They focus on cultural similarities and ignore cultural differences; 3) They have

different ways of thinking that hurt their ability to learn the target language; and 4) They use cultural practices in the target culture without thinking about it properly.

In particular, the following things can make it harder to understand other cultures when learning a second language.

#### 4.1 Out of Balance

Miscommunication and interacting with people from other cultures can lead to the formation of stereotypes. People's "naive" views of different groups are affected by their cognitive models and personal values. Some positive stereotypes, like "intelligent" and "ambitious," and some negative stereotypes, like "retarded" and "lazy," help people sort through a lot of information by using distinguishing traits. Stereotypes should never be used to describe a person's behavior; they should only be used to describe the behavior norm for the whole group. However, this "first best guess" is often and wrongly used to analyze certain ethnic and cultural minorities (Adler, 1986). A common misunderstanding in American society is that Chinese people are naturally good at math and science.

## Conclusion

To sum up, being able to relate to people from other countries is important for dealing with cross-cultural issues in a good, useful, and satisfying way. It seems likely from what we've already talked about that good communication relies on many interconnected factors and can go wrong because of bias, preconceptions, and a lack of cultural knowledge. Having empathy can help you communicate better, and you can get better at having empathy across borders by always trying to put yourself in someone else's shoes. In this case, the following suggestions might be helpful: Always keep the lines of dialogue open. Think of a mistake as both a problem that needs to be fixed and a chance to talk to each other better.

2) Know that the way people from different cultures talk to each other includes differences in the words they use, the way they accent their voices, and the way they move their bodies. Accept and value one's own culture while also being open to learning about and using the customs and traits of other cultures.

3) Keep an open mind, be ready to try new things and make mistakes, and be flexible in how you talk to people.

4) If you want to understand someone else's culture, you should first look at and learn about your own. To have cultural empathy is to not judge others and know that people from different cultures can still communicate.

5) Show that you are very interested in other people's traditions and cultures. A tendency to change how you act and talk to fit in with the culture norms of another group. Your ability to communicate clearly is directly related to how culturally aware you are. International empathy also requires being open, caring, and respecting each other's human worth, even when there are differences in culture.

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