

# The cultural impact of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

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Studij: Preddiplomski studij Engleskog jezika i književnosti i pedagogije

Tatjana Marinović

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(TEFL)**

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Mentor: prof. dr. sc. Mario Brdar

Osijek, 2018.

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## **The Cultural Impact of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)**

### **Summary:**

Teaching English as a foreign language has quite a cultural impact in most of the countries where it is being taught. To understand the concept of cultural impact, one first needs to become aware of the cultural conceptualisations that are the basis for the connection between native language and culture. The spread of English as the main foreign language in the world cannot be controlled so teachers and learners need to learn how to live with English language as the part of their cultural identity without affecting their native language and culture in a destructive way. Many countries where English is taught as the second language, see the knowledge of English as a skeleton key on the way of their success in every aspect. Teachers mostly in Asia do not have the right competence to teach their students English in the right way so parents of the children end up spending most of their money to private lessons of English in order to enable their children to be proficient in English which is considered the only way to success. Many teachers in Australia are not familiar with the cultural conceptualisations of the Aboriginal children they teach so conflicts during English lessons are common, and that needs to be improved by developing cultural awareness. Cultural awareness includes avoiding stereotypes, prejudices and solving intercultural conflicts in order to improve communication.

**Key words:** culture, language, English, teaching, competence

## **INTRODUCTION:**

English as the main foreign language taught all around the world has quite an impact on the culture and everyday life in general in the countries where it is being taught. Many teachers and professors consider British English and American English as the only correct forms in the use of English language. In this paper, we will put an emphasis on cultural awareness that has to be developed so teachers, professors and learners of English of all age can respect their own culture and language without any greater negative impact of a foreign language and culture they are learning. Some of the chapters in this paper will include cultural conceptualisations which are the basis for connection between culture and language since they consist of cultural schemas and cultural categories which are different in all cultural groups. There are also several chapters that discuss the impact of English as a foreign language on educational systems and cultures of the countries all around the globe. We will present some examples of the countries where alongside English, other languages are also native with respect to the history of the country (New Zealand), but also examples of some countries where English as a foreign language has a greater importance than it should, and it is considered as an only means through which individuals can succeed in every aspect of their lives (Taiwan). Also, we will discuss the importance of teachers' competence to teach English as a foreign language because many countries do not have competent teachers of English and that is why their students do not have a high level in English language. The importance of taking into consideration learners' cultural backgrounds while teaching English as a foreign language is essential.



## **MAIN PART:**

### **CULTURAL LINGUISTICS**

#### **Language and culture**

Connection between language and culture is quite a strong one ever since, and every language represents its own culture:

“Language is a guide to social reality...it powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes... The ‘real world’ is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The world in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached” (Sapir 1949: 68-69) quoted in Kramsch (2014: 32).

During teaching and learning a second language, both teachers and students encounter a new foreign culture, so Kramsch (2014) emphasises that the important question arises such as can learners of second language adjust themselves to the culture of the native speakers of the language they are learning. Also, Kramsch (2014) emphasises that culture acquisition is a desirable goal of second language learning as long as that culture acquisition means to occasionally see the world through the eyes of the native speaker or to sometimes act in ways that conform to the expectations of the native speaker. While learning a second language, students need to learn the language in their own way that will be different from the way of native speakers respecting their own cultures by doing that. According to Kramsch (2014) besides performing a specific culture by its members in the form of dictionaries, encyclopedias, examinations, instruction manuals, culture is also performed, especially today, by social networking which is constantly changing the cultures that people live by and the spread of especially English language which has a huge role in all of this aspects of performing ones culture.

### **Cultural conceptualisations and language**

The system of language comprises many categories, schemas, conceptual metaphors and properties all of which reflect different cultural cognitions of the native speaker of certain language over the history of its existence (Sharifian 2011). Sharifian (2011) explains that cultural conceptualisations (cultural schemas and cultural categories) are developed through a number of interactions between the members of the same cultural group and enable them to think as one mind in a more or less similar way because they are familiar with the properties of the same culture. What is also important for learning a second language is cultural cognition. Sharifian (2011) explains that cultural cognition is usually the basis for many of our actions and behaviours because our linguistic performance derives from our cultural cognition and also because we act upon our assumptions that other people's behaviours we interact with, draw on the same cultural cognition which is not always the case so we need to be careful if we do not want to create a cultural conflict. As Sharifian (2011) puts it, most of the conflicts and miscommunication happen because all of the interlocutors assume that they are all drawing on the same cultural models and that is why students in schools need to develop intercultural competence in order to be able to understand different cultures in comparisons to their own. Cultural conceptualisations also provide a basis for negotiating intercultural meanings which are associated with the individual's living in a particular cultural environment and developed from interactions with speakers from other cultures (Sharifian 2011).

### **Foreign language and culture in cross-cultural perspectives**

“Teaching is interaction, and classroom learning occurs in and through interaction” (Edmondson in de Bot, Ginsberg and Kramsch 1991: 182). Hansen and Stansfield suggested that (as cited in de Bot et al. 1991: 183) while learning a second language it is of great importance to have a strong interest in other people and attentiveness in social cues in the task of communication which possibly leads to effective communicative skill. Edmondson (in de Bot et al. 1991) emphasises

that learning in classrooms is, above all, a social activity, and learning style is not specifically determined by cognitive skills since interest and attentiveness of students are strongly affected by attitudes and motivation. It is necessary both for learning theory and teaching practice to be able to recognize which internal factors of an individual are subject to change, and which are perhaps not (Edmondson 1991). Of course, it is also necessary to take into account behaviours of native speakers in order to understand classroom procedures and learning process (Edmondson 1991).

### **Aboriginal children in educational systems in Australia**

Educational systems in Australia largely promote the importance of Standard Australian English as the key to ‘participation and success in wider society’ among Aboriginal students (Malcolm 2017). Many schools consider the ‘home’ dialect of many Aboriginal students a deficient variety of English and that needs to be eliminated from educational systems in Australia (Malcolm 2017). Very often it happens that non-Aboriginal teachers who are unaware of discrepancy of cultural conceptualisations place the same expectations in learning English on Aboriginal students as are placed on those students who speak Australian English as their first dialect (Malcolm 2017). For example, for Aboriginal students, the word ‘family’ is associated with their extended family and the responsibilities towards them unlike for Anglo-Australian students where the word ‘family’ represents a ‘nuclear family’ maybe including some pets (Malcolm in Sharifian 2017). Everything from learning materials to tests they are supposed to take at schools, reflects that Aboriginal students are expected to perfectly understand the Standard Australian English which is being spoken by both their teachers and classmates (Malcolm 2017). If non-Aboriginal educators are unaware of the Aboriginal cultural conceptualisations, they can easily misinterpret non-Aboriginal Children (Malcolm 2017). “The educational system needs to be aware of the cultural conceptualisations that are currently operative in the minds and speech of all students to be able to design and deliver appropriate teaching” (Malcolm 2017: 74)

## **LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING**

According to Sharifian (2014) the National Standards promoted by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) presented a modernist view by proposing five goals of foreign language learning in the USA. First of those goals is communication that considers providing and obtaining information, expressing feelings and also exchanging opinions in languages beside English. After that, there are cultures that serve for gaining knowledge and understanding relationships between different cultures that are studied. Later, we have connections where students acquire information through foreign languages. Also there are comparisons which provide insight into different culture through language that is being studied by comparing it to its own. Last but not least, we have communities where students are encouraged to participate in multilingual communities all around the world, but also at home (Sharifian 2014). Developing meta-cultural competence in teaching English as a foreign language, but also as an international language, implies a fundamental awareness, and understanding as well, that English is no longer a language that belongs only to its native speakers, but also a language that can be and is used by all bilingual and multilingual speakers across the world (Xu 2017). According to Berns (1995), English should not be a means of imitating British or American English, but a medium for expressing culturally different and unique ideas, emotions and identities of native and non-native speakers of it in the world. English in Europe should be taught as an expression of European culture, not American culture, and also as a means of expressing European identity (Berns 1995). “The technical neatness of the native-non-native speaker distinction is strengthened by its relationship to national languages, which in turn enables English language educators to feel certain about who teachers and students are in terms of which countries they come from” (Holliday 1995: 148).

## CULTURAL LINGUISTICS AND WORLD ENGLISHES

Since languages in Europe should express European identity, any form of linguistic dominance through other languages, especially English in the present state, or negligence of one's own language, is considered as an obstruction of the path that leads to integration (Byram and Grundy 2003). In many world Englishes we can see the presence of 'hybridisation' which is according to Kachru (1983), quoted in Sharifian (2014: 461), a process of creating new and creative words, phrases and expressions. As an example Sharifian (2014) mentions Hindi-English hybrids such as *lathi charge* (a baton charge by police) and *tiffin carrier* (a receptacle for carrying cooked food). Also, suffixes from local languages can be attached to English words to create some new hybrids, such as *police-wala* (Sharifian 2014). A Chinese may consider an American rude and abrupt if he makes some form of request too early, and an American may consider a Chinese as being unsure of his or her ground if he or she introduces a request with many reasons and justifications for it (Sharifian 2014). Exactly because of this cross-cultural misunderstandings, all learners and teachers of English need to become familiar with many different varieties of English and the conduit English provides for many different cultures (Sharifian 2014). The word *outdooring* in Ghanaian English is the perfect example of a cultural schema associated with an English word from an African variety where in Ghanaian English refers to a child naming ceremony (Sharifian 2015). Another example from Ghanaian English is the word *divine* which represents a cultural schema of Ghana that involves contact with unseen world to discover reason behind a misfortune, evil and so on (Sharifian 2015). In these cases, especially with the word *divine* in Ghanaian English, English words are associated with new cultural schemas, not just new meanings, and because of that those kinds of words are impossible to explain or describe in just a sentence or even two sentences (Sharifian 2015). As we already mentioned, miscommunication between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal teachers clearly disadvantages the situation of Aboriginal students in educational systems in Australia where Aboriginal English is seen as incorrect form of

the language and Aboriginal students are expected to fully understand Anglo-Australian English not minding their own cultural schemas and exactly those kinds of situations lead to drop out of many Aboriginal students from school (Sharifian 2015) and that should never be the reason for leaving school.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACROSS THE WORLD**

### **Context of New Zealand (theories of language contact and theory of cultural conceptualisations)**

We chose the case of New Zealand because among many others, New Zealand was also one of the British colonies, so we wanted to portray the impact English had on this country since it became its official language, but its inhabitants did not allow their roots to become forgotten, so they included Maori as their official language as well.

According to Degani (2017) there is a presence in New Zealand of a young generation that is bilingual in Maori and English, so they are bicultural as well. Since Maori was made the official language of New Zealand in 1987, Maori immersion schools, Maori institutions of higher education and Maori study programs at the universities of New Zealand have been established to promote Maori language through all aspects of education, and it is also being promoted through media by Maori TV channels and radio stations (Degani 2017).

“If one considers the fact that Maori worldview and traditional Maori values are remarkably different from Pakeha<sup>1</sup> culture, the potential contribution of people who have grown up bilingual and bicultural to the development of a distinctive way of using English should not be underestimated (Degani 2017: 667)”.

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<sup>1</sup>New Zealand European culture brought to New Zealand by English settlers.

This is the case of a positive cultural impact since Maori was the first language spoken in New Zealand. English became one of the official languages because New Zealand was colonised by Great Britain, so English is actually a foreign language that has been adopted as an official one alongside Maori. New Zealanders did not allow for Maori to be forgotten since it is a big part of their history and culture so they incorporated it in educational systems alongside English language.

### **The impact of English on educational policies and culture in Asia**

The case of countries in Asia, especially the powerful ones such as China and Japan, were included in this paper because they are the countries with many inhabitants and a really good educational system. Since these nations want to achieve the best they can in everything, they also want their children to be as proficient in English as possible so they can compete with American children, and they also think that learning English will definitely improve their chances in going to school and acquiring a job in the USA. It is also clearly shown how teachers pay attention to the native culture of their students, which is really important through the process of education, allowing students to learn English in a more proficient way.

Professionals of teaching English to students of other languages need to understand the impact English has as the number one foreign language taught in educational systems around the globe (Nunan 2003). When children reach the age of three, learning English becomes compulsory for them and they generally have to attend two or three forty-minute lessons per week (Nunan 2003). The impact of English is visible in many aspects of Chinese education from entry requirements to universities, curricula to published materials (Nunan 2003). In September of 2001, the Ministry of Education instructed all colleges and universities in China to use English as the main language while teaching courses such as information technology, foreign trade, finance, law, etc. (Nunan 2003). According to Seppala (2011) requirements for English proficiency in China are quite fixed because students in order to get the job they desire, need to pass the minimum of CET 4 (College

English Test), ideally CET 6, which equals with almost perfect proficiency in English and that is quite a lot to ask from students to whom English is a second, and not a native language. One of the main problems in China concerning learning and teaching English as a foreign language are the attitudes of many English teachers for whom only the standard English (spoken in countries where it is a native language) exists. Other problems on educational level include mechanical learning, learning for grades and without understanding by Chinese students and the emphasis on passing the CETs (Seppala 2011). In Korea, as well as in China, children start learning English at the age of nine and by the time they enter high school they receive four hours of English lessons per week (Nunan 2003). English teachers lacking proficiency in English is considered a main problem in Korea, and in order to improve on that, huge amounts of money are spent on teaching, but also on learning English (Nunan 2003). Many Korean families spend one third of their income on child's activities in free time, which include English private lessons for improving their proficiency in English (Nunan 2003). Some informants are concerned that introducing English as a foreign language before children acquire literacy in their native language, Korean, might have a negative impact on their proficiency in their native language (Nunan 2003). Nunan (2003) considers that investment in recruiting numbers of native-English-speaking teachers through different kinds of programs should be invested in programs which would upgrade the proficiency and professional language skills of local teachers and professors.

### **Teaching English language inferential schemas used in archeology to Japanese university students**

The issue of teaching archeology in English is connected with the cultural framework of Japanese college students who have grown up in a Japanese educational and cultural surroundings, which of course fosters specific tendencies for illustrating prehistory in the context of education (Occhi 2007). In one of the lessons, in order for students to better understand Neanderthal lifestyles in the context of English language, teacher first presented a video which included a discussion of



Neanderthal lifestyles using a few modal + have + past participle forms after which they were required to solve some worksheets, to discuss about the video and to present their ideas about the main topic of the class through the process of brainstorming (Occhi 2007). Those kinds of tasks improved students' grasp of that specific grammatical form and sensitized them for an easier use of that form in different contexts (Occhi 2007). Adjusting the tasks in English classes for students from different cultural backgrounds allows the students to better understand and use vocabulary and grammatical forms they are required to know in order to be able to communicate freely in English language. According to Hinkel (1995), mentioned in Sharifian and Palmer (2007: 28), Japanese students use English modals of obligation which clearly reflect their cultural models rather than the modals that are being used by English native speakers.

### **The case of English textbooks in Vietnam**

Since Vietnam and the UK have a similar tradition of tea drinking, we wanted to show how those traditions were portrayed in English textbooks since those are two different cultures. It is really important for children to know the difference between connotations with tea drinking in the UK and Vietnam so they are able to respect both cultures.

According to Ngoc Dinh (2017), which is a study on the tradition of tea drinking and connotations that go with it in Vietnam and in the UK in two English textbooks used in Vietnam, the descriptions of those traditions, differences and similarities between them in real life are represented in the same way in both textbooks (*English 10* and *New Headway*) that were being used for the research. Both textbooks contain texts about the cultural schemas and the traditions of tea drinking people in Vietnam and in the UK encounter in their everyday lives. The presence of textbooks like the ones earlier mentioned can minimise different stereotypes and raise the awareness of cultural conceptualisations of foreign language learners (Ngoc Dinh 2017). Critical exploration of the cultural conceptualisations of a specific foreign language through textbooks, i.e. through different

texts and visuals, encourages language learners to make comparisons between cultural conceptualisations of their native language and the foreign language they are learning, and by doing that, they are learning to appreciate differences (Ngoc Dinh 2017).

### **The case of Persian-speaking learners of English**

Since learning English for Persian-speaking learners requires a lot of effort in getting acquainted with a new, quite different culture, we wanted to show how English is different from Persian language in this respect. Persian-speaking learners adjust English to themselves so they can learn similarities and differences between these two languages in an easier way.

Unlike for an Aboriginal Australian who learns English as a foreign, or a second language, for a West European learning English as a foreign language, it requires little procurement of new and unknown cultural conceptualisations (Sharifian 2007). In Persian language there is a word *tarof*, which stands for “compliment(s), ceremony, courtesy, and flattery” (Aryanpour and Aryanpour 1984: 226, quoted in Sharifian and Palmer (2007: 38)) and encourages Persian people to abstain from direct requests and asking for favours from other people (Sharifian 2007). According to Koutlaki (2002), quoted in Sharifian and Palmer (2007: 39), the word *tarof* expresses a really complex concept and it carries many different meanings for the native speakers of Persian so it is quite difficult to describe that word in a sentence or two because it does not have an English translation. Learning English as a foreign language for a Persian speaking person often means learning new cultural schemas that are associated with the expression of different emotions through different English words because they may not express the Persian emotion to the fullest (Sharifian 2007). When it comes to metaphors in Anglo varieties of English, the inner organ heart represents the center of human’s emotions (e.g. *she broke my heart*), while in Persian there is a word *del* which actually stands for ‘heart-stomach’ as the center of the emotions, courage and reason, so these words represent both similarities and differences of Persian English and Anglo

varieties of English influenced by the cultural conceptualisations (Sharifian 2007). In consequence of this, it might be easier for teachers of English in, for example Iran, to draw some parallels between these two languages and allow for their students to better understand the metaphor.

### **English as a foreign language in Taiwan**

The case of learning and teaching English in Taiwan is a rather an extreme one. Alongside being taught as a mandatory subject in primary schools and high schools, English in Taiwan is used as a criterion for job applications and purposes of school admission (Kung 2017). In 2002 the Parliament suggested English should be one of the official languages in Taiwan, which would strengthen the status of Taiwan as a nation on a global scale (Liu 2005 mentioned in Kung 2017). According to Shin and Lee (1996) mentioned in Kung (2017), in the year of 2003, Taiwan's Ministry of Education looked for native English-speaking teachers in primary schools and high schools in order to ease the learning of English, which would enable students to be more competent in communicating in English. Bilingual signs (Chinese to English) were set up in streets, schools and government buildings so they would welcome a greater number of foreigners (Kung 2017). In Taiwan, an extreme trend of learning English has no end in sight and the number of people speaking only English is increasing (Kung 2017). According to Cheng (1996) mentioned in Kung (2017), at the cultural level, learning English in Taiwan is viewed as a means to upgrade the social status and economic mobility what would offer individuals to achieve more material and financial success. At the educational level, according to Ross (1993) mentioned in Kung (2017), learning English as a foreign language has a role of facilitating national modernization and affluence. Since English is shown as the main goal for achieving success in educational and professional aspect, Chinese students make great efforts to pass standardized national examinations so they are able to go study in North America (Kung 2017). It is of great importance for teachers and professors of English in Taiwan to be aware that if they want to achieve the desired learning outcome, they need to display a sense of cultural understanding that will create a more positive atmosphere among

teachers/professors and students in classes of learning a foreign language (Kung 2017). In order to make teaching and learning of English more effective, language teachers should take into consideration the needs from cultural roots of Chinese learners (Kung 2017).

The case of learning English as a foreign language in Taiwan is included in this paper because the proficiency in English that is expected from students in Taiwan is a bit too much. Teachers want their students to pass hard national exams that are constructed in almost the same way as the ones in the USA so they are able to go outside Taiwan and study in the USA. The mistakes teachers are making in teaching their students a foreign language are that they keep forgetting their students' roots, and their native culture which results in both teaching and learning English being less than effective, and this needs to change if they want a better educational system.

### **English in language education in Germany**

After Asia, we are moving to another continent, Europe. Among European countries, we chose Germany because this country really respects its own native language and wants children to be really proficient in it before learning any other foreign language. What we thought is really important is teaching German children about cultural awareness, how they should behave in situations involving children from other countries and cultures, and encouraging students to speak English in their own accents, not in American, British, or Australian accent.

The education of English teachers in Germany continues very much in the national tradition (Byram and Grundy 2003). The core subjects of that kind of education are English or American studies with the occasional post-colonial and immigrant writing in addition (Byram and Grundy 2003). The aim of the education of English teachers in Germany is near-nativeness, where the process of learning English relies on the idea that English teaching and learning should prepare for communication with native speakers of standard English (Byram and Grundy 2003). Teaching of

English remains locked into a culture-specific tradition, and because of that English in German education is torn between the local and the global aspect, and between the territorial and non-territorial aspect as well (Byram and Grundy 2003). German teachers in Gymnasiums (high schools where standard English is being taught, which are being attended by only few immigrant students and where teachers have college degrees) believe that it is important to teach students what is regarded as a cultural awareness, because language is always interlinked with culture (Byram and Grundy 2003). Those teachers also think that students should not limit themselves to learning only English spoken in Great Britain and Australia, and that students expect from them a cultural knowledge about the countries which native language they are learning and professors need to be able to offer them that kind of knowledge (Byram and Grundy 2003).

“In Crystal’s words: the chief task facing English language teaching is how to devise pedagogical policies and practices in which the need to maintain an international standard of intelligibility, in both speech and writing, can be made to comfortably exist alongside the need to recognise the importance of international diversity, as a reflection of identity, chiefly in speech and eventually perhaps also in writing” (Crystal 1990:20) quoted in Byram and Grundy (2003: 69).

### **The impact of English in Spain**

We chose the case of Spain because English is the most studied foreign language in this country. We wanted to emphasize that in Spain teachers are also making some mistakes while teaching their children a foreign language. They want their children to be as proficient in English as native speakers are, and they want them to speak in American or British accent. If teachers taught their children a foreign language while having in mind that English is their second language and that they come from a different culture, children's proficiency in English could really improve.

English is an obligation for the youngest generations, and it is definitely the most studied language in Spain (Lujan-Garcia 2012). Young children start studying English when they are three years old in an optional way, and in a compulsory way when they turn six years when they attend two

hours of English classes per week (Lujan-Garcia 2012). The implementation of the Bologna process in Spain has brought many different changes for higher education, including a more prominent role of English as a foreign language, what caused many controversial reactions among teachers and students at the universities across the country (Lujan-Garcia 2012).

“ (...) English is used as the means of instruction in certain subjects. There are a number of credits which are related to English construction and which have to be fulfilled by all the students, no matter whether they are attending a humanistic or a scientific degree. In short, English has gained a more prominent role throughout Higher education in Spain” (Lujan-Garcia 2012: 6).

Spanish speakers could be much more proficient in English language if they adjust English to themselves and to their culture. They can do that by avoiding pressuring themselves to be as proficient in English as native speakers are. (Lujan-Garcia 2012). The acquisition of knowledge of English in Spain should be a local issue, and not a global issue, so the materials being used by English teachers in Spain (textbooks, recordings) should consider specific requirements of Spanish learners since they are created to adjust foreign contexts to address students from all over the world (Lujan-Garcia 2012). Since the goal of teaching English as a foreign language is to enable them to communicate with their own English accent rather than American or British accents that are not natural to them, teachers of English should have a better deliberation of non-native accents (Lujan-Garcia 2012).

### **Foreign language teachers and the intercultural dimensions in primary education in Croatia**

Last, but not least, there is a case of our country, Croatia. In addition to being our own country, we also chose it to show what teachers of English language consider as the most important thing while teaching English as a foreign language. A bit disappointing was to discover that teachers consider less important the ability of their students to identify cultural stereotypes and the ability to solve intercultural conflicts, which are elsewhere considered as really important factors in

developing intercultural competence. It is also the last case study dealing with intercultural competence before we move on to cultural awareness to which intercultural competence is strongly connected.

According to Breka and Petravić (2015), teachers of foreign languages need to develop intercultural competence. According to Sercu (2005), mentioned in Breka and Petravić (2015), the framework of intercultural components consists of cognitive, affective and pragmatic dimensions (Breka and Petravić 2015). The cognitive dimension includes knowledge of self and others, and the knowledge of both individual and social interaction. It also includes knowledge of the culture in general and at a specific level that allows teachers to clearly see how culture strongly affects language and communication. The affective dimension consists of attitudes with an emphasis on valuing oneself and others, and critical cultural awareness, which allows teachers and professors to critically evaluate their own and foreign cultures. The last of the three, the pragmatic dimension, represents skills of interpreting and relating which refer to interpreting documents from a foreign culture and comparing them to native culture, and also skills of discovery and interacting for which the basis is competence in intercultural communication and interaction (Byram 1997 quoted in Breka and Petravić 2015).

"They<sup>2</sup> should also be able to select and apply the appropriate strategies, techniques and activities aimed at the development and (self) evaluation of the cognitive, affective and pragmatic dimensions of learner IC<sup>3</sup>, with a specific emphasis placed on the integration of linguistic and intercultural learning (Breka and Petravić 2015: 29)".

According to a research in which participants were 105 teachers from primary schools in Croatia who have been working as teachers of English for five to twenty years, in teaching English as a foreign language, the highest level of importance was attached to developing respect, empathy and

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<sup>2</sup>Teachers and professors of foreign languages.

<sup>3</sup>Intercultural competence.

tolerance for foreign cultures (Breka and Petravić 2015). Also, they find the ability of learners to compare foreign cultures with the native one, rather important (Breka and Petravić 2015). Teachers consider less important the ability of learners to handle and solve intercultural conflicts, identifying cultural stereotypes and prejudices, and the need of learners to become aware of their native culture and the will to learn more about it, all of which are considered crucial components of developing an intercultural competence (Breka and Petravić 2015).

## **CULTURAL AWARENESS**

According to Bakaršić (2001), cross-cultural approach is essential in every aspect of communication in foreign language teaching. Learners of a foreign language should avoid viewing other cultures through the prism of their native culture (Goddard, Wierzbicka 1997, quoted in Fenner et al. 2001: 49). According to Kramsch (1993), mentioned in Fenner et al. (2001: 49), the main task of teachers of foreign languages is to create a positive atmosphere in classrooms which would represent a third place, place between native and foreign culture, the center of uncritical acceptance of other cultures.

"The most important long-term benefits of culture teaching may be to provide learners with the awareness and the tools that would allow them an opportunity to achieve their academic, professional, social, and personal goals and become successful in their daily functioning in L2<sup>4</sup> (or EFL<sup>5</sup>). (Hinkel in 2013: 8)"

Lujan-Garcia (2012) emphasises the importance of natural use and function of English which is not forced by native models, norms, and rules. Natural use of English allows mutual understanding and freer communication between non-native speakers across the world which respect and take into consideration local features of a language including phonological and grammatical levels

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<sup>4</sup>Second language.

<sup>5</sup>English as a Foreign Language.



(Lujan-Garcia 2012). According to Sharifian (2014), foreign language learners need to learn how to operate between languages, i.e. how to advance their cultural and intercultural knowledge across different multilingual contexts. “Being a non-native speaker of a language doesn’t prevent someone from claiming that language as a part of their cultural heritage identity” (Holliday 2009: 152) as long as foreign language and culture do not suppress the vast importance of native culture and language.

## **CONCLUSION:**

English as the main foreign language has a huge cultural impact all around the world, but only to the allowed extent. If teachers of English take into consideration cultural backgrounds and cultural knowledge of their learners, English can be seen, as is supposed to be seen as such, as a language that serves them for free communication with native speakers and other non-native speakers of English. British English or American English should not be forced as the only correct form of the use of English by non-native speakers because accents have an important role of presenting one’s cultural background, so each non-native speaker should be allowed to express himself/herself in her/his own way of speaking English affected by his/her culture and his/her exposure to English. Instead of spending money to the recruitment of native-English-speaking teachers into their countries (cases of Japan and Hong Kong), the country should invest in educating their teachers in the right way so they are competent enough to transfer the knowledge of English with respect to

their native culture. Learning a foreign language does not only mean learning grammar and vocabulary of a language, but it also, from a pedagogical point of view, means learning how to behave in intercultural conflicts and how to solve them, how to act without prejudices and stereotypes towards people from other cultures, and how to use the foreign language learned mainly as means of communication. The spread of English as the main foreign language being taught in the world cannot be avoided, so both teachers and learners of English as a foreign language need to adjust to it in the best possible way which includes the respect of their own culture with accepting language as a part of their cultural identity.

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