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CONCEPTUALIZATIONS TOWARDS INTEGRATING CULTURE WITHIN LANGUAGE  
TEACHING: A CASE STUDY

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This research displays a concern about the integration of culture into language education, especially in a context wherein students are educated as they are pursuing a Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching. Such interest has been led by the concept of interculturality, a notion and process that has been uprising as a result of the spread of cross-cultural communication and that therefore, has influenced language education. When interculturality is placed in an educational context, it translates into intercultural competence, which, in this research, can be understood through the concepts of language, culture, and the relationship between these two notions.

In order to achieve this study's purposes, theoretical works and language teachers' conceptions are put in perspective. In the first place, what authors have stated as well as the alternatives they have given regarding the approach to culture within language education bearing in mind an intercultural stance are documented. Secondly, the conceptions that a group of language teachers from Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP) hold with respect to the teaching of culture in language education are surveyed. Last of all, this work grants an analysis that integrates the theory grounding the relevance of the cultural component within language teaching and the language teachers' conceptualizations of notions such as language, culture and how they are related, as well as the impact these have on their practice.

### **1.2 Justification**

Culture has been claimed to be essential when it comes to learning a language, not only as a notion but as a concept that needs to be practiced. Throughout this century, much language literature has highlighted and proven the role of the cultural component within language learning

and teaching. However, the little impact that this literature, and therefore, the dimension of culture, has had on the language teaching practice leads to wondering how language teachers conceptualize culture and its relationship to language in order to get insights into this matter. These are the concerns that have driven this research, exploring the ways in which culture is conceived and practically integrated into language education in the teaching context where this work's author carried out her Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching.

### **1.3 Previous Research**

Interculturality has been the focus of many different studies in Mexico; yet, only a few have aimed at how the intercultural competence is approached within language education. After thorough research, two works whose purposes were related to the teaching of culture were found. Both studies were carried out and published by Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and date back to 2003 and 2007. Recent studies that focus on intercultural competence do not inquire about the way it is actually promoted in the language teaching practice. Even though these works by UNAM shared general objectives, their methodological approach and conceptions were distinct.

Sercu and Ryan's (2003) work was the first one that focused on the teaching of the intercultural competence in our country. This study was part of a broader one that involved different countries, and its objective was to explore the conceptions teachers held of different aspects of the intercultural competence, their views with respect to their own teaching practice, and the extent to which intercultural competence was enhanced in the classroom. In order to address their objectives, the authors administered a questionnaire that included closed questions and some open-ended questions among 47 language teachers. Participants were teachers from two high school programs that belonged to UNAM.

This research showed two perspectives regarding the enhancement of intercultural competence; teachers' theoretical background and their actual practice. According to Sercu and Ryan (2003), there was discrepancy between the dimensions of intercultural competence that teachers indicated they are familiar with and the dimensions they encouraged in class. Additionally, results displayed that the focus of language teaching was mainly set on language learning rather than on a blending made up of language and culture learning. This matter was related to the conception of language proficiency that was held, which aimed at the development of linguistic competence. In the same way, the teaching of culture was bonded to dimensions of knowledge, such as information about lifestyle, values, traditions, and history, and some interaction experiences.

On the other hand, Mallén's (2007) work aimed to find out whether the dimensions of the intercultural competence were enhanced in the language class and if both teachers and students were aware of that. The conception of the intercultural competence and therefore its dimensions were based on those proposed by Byram (1997). Focus groups were carried out separately among a group of five teachers and a group of 12 students who were part of a program by UNAM in which students from different degrees take English classes. In this research, teaching of culture was mainly explored through inquiring about activities carried out in class rather than conceptions or key notions.

This research displayed a discrepancy between the two groups of participants, students and teachers, and between teachers' own conceptions. In the first place, teachers claimed and listed activities they carried out in class for enhancing intercultural competence; however, students seemed not to notice them though as they could not remember them. In fact, the latter stated that further than the linguistic competence was necessary for learning a language.

Secondly, teachers' conceptualizations mainly focused on the dimension of attitudes; yet, their teaching practice aimed at knowledge as well as little interaction.

These two works have set the basis for research on the intercultural competence related to language teaching practice in Mexico. Sercu and Ryan (2003) and Mallén (2007) shared general concerns; getting to know how culture has been approached within language teaching. In the same way, the focus for attaining this objective was placed on language teaching practice. Despite their specific objectives and methodology applied, their results were similar, as they both displayed issues that were going on regarding both language teaching practice and teachers' conceptions and perceptions. They showed that there is awareness when it comes to relating language and culture; yet, there is little if any practice for integrating them since the linguistic competence is receiving the most attention. In consequence, prior research on the approach of intercultural competence has displayed matters that are worth further studying.

#### **1.4 Problem Statement**

It has been observed that a great number of language learners struggle when communicating in the target language within real-life situations. After years of language learning, many students from the BUAP Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching still get in trouble when they experience authentic interaction in which they have to use the target language, either with native speakers or nonnative speakers of the language from other countries. Language learners' difficulties when dealing with real interaction can be related to the aim of language teaching, which has been focusing on the linguistic competence and slightly dismissing the cultural dimension. In order to understand such statement, it is necessary to take a glance at what distinct scholars have discussed about the aims leading the language teaching practice, the

alternatives that have been identified, as well as the proposals for exploring and comprehending this matter, which sets the basis for undertaking this research.

Despite the distinct factors that influence the language learners' performance in real situations, one of them has to do with language teaching practice. Baker (2015) and Oranje and Smith (2018) argued that one of the issues of language education is related to linguistic competence, which has been placed as the hub of language teaching and learning. Similarly, Beacco's (2000) research showed that other dimensions that should be included in language teaching, such as an approach to culture, are "subordinated to the teaching of language structures" (as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, p. 49, 2013). Hence, language structures as the cornerstone of language education may have some effect on students' performance in the real world.

Different language scholars have shed some light on the impact of focusing language education on grammar. Jackson (2014), Baker (2015), and Heinzmann et al. (2015), to name but a few, stated that language learning and therefore real-life interaction require more than the linguistic competence to be accomplished. Indeed, Jackson (2014) claimed that "knowing the grammar and vocabulary of another language does not ensure that people will be able to communicate successfully across cultures in that language" (p. 317). That is, the nature of communication requires language learners to manage way more than language structures in order to experience effective interaction.

The enhancement of intercultural competence turns out to be the alternative for language learners to succeed in cross cultural communication, that is, real-life interaction. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) stated that "the aim of intercultural language teaching and learning is not to displace language as the core focus of language education but to ensure that language is



integrated with culture in conceptualizing language learning” (p. 24). Firstly, this means that when integrating language and culture, an intercultural approach emerges. Secondly, such an approach does not intend to displace the role of language within language learning, but rather it encourages the acknowledgement of the relationship between languages and cultures. Put differently, the integration of culture in language teaching aims to help students attain better results when interacting as they apply the target language.

In consequence, some teaching perspectives have emerged in order to understand the ways in which language and culture can be integrated in language education. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) stated that language teachers may act in accordance with two different perspectives when they try to comprise culture within their language teaching practice; the cultural and the intercultural orientation (p.48). When abiding by the former, “culture is an object studied as an entity in its own right and the development of knowledge about culture focuses on the accumulation of knowledge about the entity identified as a culture” (Liddicoat, 2005, as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 48). In contrast, when following the latter, language learners are placed “as language users and social actors at the center of language learning, along with the languages and cultures they bring to that learning” (Kern & Liddicoat, 2008, as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 29). Put differently, within a cultural orientation, the conceptualization of culture remains as pure knowledge about a social group. On the other hand, the intercultural orientation entails a conception of language, culture, and the relationship between them, which encourages students to become active learners and language actors.

Yet, before confirming if there is any relationship between the integration of culture in language teaching and students’ performance in real-life interactions applying the target language, it is necessary to get to know the way culture is approached in the language classroom.

In consequence, this study aims to explore teachers' conceptualizations of notions related to language, culture, and their relationship in order to get some insights into the ways the cultural dimension is integrated as language is taught. That would be possible bearing in mind Liddicoat and Scarino's (2009) reasoning, which claims that language teachers' conceptions of language and culture help understand and survey how they are approaching culture within their teaching practice. In the same way, yielded results will be analyzed based on Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013) proposal for two teaching orientations when incorporating culture into language teaching (p. 48).

### **1.5 Research Questions**

This work aims to address the following questions:

1. What teaching perspective do teachers' conceptualizations match when integrating culture within language teaching; a cultural or an intercultural perspective?
2. How do teachers conceive the relationship between language and culture when it comes to language education?

### **1.6 Research Objectives**

The aim of this study is to explore, based on Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013) proposal for two teaching orientations when integrating culture within language teaching (p. 48), which perspective matches the conceptualizations of English teachers at the Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching at Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, whether a cultural perspective or an intercultural perspective.

### **1.7 Instrument and Participants**

A semi-structured interview was conducted among a group of five English teachers who are in charge of upper-intermediate English courses at the BUAP Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Language

The term 'language' is more than the label individuals stick on the system of symbols they manipulate for communicating their thoughts and that identify themselves as members of a nationality. Indeed, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) claimed that "the conceptualization of language for teaching and learning is integrated: linguistic structures provide elements for a communication system, that, in turn, becomes the resource through which social practices are created and accomplished" (p. 17). In other words, language should be seen through three lenses; the grammar and language structures, the meanings that are given to those when interacting, and its function and influence within society and individuals themselves. In consequence, language is about to be explained through these three distinct perspectives.

In the first place, language is conceived as a structural system. Within this perspective, language is seen as "a set of agreed meanings assembled according to a set of rules" (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 12). This is a formational conception of language since the focus is placed on the forms that speakers use when they communicate. This means that language structures rule the communication process and that they define what speakers should say, rather than the meanings they want to communicate. Therefore, it also assumes that meanings are already determined, that they lie in words or sentences. Similarly, language is seen as "fixed and finite, and the complexities of language use are ignored" (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 12). That is, if language is only seen as a set of prescriptions that must be followed, processes that have emerged as a result of interaction and reconstruction of societies, such as language variability, are missed out.

The conception of language as structural system disregards language variability. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) stated that within this perspective “deviations from the prescribed linguistic standard have been regarded as defective language use and have been judged negatively as lack of education or laziness instead of as a natural and significant part of a language ecology” (p.12). In other words, recognized standard variations are seen as the proper and correct ones, dismissing what the nature of language results in, variability. Crystal (2004) indeed has claimed that “when a language spreads, it changes”, and when it comes to English, a significant number of dialects are included (p. 27). Therefore, an English dialect cannot be the model to follow for teaching or speaking. Nonetheless, according to Liddicoat (2005), “language education has adopted a view of culture that privileges a prescriptive, standardized, written code enshrined in authoritative grammars, dictionaries, and style guides” (as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p.12). That is, the structural language view has been given a place in language learning and teaching, instead of being just a component of a broader outlook.

Further, language can be conceived in terms of its purpose, communication. When language is conceived as a communicative system, the focus is on the purposes of using language instead of the structure of it (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 13). This perspective of language, however, may have a structural character as well, since communication is seen as a process of “using combinations of linguistic structures to express speaker’s thought, produced by a psychophysical mechanism; that is, communication was the use of grammar to express thought” (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 13). Within this perspective the core is not the purpose itself then, but part of the means to achieve that purpose, which is the linguistic forms. It still conceives language and, therefore, communication, as a systematic process in which language forms guide the way meanings are expressed. Nevertheless, Carey (1989) has provided another conception of

communication, which states that it “is not simply a transmission of information, it is a creative, cultural act in its own right through which social groups constitute themselves” (as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, p. 13). This notion goes beyond the actual purpose of language, it defines it as the core process that underlies societies and it acknowledges the way societies and individuals reconstruct themselves through communication.

Correspondingly, the third conception of language focuses on its natural role within social groups; that is, language as social practice. According to Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), in this orientation language is:

something that people enact in their daily lives and something they use to express, create, and interpret meanings and to establish and maintain social and interpersonal relationships. It is an involvement in processes of meaning-making and interpretation with and for others. (p. 14)

Within this notion language is more than an instrument for describing the world; it is the practice that allows individuals to interact with their own reality and to become part of a group. Language is then basically seen as means for carrying out interaction; the vehicle for achieving negotiation of meanings, that is, the process to understand and interpret others. In the same way, the conception of language as social practice states that “language is not simply a tool for describing the world; it is an integral part of acting and being in the world; it is an essential condition of social life and constitutive of the human world” (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 15). That is, language is not only about its forms or purposes; rather, it underlies life in society and entails the process of negotiation of meanings which helps individuals understand each other and get distinct world insights.

Since the language as social practice perspective goes beyond grammar and the idea of simply arranging language forms to communicate, it requires a different approach to language learning. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) concluded that “knowing a language therefore means more than knowing a linguistic system or communicating information, it means social practices using that system in order to participate in the social life” (p. 14). This means that it entails both, linguistic forms, that is, language as a structural system, and the purpose of using language, communication. Nevertheless, these two elements are not the core of the process, but rather they function along with the social practice perspective as a whole. Heinzmann et al. (2015) agreed with this fact as they stated that:

the desired skills (in language learning) imply more than learning and mastering abstract linguistic tasks related to a language’s structure or vocabulary. Rather, the objective is to develop communicative competence, meaning language learners should acquire the skills necessary to communicate appropriately with people from a variety of cultures. (p. 187)

In other words, grammar structures and vocabulary are only part of the process of interacting and evolving within society using language, as they must be appropriately used to attain effective negotiation of meanings. Consequently, meanings are not already established, they are built up through interaction, and the cultures speakers bring out when communicating influence such process.

## **2.2 Culture**

In the same way as language, culture has been given different conceptualizations within the language education area. First, culture can be often conceived in accordance with the country it is linked to. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) called this perspective “culture as national attributes” (p. 18). Within this perspective “cultures are understood as being bounded by

geographic borders and are constituted by the inhabitants of those borders in an undifferentiated way” (p. 18). This means, culture is a general term which is defined by the country where a certain culture can be found and its people. Naturally, this conception reduces culture to superficial characteristics. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) also argued that “such a view of culture is an essentializing one that reduces culture to recognizable, often stereotypicalized, representations of national attributes” (p. 18). That is, cultures end up being labels which may vary in relation to countries, and these labels stand for all social groups inhabiting there. In consequence, such definition strengthens stereotypes as it only acknowledges the characteristics of one social group, the most “common” one. In the same way, these authors claimed that this conception of culture can be split into two perspectives; high culture and area studies.

On the one hand, the high culture perspective focuses on popular products out of a certain country. Within this conception, culture is determined “as the valued artifacts of a particular national group, such as art, literature, music, etc., of a particular nation or ethnic group” (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 18). That is, culture is understood through examples of the most valuable and recognized pieces of fine art produced in a specific country or social group. Hall (1990) also distinguished this perspective and stated that it mainly refers to important pieces of art as well as relevant facts and information of the target culture (as cited in Ghanem, 2017, p. 1).

On the other hand, the area studies standpoint still limits the conception of culture to relevant information. According to Liddicoat (2004), culture is regarded as “history, geography and institutions of the target language country” (p. 299). This means that the notion of culture is bonded to a country where a recognized variation of language correspondent to that culture is spoken. Further, approaching to that culture would mean knowing and probably memorizing historical dates, facts and information about the country where the target language is spoken;



meaning that language learners may well remain as outsiders in the culture they are learning (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 19).

Secondly, culture can also be defined according to the values and behavior that help understand different practices within social groups. This approach is named culture as societal norms and “seeks to describe cultures in terms of the practices and values that typify them” (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 19). Thus, this orientation encompasses elements that go beyond knowing information about the country or social group where a culture can be found. Instead, such knowledge offers a basis to understand others’ practices. Likewise, Hall (1990) identified this perspective and named it “low culture”; he described it as “everyday life, behavior, traditions and the perspectives of the people in the culture of study” (as cited in Ghanem, 2017, p. 1). Even though this orientation helps language learners gain insights into distinct social groups’ beliefs, values, and behaviors for understanding, it still generalizes those practices across social groups, which enhances stereotypes; while students also remain external to the target culture.

In the third place, culture is conceived as a symbolic system. This notion is based on Geertz (1973, 1983) who claimed that “cultures represent systems of symbols that allow participants to construct meaning” (as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 20). This means that cultures are the frame individuals abide by when they communicate; thus, culture is brought out to any act of interaction, either with individuals’ own reality or with their peers. In consequence, culture influences the effectiveness of the processes of negotiation of meanings. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) further stated that “cultures are the lens through which people mutually create and interpret meanings and the frame that allows communication of meanings that go beyond the literal denotations of the words being used” (p. 20). Therefore, an individual’s culture or cultures allow the process of meaning making and interpreting, since meanings will always entail more

than what they seem. For this perspective of culture, meanings are not already established, they do not lie in words or sentences; they are built up in interaction in certain cultural contexts instead (Langacker, p. 28, 2008).

Last of all, culture can also be pictured as social practice. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) said that within this perspective cultures are “dynamic and emergent - they are created through the actions of individuals and in particular through the ways in which they use language” (p. 21). Thus, culture is a construct that is built up within society in accordance with the practices members of social groups perform as they use language; consequently, it is always in development. In addition, interaction and real-life experiences are considered, since “culture is seen as the ability to interact in the target language in informed ways” (Liddicoat, 2004, p. 299). That is, both language and culture emerge whenever individuals experience interaction; they need the language to interpret and create meanings; yet, what they want to share and the way they negotiate those meanings translates into culture. As a result, when conceiving culture as social practice, language learners get engaged in the culture they are learning; they are not any longer language users only, but rather active participants of this culture (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 21).

Despite the different conceptions that have been given to culture, an integrated conceptualization is needed in language education. Byram (1986) suggested merging all perspectives to some extent in order to have a broad and reliable notion of culture (as cited in Ghanem, 2017, p.1). Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) agreed with it and stated that “a solid approach to culture in language education should integrate a range of different understandings of culture” (p. 21). That is, when integrating language and culture in language education, it is crucial to hold a conception of culture as the blending of four different dimensions; the national

attributes that characterize the peoples that belong to a certain culture, these peoples' beliefs, behaviors and attitudes toward distinct situations, the symbols that frame the meanings they negotiate, and how these practices constantly evolve and constitute societies as well as individuals. Accordingly, Liddicoat (2004) stated that culture should be pictured "as a core component of language education" (p. 300). On this way, culture is part of an intercultural perspective in which "culture be broad but also that it be seen as directly centered in the lived experiences of people" (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 22). In other words, a big picture of culture frames interaction, which is language in use, and at the same time, it is evolving.

Therefore, a conceptualization of the relationship between language and culture is needed in language teaching. Oranje and Smith (2018) implied that culture cannot be dismissed in language teaching, as they stated that it helps "avoid or manage misunderstandings in interaction" (p. 311). Further, according to Jackson (2014), the cultural dimension also influences learners' language proficiency (as cited in Oranje & Smith, 2018). Kramsch (2000) correspondingly stated that culture is the core of language teaching and enhances language proficiency (as cited in Ghanem, 2017, p. 1). Put differently, understanding the relationship between language and culture leads to approach culture effectively within language teaching, which consequently improves learners' language competence. This translates into intercultural competence.

### **2.3 Intercultural Competence**

Language education must aim further than the enhancement of linguistic competence, as this does not seem to be enough when learning a language. Jackson (2014) claimed that "knowing the grammar and vocabulary of another language does not ensure that people will be able to communicate successfully across cultures in that language" (p. 317). That is, if learners

are limited to acquire linguistic competence only, they will struggle with communication in real-world experiences when using the target language. Further, it has already been stated that language cannot be simply conceived as a structural system since the act of communication implies a spontaneous construction of meanings (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). However, the integration of language and culture in language teaching and learning would demand experiences in which students engage in meaningful interaction. Thus, an approach beyond linguistic competence and that aims to integrate and understand the relationship between language and culture within language education needs to be considered.

The development of the intercultural competence in language education turns out to be a process in which language and culture are integrated. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) stated that “the intercultural in language teaching is then a way of viewing the nature of language, culture, and learning as they come together in the acquisition of a new language” (p. 6). That is, this perspective establishes that language and culture are naturally related and such relationship should emerge in language learning too. Similarly, some scholars such as Byram, Kramsch & Liddicoat have called this process intercultural language learning; in this perspective, communication and interaction are situated as the core processes to attain proficiency in the target language, since these help students understand and negotiate meanings with the other successfully (as cited in Scarino, 2009, p. 68). Put differently, through intercultural competence language learners can ensure the development of abilities they need to succeed in intercultural interaction.

Nonetheless, the skills that language learners need to develop are different and more complex than those native speakers do. This is the reason why they should instead aim to become what Byram (1997) named “intercultural speakers”. To illustrate, Byram (1997) stated

that awareness of their own identity is crucial for language learners when carrying out intercultural communication, since that constitutes what he calls their “social identity”, which is part of what interlocutors perceive between each other when communicating, and which gets more complex when they have different cultural backgrounds (p. 32). In other words, learners need to be conscious of what they bring out to interaction, which is clearly more than the target language; it is their own language and culture too. Likewise, Oranje & Smith (2018) described the intercultural speaker as a person who has effectively developed intercultural communicative competence and who “can mediate intercultural interactions, both affectively and cognitively” (p. 311). Thus, as the objective of the intercultural speaker is to carry out effective interaction across cultures, the abilities they are required to develop match what intercultural competence stands for.

In order to grasp a better and broader understanding of intercultural competence, some authors have conceptualized it in three dimensions; knowledge, skills and attitudes. To illustrate, Byram (1997) created a model in which this competence was broken down into these three notions. In the same way, Baker (2015) defined what he called intercultural communicative competence by describing the dimensions of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Further, Deardorff (2006) conceived intercultural competence as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes” (as cited in Heinzmann et al., 2015, p. 189). That is, such dimensions must be worked up bearing in mind both individuals’ own languages and cultures and those they are learning.

### ***2.3.1 Attitudes***

The dimension of attitudes relates to attitudes toward both one’s interlocutor, who has a different cultural background, and their culture. Byram (1997) emphasized four essential

attitudes; curiosity, openness, and willingness to both suspend judgment in view of the other's culture, and decenter from one's own culture in order to get insights from the other's perspective (p. 34). Correspondingly, Deardorff (2015) added the values of tolerance and respect toward the other's practices, which may well differ from one's own (p. 4). Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) described a practice that seems to be the first step to develop the attitudes mentioned above, that is, "accepting that there is no one right way to do things"; which states that individuals should be aware of cultural variability, so they respect the diverse practices cultures entail (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 23). Nonetheless, in order to develop these attitudes, reflection needs to be carried out beyond the target language culture.

Learners understanding their own culture can lead to understanding the other's culture. In accordance with Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), "accepting that one's practices are influenced by the cultures in which one participates and so are those of one's interlocutors" is part of the development of intercultural competence (p. 23). Put differently, individuals need to acknowledge that they are influenced by the cultures and languages they are part of as well as the individuals they interact with. This can lead to a process that Baker (2015) described as "to de-centre and relativise one's own values, beliefs and expectations" (p. 132). Meaning that there is no need for leaving out one's own language and culture, but rather reflecting on them and integrating them into the language learning process, as they are a tool for understanding others. However, these practices cannot be developed without some knowledge. Thus, Byram et. al (1994) stated that "increased knowledge creates positive attitudes"; meaning that knowledge of some aspects of the other's culture can boost the dimension of attitudes (as cited in Byram, 1997, p. 35).

### 2.3.2 *Knowledge*

There are two broad dimensions of knowledge following Byram's (1997) conceptualization; first of all, knowledge about one's own culture and about the target language culture. In accordance with Byram (1997), it "includes knowledge of the values and beliefs shared by a culture's members" (as cited in Oranje & Smith, 2018, p. 311). That is, an approach to the societal norms that underlie the behaviors and practices that social groups bring off, bearing in mind that these do not define their members. In addition, Deardorff (2015) stated that individuals need to be familiar with historical and geographical facts, as well as artifacts that are generally relevant for other cultures (p. 3). Yet, this dimension of knowledge with respect to one's own culture seems to be relevant too, as Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) claimed that "using one's existing knowledge of cultures" can work "as a resource for learning about new cultures" (p. 24). More specifically, reflecting on one's own culture helps understand and get engaged with the others' cultures.

In the second place, knowledge entails what learners know about the actual interaction processes. It firstly involves, in accordance with Byram (1997), individuals recognizing how they have acquired their own culture (p. 36). Further, Deardorff (2015) stated that this dimension of knowledge also refers to awareness of the influence of one's own languages and cultures on how individuals create and interpret meanings, as well as the different ways they interact with their reality and others (p. 3). This may lead to what Baker (2015) described as "knowledge of different communicative practices in different socio-cultural settings" (p. 132). That is, knowledge of the way interaction is carried out across different cultures and contexts. Eventually, Deardorff (2015) included the linguistic competence as part of this dimension (p. 3). Even though the language structures are not the focus on the intercultural competence, but rather

an aspect of its dimensions, they are essential for individuals to negotiate meanings when interacting.

### **2.3.3 Skills**

Skill translates into knowing how to carry out a task. Basically, this dimension bears on communication. Authors like Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2015) conceptualized the dimension of skills as they described different practices that define them. Nonetheless, both concluded that within this dimension, individuals make use of both attitudes toward themselves and others, and knowledge about their own social groups, others' cultures and processes of interaction, as they interpret and understand the interlocutors' meanings and behaviors (Byram, 1997 & Deardorff, 2015). This means that at this point, individuals put the three dimensions into practice in order to attain interaction across cultures.

In addition, skills entail looking forward to intercultural communication consistently. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) claimed that skills also consist of "using language to explore culture" (p. 24). In other words, individuals get to know themselves as well as their reality and that of their interlocutors through language; this is then how to explore and interpret the world. In consequence, it is crucial "finding personal ways of engaging in intercultural interaction" (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 24). In other words, individuals need to develop strategies to gain new intercultural interaction experiences and therefore, get new world insights from different perspectives, as they apply both their language and cultures.

As for the attitudes, knowledge and skills dimensions, they do not mean that intercultural competence aims to displace language; instead, they integrate culture within language teaching. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) established that "the aim of intercultural language teaching and learning is not to displace language as the core focus of language education but to ensure that



language is integrated with culture in conceptualizing language learning” (p. 24). That is, intercultural competence does not disregard the role of language within language learning, but rather it encourages the acknowledgement of the relationship between languages and cultures and how these are related to individuals. Correspondingly, Scarino (2009) claimed that the development of this competence is “fundamentally about how language and culture come into play in creating and exchanging meaning” (p. 69). This means that interlocutors bring out these notions whenever they interact; thus, neither culture nor language should be dismissed within language education.

With respect to intercultural competence and the dimensions that integrate it, they entail a continuing development. Bennett (2015) stated that “the intercultural competence development is a lifelong process” (as cited in Deardorff, 2015, p. 22). Namely, no individual can ever be entirely intercultural competent; instead, one can only develop certain aspects from the intercultural competence dimensions. In the same way, according to Byram (1997), such dimensions are not absolute, they rather should be adapted to the different contexts and circumstances, as no social group or individual is the same (p. 31). Hence, it is relevant to get to know the aspects that each dimension encompasses, as they do not work as a whole. Yet, this triggers the question on how to approach these notions in the language teaching practice.

#### **2.4 Teaching Perspectives when Integrating Culture in Language Education**

Perspectives within language education have emerged in order to replace methods for a flexible frame to understand and guide the teaching practice. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) conceptualized perspective as “how the complexity of lived experiences of linguistic and cultural diversity shape both the focus of language teaching and learning and the processes through which it happens in classrooms” (p. 2). That is, a language teaching perspective encompasses the

understanding of the processes of teaching and learning in relation to the languages and cultures that are brought in along the way. Such understanding also considers how these aspects influence the classroom experiences in order to enhance both teaching and learning. Liddicoat (2004) stated that unlike methods, which are conceived as “homogeneous bodies of practice” (as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 4), perspectives do not “seek to formulate practice in particular ways, but rather to open up thinking about theory and processes of language teaching and learning in ways that can inform more elaborated understandings of both theory and practice” (as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 7). Put differently, perspectives are different to methods in that they do not seek to prescribe either the teaching or the learning process. Instead, they try to understand and describe such processes through a balance between practice and theoretical background in favor of effective language teaching and learning.

In particular, attempts to integrate culture within language teaching have led to the appearance of distinct perspectives. To illustrate, Liddicoat (2005) identified two perspectives when it came to enhancing the intercultural competence in language education contexts; “a cultural perspective and an intercultural perspective” (as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 28). Namely, when trying to integrate language and culture, that is, the intercultural competence, within the language teaching practice, teachers may unconsciously fall into one of these two different orientations. Thus, in order to aim this work’s objectives, these two perspectives will be the basis for understanding the teachers’ practice.

#### ***2.4.1 Cultural Perspective***

The cultural perspective conceptualizes culture as a body of knowledge that students are expected to learn for gaining insights into the target language culture. In 2004, Liddicoat named this perspective the “static view of culture” and explained that it leads language learners to “learn

information about a country or people, their lives, their history, their institutions or their customs or about the cultural icons these people have produced, such as their literature, their art, their architecture or their music” (p. 301). Put differently, an approach to culture translates into knowledge on distinct dimensions of the target language culture, which may well lead to stereotypes. In consequence, this perspective assumes that knowing information about a culture will provide language learners with the required abilities to carry out effective interaction in the target language.

Nonetheless, the relationship between language and culture is not evident within this focus. Liddicoat (2005) concluded that in this orientation, “culture is an object studied as an entity in its own right and the development of knowledge about culture focuses on the accumulation of knowledge about the entity identified as a culture” (as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 48). Namely, the integration of culture in the teaching practice does not imply any relationship to language; it is rather perceived as knowledge less significant to the learning of language forms. Further, Beacco (2000) stated that “the body of knowledge taught is often limited, overgeneralized, and subordinated to the teaching of language structures” (as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, p. 49, 2013). Hence, culture is not equally important to language either; instead, it is only seen as information with no influence on the language usage to carry out communication and on the students’ own culture.

Due to this perspective’s conception of culture and its relationship to language, students remain as outsiders of the target culture, which has implications. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) claimed that “a cultural perspective implies the development of knowledge about a culture, which remains external to the learner and is not intended to confront or transform the learners’ existing identity, practices, values, attitudes, beliefs, and worldview” (p.28). In other words,

when abiding by this orientation, students do not get involved in the target language culture, since they are only learning or memorizing characteristics from a social group. Therefore, the new culture does not have any influence on learners' own culture. Liddicoat (2005) explained that this perspective "emphasizes the culture of the other and leaves that culture external to the other" (as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 29). This means that even though the target culture is the focus, students do not get engaged with it, which has no effect on their own culture. Consequently, language learners' culture is dismissed in the language learning process.

Despite its setbacks, the cultural perspective may be the basis for a different orientation that goes beyond this conceptualization. In the first place, Byram (1997), who called this perspective Critical Cultural Awareness, stated that this construct "forms the core of intercultural communicative competence" (as cited in Baker, 2015, p. 131). Similarly, according to Baker (2015), another perspective "has been put forward as an approach which builds on CA (Cultural Awareness) but takes a more dynamic intercultural perspective" (p. 131). That is, the cultural orientation has served as the foundation for an emerging perspective which aims to the development of the intercultural competence among language learners.

#### **2.4.2 *Intercultural Perspective***

The intercultural perspective conceptualizes culture in relation to the interaction that is carried out among social groups, that is, language. Liddicoat (2004) first called this perspective "the dynamic approach to culture" and explained that it "views culture as sets of variable practices in which people engage in order to live their lives and which are continually created and recreated by participants in interaction" (p. 301). Namely, the conception of culture is not limited to knowledge; instead, it is seen as a process that is continuously developing and shaped as a result of individuals' interactions. In consequence, the approach to culture within this

perspective is about ways of getting involved in the target culture, that is, “actions and understanding” (Liddicoat, 2004, p. 301). This means that the intercultural perspective goes beyond the dimension of knowledge, it also entails skills and attitudes, which align with the development of the intercultural competence for students to engage in real interaction experiences.

Through the intercultural perspective, language students understand and learn about the relationship between language and culture by interacting. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) claimed that “an intercultural orientation focuses on languages and cultures as sites of interactive engagement in the act of meaning-making and implies a transformational engagement of the learner in the act of learning” (p. 49). This means that within this orientation, students become active learners who learn a new language and culture as they engage in interaction experiences, that is, language in context. Such engagement does not only involve the language and culture students are learning, but the languages and cultures they already possess.

In consequence, students’ own language and culture are not hidden, they are part of the language learning process. In accordance with Liddicoat (2005), the intercultural perspective “emphasizes the learners’ own cultures as a fundamental part of engaging with a new culture” (as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 29). Put differently, learners’ culture is the basis for understanding the target culture, which implies that they must engage and reflect on these two. In the same way, these authors added that within this perspective, “the interpretations that learners make of themselves, of others, and of learning as a part of the teaching-learning process” are the “lynchpin that holds the process together” (p. 48). Meaning that the encounter between languages and cultures in language learning is crucial, and learners should be aware of it.

Further, such understanding and reflection can assure students' cultural background enrichment and effective intercultural communication.

Additionally, this teaching perspective leads language learners to assume distinct roles. According to Scarino (2009), as a result of intercultural communication, learners become "participant users" since they interact with others using the target language, and "learners/analysers" as they reflect on this process from all the different perspectives they have already acquired (p. 69). Correspondingly, these dual roles get students decentering from their own cultural background, meaning that they become able to "move between languages and cultures" (Scarino, 2009, p. 68). Likewise, from Liddicoat and Kern's (2008) point of view, the intercultural perspective "places learners as language users and social actors at the center of language learning, along with the languages and cultures they bring to that learning" (as cited in Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 29). In other words, the skills of assuming different roles and moving between languages and cultures when it comes to intercultural interaction become available because learners' cultural background is not dismissed and because they are given opportunities to engage in interaction.

All in all, the intercultural perspective aims at the development of the dimensions that conform the intercultural competence. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) concluded that "language teaching and learning from an intercultural perspective places the learner at the meeting point of languages, cultures, and learning" (p. 51). That is, learners do not have to displace their current cultural background –in which language is also situated–; they instead undertake this learning experience starting from who they are. Additionally, they are expected to formulate a conception of what learning is, based on the interaction experiences they engage in. In sum, the intercultural perspective results in:

learning that all human beings are shaped by their cultures and that communicating across cultures involves accepting that one's own and one's interlocutors' assumptions and practices are formed within a cultural context and are influenced by the cultures in which they are formed, also acknowledging the diverse ways that assumptions and practices are at play in communication. (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 29)

That is, when abiding by the intercultural orientation, language learners get to reflect on the relationship between language and culture; how culture regulates the language usage and how culture shapes individuals. Besides, they are able to understand that learning a new language entails learning a new culture, and that this process has an impact on their own identity. Once language learners are helped to comprehend the way these processes work, they may well carry out effective negotiation of meanings in intercultural communication.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Questions**

This work intends to explore to what extent both language and culture are brought together within language education. More specifically, the aim is to get to know how culture is integrated within language education based on Liddicoat and Scarino's (2013) proposal for two teaching perspectives, cultural and intercultural, when integrating culture within language teaching, and therefore grasp some insights into its relationship to students' development of the intercultural competence. In order to address these objectives, teachers' conceptions of both their own practice and the theory that grounds such practice will be surveyed. Eventually, data gathered on this matter will help answer the following research questions:

1. What teaching perspective do teachers' conceptualizations match when integrating culture within language teaching; a cultural or an intercultural perspective?
2. How do teachers conceive the relationship between language and culture when it comes to language education?

### **3.2 Participants and Setting**

This research was carried out at the Languages School at Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla. Even though there are two undergraduate programs that aim at language teaching, this work limited to the English Language Teaching degree. This program encompasses a variety of subjects that are expected to lead students on their way to becoming English language teachers. Students from this program are required to take a certain number of target language classes, which focus on the language itself rather than on any other content. Bearing that in mind, this study only considered as participants target language teachers in charge of intermediate and advance levels of English.



The purpose of this study is to explore how culture and language are taught in the language classroom and the conceptualizations that help teachers ground those practices, and five cases were analyzed. Five teachers from the Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching who are teaching or have taught English target language that equals either intermediate or advance levels were interviewed. Yet, participants have also taught other content classes, not only target language classes. The cases included three females and two males; two of them were English native speakers, whereas the rest were Mexican.

### **3.3 Data Collection Method and Procedure**

The qualitative and exploratory nature of this research as well as its context helped consider a case study to be the best means to address the research objectives. In the first place, according to Thomas (2021), a case study aims at understanding and exploring extensively, which turn out to be the targets of this study. Secondly, “this approach is based on the assumption that the case under study is typical of cases of a similar kind so that generalizations can be made, which are applicable to comparable type of cases” (p. 71). Put differently, a case study helps explore a group under certain environmental conditions and therefore allows to deduct what is going on within groups that share those similar conditions. Among the instruments that suit this approach one may find family history, records, and interviews, to name a few.

Bearing in mind this study's objectives, the semi-structured interview was selected as the only instrument for data collection. Gibson and Hua (2016) conceptualized the interview as a discussion with a defined purpose between two or more people. Further, they stated that a semi-structured interview encompasses features of both structured and unstructured interviews, and that “it may include some standardized questions, but the order of the questions may vary; and

the interviewer may explore some questions further, or omit others” (p. 182). This means that the semi-structured interview gives more room to liberty, specifically when the answers given are not that clear or, on the other hand, already contain information that does not need to be inquired again; naturally, without losing track of what has been already planned. These characteristics made this type of interview a proper option for exploring conceptions that interviewees hold.

A series of five semi-structured interviews were carried out at the BUAP Languages School. Five teachers were asked to be part of the process; the only characteristic that was considered for such selection was being a target language teacher. Interviewees were provided with a study’s overview before the interviews were scheduled and before starting each interview. They ranged between 20 and 40 minutes each. Further, participants granted permission to audio-record the interviews for later transcription and analysis; yet, interviewees’ names will remain confidential as agreed.

Four questions were taken and adapted for executing the semi-structured interviews. These questions were adapted from Sercu et al.’s (2005) survey. Sercu et al. (2005) performed an international study that aimed to explore language teachers’ conceptions with respect to different dimensions of the intercultural competence, their views regarding their own teaching practice, and the extent to which intercultural competence was enhanced in the classroom across different countries, including Mexico. Their survey contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions, and it has been adopted and adapted by different researchers who also intend to explore the intercultural competence in language teaching, such as Oranje and Smith (2018), and Ghanem (2017).

### **3.4 Data Analysis and Procedure**

Since the interviews were recorded, they were later transcribed verbatim in order to conduct the analysis procedure. Interviews generated about two and a half hours of digital audio recording, which resulted in five texts for starting the analysis. The transcripts were reviewed several times as the recordings were playing. This technique helped go back and forth for listening to details and reviewing meanings; therefore, accuracy was built.

After the scripts were ready, a method called thematic content analysis was applied for coding data. In accordance with Gibson and Hua (2016), within this method “interview data are broken down into smaller units and coded according to themes or key words” (p. 191). This means that the key concepts that ground a study, which naturally emerged during the interviews, are turned into categories; these will help organize the collected data. The thematic content analysis was thought to be a proper and reliable method because of its qualitative nature, which matches that of this research. In the same way, the conducted interviews go around key conceptualizations that intend to explore participants’ own conceptions; hence, this analysis method led to accurate organization of data and a consistent grasping of it.

The process of analysis started with the building of categories for organizing the evidence. Interview scripts were read several times, and key concepts that emerged were identified. Fortunately, there was consistency among these conceptualizations since interviews aim to explore the same concepts. Eight categories related to the teaching of culture within language education were identified; yet, only three of them were considered abiding by this study’s objectives. Categories were organized in a table and went along with extracts taken out from the interviews in order to explore what each interviewee had to say about those concepts.

Further comments were also included, either as paraphrasis of the extracts or as quotations of what authors have said about those topics.

## Chapter 4: Results

### 4.1 Case 1

#### 4.1.1 *Conceptualization of Language*

This participant's conceptualization of language immediately evoked culture. At first, the participant related language to culture, he stated that language was culture and vice versa. Such a statement portrayed that this teacher is aware there is a close relationship between language and culture and that it is unavoidable to bring out culture when defining language, though he did not elaborate on that connection.

After giving second thoughts, he was able to share a general conception of both concepts. The participant said, "if you use correct grammar, correct vocabulary, you could transmit ideas. That's completely clear, but you need to be aware of culture, okay? Once again, the way you address to people". Put differently, language, which is the notion of interest, translates into structures and vocabulary whose usage has the purpose of communication. By and large, this teacher conceives language as a structural system, a notion which is related to culture. Yet, he did not give any further explanation on the nature of this relationship.

#### 4.1.2 *Conceptualization of culture*

Culture, according to this participant, refers to whatever is uttered applying the language. This participant stated that individuals transmit culture whenever they use the language; yet, he did not describe what aspects of culture can be conveyed. Correspondingly, he claimed that "all the ideas that are transmitted in English have to do with everything or every aspect the culture has". That is, through language one brings out their own culture; however, those aspects remained undescribed.

Nonetheless, after thinking of the conception of language, the participant provided another outlook he has about culture. Once he related language to the proper use of grammar for sharing ideas, he said that the ways of addressing people refer to culture. In other words, he also understands culture as the context for interaction.

#### ***4.1.3. Conception of the Relationship between Language and Culture***

The participant is aware of the relationship between language and culture. He stated as follows; “I wouldn’t say that language is the culture or the culture is the language, no, it’s the same. I mean language is culture and culture involves language”. He firstly stated that language was culture and vice versa. Later, according to the lines above, he claimed that language was a dimension of culture. In sum, he stated that language and culture are related, but he did not go further in order to explain such relationship.

## **4.2 Case 2**

### ***4.2.1 Conceptualization of Language***

In accordance with this participant, language refers to the means to achieve communication. She first claimed that for her language was a channel, either written or spoken, which is used for communicating with people in order to achieve some objective, that is, a language function. This means that according to her perspective, language stands for a tool useful for interacting.

Further, this teacher identified a connection between language and one’s identity. In her own words, “but also language carries... carries who you are, because also you express who you are through your language”. That is, language once again is perceived as a tool, in this case for conveying who one is. Somehow within these lines a relationship between language and culture was unconsciously brought up, but the notion of culture was not integrated within this

conceptualization. All in all, this participant's conception of language focused on it as an instrument for both communicating with one's peers and portraying one's identity.

#### ***4.2.2 Conceptualization of Culture***

First, according to this participant, culture is conceived as a dimension of language. She stated, "culture as something that is within the language". This does not only mean that culture is an aspect of the construct of language, but that there is a relationship between these two conceptions as well. In the same way, she later claimed explicitly that all the aspects that make up culture, from her own perspective, are related to language.

Secondly, culture translates into knowledge of history and people's ways of thinking and behavior. This teacher shared different aspects of culture which can be generally categorized within a dimension of values and behavior as she claimed that "culture is all these different hmm... activities, these ways of thinking, these practices that a group of people from a certain culture do and practice... the way we see life, the way we relate to each other". Correspondingly, she pointed out that the ways in which people interact have to do with culture as well. This highlights another connection between language and culture. In addition, she explained that all these components of culture are influenced by individuals' own history. That is, history is considered as another aspect of culture by this participant.

#### ***4.2.3 Conception of the Relationship between Language and Culture***

Language and culture are related in that culture determines how language is used. The participant firstly stated that all the aspects of culture that had been discussed up to that point determine how people speak. She then offered an instance of this situation as she said that "you also pick consciously the kind of language you use according to the person you're talking to. Hmm. And that's also part of culture, like you understand that there are rankings, there are

hierarchies”. Put differently, understanding one’s context, that in this case refers to social distance, influences the language selection during interaction.

Additionally, language stands for the means through which culture can be conveyed. For this participant, language is “a channel, but it’s a bridge. It’s kind of a... the way I find to express who I am... ehh and how I place myself in front of the person I’m talking to, so this is me”. Put differently, within this outlook culture refers to the individual’s identity, whose aspects come out during interaction. Whereas, language remains as the means for communicating such aspects.

### **4.3 Case 3**

#### ***4.3.1 Conceptualization of Language***

The conception of language had not been a concept for reflection by this participant. At first, this teacher stated that “it’s very difficult. I’ve never thought of this, I only teach, I don’t think about what I do most of the time...” In other words, he faced difficulties when he was asked this question as he had never come up with this conceptualization. Further, his teaching practice had not required him to think of his own conception of language.

Yet, after rethinking his answer, the participant was able to share a conception of language. He stated that language is not only about words, but it is also about the knowledge, attitudes, customs and lifestyle, food, drinks, and even the conception of stereotypes shared by the people who speak a language. Additionally, he related language to culture as he mentioned it as part of the components that define language. In the same way, the meanings that are given to idiomatic phrases and jokes are aspects that also had room within this conception.



### **4.3.2 *Conceptualization of Culture***

This participant did not offer any conceptualization of culture, but claimed he approaches it in class. In a similar way to the notion of language, this teacher stated that giving a conception of culture was difficult and that he had not thought about it, he did not go into details though. Yet, he said, “I try to practice as much as possible of other cultures”; later, he explained that he meant cultures from countries all around the world, not only those in which the target language is spoken. In other words, he tries to integrate aspects from cultures that do not necessarily correspond to English speaking cultures.

### **4.3.3 *Conception of the Relationship between Language and Culture***

The connection between language and culture is reflected in interaction. According to this participant, people can speak a language without knowing culture; yet, interacting this way would be impossible. He said, “like a robot is possible, but you can’t really interact with people, you do mechanical things...” That is, this teacher differentiated speaking a language from interacting applying a language. Consequently, he assumed that the relationship between language and culture lies in language use.

## **4.4 Case 4**

### **4.4.1 *Conceptualization of Language***

Even though this participant had never reflected on this conception, language involves both prescriptive and descriptive in accordance with her. At first, this teacher stated that language refers to everyday language and proper language. Correspondingly, she said, “a lot of descriptive, a little bit of prescriptive there”, which implies that from her point of view, the descriptive part has a major impact. Nonetheless, as she was thinking of her answer, she stated,

“I’m not sure about... I don’t think I’ve never thought about this”, meaning that before the interview, she had not considered defining this notion.

#### ***4.4.2 Conceptualization of Culture***

Culture is conceived through its connection to language, and such relationship becomes evident during classes. This participant stated, “I think the conception of culture that I base language teaching on is just the fact that... language and culture are inseparable”. That is, culture and language are closely related, and that connection stands for this teacher’s conception of culture. She did not elaborate on the way these two notions are connected though. Additionally, she said that this relationship becomes evident when teaching since, in her own words, “every time something comes up in language class, something cultural comes up with it”. In other words, according to this participant, there is a cultural dimension behind distinct situations that happen in classes, for instance, holidays.

Furthermore, culture is regarded as everyday life. The participant also claimed as follows, “it’s present every day in everything we do it’s culture”, meaning that culture refers to the behaviors and practices that people usually carry out. This statement is related to what she said first about holidays, which are also practices.

#### ***4.4.3 Conception of the Relationship between Language and Culture***

According to this participant, the connection between language and culture lies in the meaning of words. She stated that people can learn vocabulary and even build up sentences with them, but that would not be enough as she said, “but I think when you really, you know, realize why people say things the way they do, why they use that expression or why they call something ‘something’, that’s when you really start learning language, when you’re learning culture behind

it". In other words, culture also denotes a background in which interaction takes place and that frames possible meanings to whatever is uttered.

Further, this relationship also becomes evident in the ways of addressing people. This teacher also claimed that one must decide between applying formal or informal language depending on one's interlocutors. In the same way, she pointed out that one's interlocutors also influence the ways of behaving in front of them. Within this outlook, culture refers to both the context in which communication comes up and the behaviors that are thought to characterized specific situations during interaction.

## **4.5 Case 5**

### ***4.5.1 Conceptualization of Language***

Language is a notion totally related to culture from this participant's perspective. When he was inquired this question, he firstly said that language was connected to culture and that languages cannot be taught without culture or vice versa, since "they are both part of the same". This means that his conception of language immediately evokes culture, he did not elaborate on details about this relationship though.

Additionally, this participant offered a conception of language that he regarded as anthropological. He stated that "language is the creation of human beings" and that "the human beings create the way they decide to live in a specific community; they decide all the way they want to do it with that specific community. So, language itself is a way to communicate and integrate culture". Put differently, language refers to the means by which individuals within communities interact and create ways of living. Similarly, language is a vehicle for portraying one's culture.

### ***4.5.2 Conceptualization of Culture***

In the first place, the participant related this notion to language. He said, “I think that language is culture by itself”, which means that there is a close relationship between these two concepts. Yet, he did not offer further details about this. Additionally, he mentioned that culture cannot be dismissed in language teaching owing to this connection.

This teacher also identified some aspects that he considered to be part of culture. He came up with this conception after he said that the book that is applied in the target language courses contains information about cultural aspects. He then elaborated on those as he stated, “I think the idea about culture contains things, habits, celebrations, the way... the way they dress, food”. That is, his conceptualization of culture is regarded as everyday life, traditions and customs. However, he also said that the way in which sounds of the target language are articulated and the sounds themselves stand for another cultural element.

### ***4.5.3 Conception of the Relationship between Language and Culture***

As language and culture are closely related, neither of them should be left out either in culture or language teaching in accordance with this participant. This teacher pointed out the relationship between language and culture; they are part of the same, and language stands for culture. In consequence, he emphasized that both notions must be brought out in language teaching. He did not elaborate on such a relationship though.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

### 5.1 Discussion

In the first place, the conceptualization of language came along with participants experiencing hesitation and repetition. Two of them stated that they have never thought about this notion. By and large, language is conceived as structures and vocabulary on the one hand, and as a tool or means for communicating on the other hand. Most of the teachers evoked culture at this point, but the way those concepts were related remained unexplained. However, some participants mentioned that culture is what provides language with meaning and influences the way it is used, especially when it comes to whom one is talking to. Further details on this phenomenon were not given though.

The conception of culture brought out distinct perspectives; yet, repetition and hesitation also arose. Culture was conceived bearing in mind language, that was a starting point. Nevertheless, the relationship between these concepts was not clarified as stated above. Mostly, culture was considered the context for communication, which heavily influences language use and selection. With respect to the dimensions or aspects that conform this construct, they vary across the ways of addressing people, traditions, everyday life, ways of thinking, values, history, sounds and the articulation of those; aspects that highlight stereotypes. Despite this variety of perspectives, one participant stated that he had never thought about the notion of culture before.

The relationship between language and culture entailed different perspectives that were not elaborated. When teachers were inquired about the conceptions of language and culture, they immediately talked about a bond between them. Indeed, the five participants agreed with the fact that language and culture are related; none of them explained that connection though. The conceptualization of this relationship did not go further than statements such as, culture is a

dimension of language, language is a dimension of culture, through language one portrays and conveys one's culture. Yet, these thoughts were not explained.

This study aimed to explore how culture was integrated within language education; in consequence, the conceptualization of the notions above helped shed some light on this matter. Yielded results revealed two relevant issues. In the first place, the language teaching practice has not required language teachers to either think or uphold conceptions of notions such as language, culture, the bond between these two or the intercultural competence. Secondly, this is closely related to the purposes of language teaching that underlie this context, which focus, for instance, on language certifications and do not seek to enhance the intercultural competence among language students.

The results set up a context for reflection on the implications that the teachers' conceptualizations of key notions have on their language teaching practice. In the first place, the given conceptions of the relationship between language and culture are stated. Secondly, these connections are broken down into the individual, yet not isolated, conceptualization of language and culture. At the end, some thoughts on the effects that teachers holding up these conceptions could have on language education as well as their approach to culture are formulated.

In some cases, culture and language were thought to be the same. A few participants coincided in their definition of culture, saying that culture is language or it is a portion of the notion of language. In the same way, language was conceptualized as culture or a dimension of it. Despite the intimate connection between these two notions, the ways in which they are related go beyond one being the other. Although participants who offered these conceptions did not explain further, inferences can be made. Considering both scenarios, if teachers conceive culture and language that way, then the teaching of culture will be likely casual or nonexistent since they

are assuming that it comes along with language, that culture is implicitly brought out in language teaching. In consequence, dismissing the cultural component, teaching practice may well focus on the teaching of language structures.

Some participants agreed that the relationship between language and culture lies in the latter being the context for the use of the former. Within this perspective, language was perceived as vocabulary and structures; whereas, culture was conceptualized as the context for language selection or the meaning of words uttered through language. Consequently, it is understood that words are thought to have established meanings that are defined through the correct use of structures, proper language selection as well as the appropriate ways of addressing people. In this case, culture is limited to its conception of a symbolic system. Culture is certainly a framework that helps individuals create and interpret meanings; yet, it is ever-evolving as they carry out interactions over and over with their own reality and others. Hence, these conceptions can have two implications in language education. First, culture may be approached through the teaching of possibly stereotyped regulations that guide the correct use of language structures. Secondly, since it is assumed that meanings are already determined, expressions and structures might be learned that way.

Further, a conceptualization of language related it to some cultural aspects; nonetheless, culture was limited to its facet of societal norms. Such conception of culture focuses on ways of living, beliefs, and values held up by a social group. For instance, some participants listed aspects that they identified as part of culture such as everyday life, history, habits, celebrations, food, ways of thinking, to name a few. Even though these take part in a dimension of culture, it goes further than that, and these elements should not be generalized across social groups. This conceptualization of culture aims at facts and information, which suggests that culture is

approached as data that must be learned since promotion of attitudes towards values and behaviors was never mentioned. If that is the case, there is no clear connection between language and culture when it comes to language teaching.

A different overlook on the connection between language and culture is when language is seen as a communicative system through which one portrays one's own self. This assumption has effects on both the conception of language and culture. When language is conceived as a communicative system, communication is narrowed to the exchange of information following a specific purpose. Thus, meanings are not negotiated but rather already determined. On the other hand, culture is also reduced to individuals' identity. Communication implies more than an exchange of information though, it means interpreting and creating meanings for achieving interaction, bringing up one's own culture and being aware and trying to understand the interlocutor's own culture. These conceptions entail therefore a focus on the teaching of language structures and their use according to a language function. That is, the aim does not lie in interaction experiences for learners to use the language spontaneously, it lies instead in learning parameters that are likely stereotyped for students to select structures and expressions according to unreal contexts.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

The conceptions of culture, language and how these are related are relevant for both teachers and students; nonetheless, these appear to be displaced by misconceptions and beliefs that end up guiding language education. Culture does not only stand for information about certain social groups that should be learned by language students. It also implies a notion that must be theoretically grounded and bonded to language. In the same way, language goes beyond structures and expressions that can be fixed to accomplish an end; it means being able to create



and interpret meanings and allowing for a process of self-deconstruction. In consequence, neither of them should be taught isolated, they need each other as they make interaction possible.

Yet, basing one's language teaching practice on misconceptions and beliefs towards language teaching and learning is an actual issue that can lead to solely focusing on linguistic competence. This matter therefore takes its toll on language learners who likely struggle to speak the target language in real contexts, leave out their mother tongue when learning a new language and fail to develop intercultural competence.

### **5.3 Future directions**

Two areas wherein further research would be helpful and valuable have been identified. The first one concerns the impact that the school setting has on language teachers' practices when it comes to integrating language and culture. Exploring the teachers' context, which naturally influences their practice, can offer a broader outlook on the results yielded in this study. Even though this research has provided insights into what is going on in the language classroom with respect to approaching culture based on teachers' conceptions, getting to know its causes would offer a wider perspective on this matter, which can lead to take action. In other words, understanding the language teachers' conceptions along with their context can help look for a suitable approach to integrating the cultural component within language teaching.

The second area in need of further research deals with strategies for integrating the cultural component within language education. Considering the proposal of Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) that states the characteristics of an intercultural perspective on the teaching of culture, research on well-grounded activities that match these features would be the following step. The present study focused on exploring the conceptions teachers hold regarding the teaching of language and culture, and therefore getting some outlooks on what they are doing respecting this matter.

Alternatives to doing this in an intercultural way were not part of it; yet, they are required in order to enhance the intercultural competence among language students.

#### **5.4 Limitations**

Despite the efforts made while working on this research, some limitations are acknowledged. The first one concerns the participants and number of cases that were part of this study. As explained before, participants needed to match some specific features, such as, experience on teaching target language classes, as well as teaching intermediate or advance English courses. Unfortunately, many teachers were not willing to participate in this work, their reasons remained unknown though. This issue led to having few cases, not as many as wanted or expected, which at the same time may affect the generalization of the conclusions across the school where this work took place. In the same way, because all cases belong to one school, generalizations may be limited when it comes to considering the whole country.

Secondly, bias in the answers collected during the interviews is likely. Two scenarios along the process of methodology suggested that culture was relevant to language teaching and, therefore, to this research. In the first place, teachers who participated in this study had to be informed in a very general way of the purpose of the ongoing work. Second, some questions in the interview, which were adapted from Sercu et al.'s (2005) survey, also implied that culture was significant for language education. These two situations may have had some effect on teachers' answers when they were interviewed.

Moreover, the pandemic had a negative effect on the stages of data collection, processing and revising. As stated above, few cases were covered in this study; yet, the pandemic hindered the possibilities to find more cases to be added. Likewise, the procedures of data processing and draft revising required frequent discussions and analyses at least between the supervisor and

study's author that were inhibited as well due to the difficulties and drawbacks that the remote communication entailed.

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