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INTEGRATING ELEMENTS OF AMERICAN CULTURE IN ESP CLASSES

The present paper reflects on the importance of cultural awareness in ESP classes and suggests incorporating some cultural elements of American studies into the course of teaching English. To explore the depth of the student's familiarity with the culture of the target language, a survey was conducted among the students of different departments at Yerevan State University. The paper also suggests introducing a series of classes on American culture, which will complement the core ESP class and give the learners an opportunity to enrich their knowledge of the culture of a country that has the largest English-speaking population.

Key words: *American culture, teaching, American studies, cultural awareness, ESP*

Over the past decades, the knowledge of the English language has been of paramount importance for all the spheres of our activities be it science, politics, or business. Though English is taught as a foreign language at schools and universities in non-English-speaking countries and there is an extensive number of teaching methods and techniques, both teachers and learners encounter difficulties in the course. The majority of learners does not apply the language outside a formal environment and seldom use it as a language of informal communication on daily basis. At the same time, most courses focus on teaching language rules and systems paying no or very little attention to the cultural specifics, which usually restricts and hinders a full perception of the language. Most teaching methods use various innovative techniques to promote listening, reading, writing, speaking, vocabulary, and grammar, as well as fluency and intelligibility. Even though at the end of the course students usually master to great extent all of the mentioned skills, they may

still experience difficulties in their communication with a native speaker or understanding an authentic piece of literary work. This may be caused by their lack of knowledge of the customs and values of the target culture. From this perspective, culture-based lessons will give students an opportunity to understand the prevalent social axioms and basic beliefs that guide the development of the target language.

ESP courses in their turn are planned to meet the specified needs of the learner within the frames of particular occupations, and thus, they target the language appropriate to those activities in lexis, discourse, and semantics /Stevens, 1988/. This means that students have limited opportunities to increase their knowledge in culture during an ESP class, and the introduction of cultural themes and related areas of studies in a form of supplementary material will benefit students and contribute to the overall increase of cultural awareness necessary to develop a good command of the language out of the occupational area.

In this respect, the integration of American studies can make a significant contribution to ESP classes, since they comprise a broad understanding of American history, structures, and institutions, represent the art and literature of diverse cultural groups, and can be applied as an effective technique to create a mental image of the target language to enhance the learning process. Besides, while studying American culture students get acquainted with concepts upon which lies American philosophy. Overall, being a complex interdisciplinary field of social sciences American studies focuses on the concept of the cultural aspect, and the incorporation of some elements of American studies in the general program of ESP and ESL classes will produce positive outcomes and help to hone English language skills.

It is commonly stated that while teaching a foreign language we also teach its culture and the acquisition of the former presupposes a mechanical acquisition of the latter. Numerous studies trace the relationship between language and culture. In the course of studying a foreign language, our cultural knowledge is often limited to standard information about the cultural aspects of the target language such as major celebrations, historical events, or forms of greetings. Even if the learners master the language and succeed in speaking the language like natives, they do not share with them the same communication value owing to the lack of cultural awareness. A full and in-depth understanding of the language can be reached if a wider scope of cultural aspects is viewed to provide a profound background of cultural knowledge, which goes beyond a standard perception of culture, and includes knowledge of arts and music, history, literature, politics, sports, and geography of the target language. As Ellis states, the effective use of language learning strategies and techniques results in better achievement of language fluency /Ellis, 1997/.

Durham and Kellner believe that in order to properly interpret and understand the culture, it needs to be situated within the social context of production and

reception in which the culture is consumed /Durham, Kellner, 2006/. Nevertheless, it is not always possible to provide an appropriate environment to practice the language in its natural environment. It is from this perspective that broader and all-encompassing knowledge of different aspects and topics on history, geography, literature, and arts, which are the constituent ingredients of the culture, should be studied and incorporated in the course of teaching a foreign language.

Obviously, American culture, known for being one of the most diverse ones and having the largest English-speaking population, has a decisive role in molding an image of the language itself. Though the United States is not the only country where English is spoken, most English language learners find it appealing to learn about American culture, partially owing to the media content and the exposure to such famous American companies as KFC and McDonald's or TV shows and TV series. At the same time, English language learners get an inaccurate or incomplete picture of the culture, mostly relying solely on the information they receive from the media. The stereotypes that have been shaped thanks to movies, shows, music, and celebrities by no means reveal the rich American culture the introduction of which can be both challenging and intriguing and can significantly contribute to the student's proficiency. It is also of crucial significance to draw attention to the fact that US culture is a part of American culture, as students often tend to view anything that is American as something exclusively and undeniably belonging to the USA. American culture is diverse and twisted and is often referred to as a "melting pot of different cultures" which makes the whole process of learning American culture even more adventurous and engaging.

Survey Results

The primary aim of the survey was to investigate to what extent the students are aware of American culture. The online questionnaire with cultural components was instrumental in collecting data and was administered among 80 undergraduate students at five departments of Yerevan State University, including the department of European Languages and Communication, where the students major in English, and the departments of International Relations, Political Science, Public Administration, and Oriental Studies where English is studied for specific purposes. The questionnaire was divided into two sections containing multiple-choice questions and open-ended questions. The questions addressed the history, culture, geography, politics, and sports of the USA. Overall, the questionnaire comprised 30 questions of which the first section included 25 short questions such as "What was the name of the Pilgrims' ship?", "What's the largest ancestry group in the US?", or "Lost Generation" refers to a group of ..." with two optional answers and 5 open-ended questions.

The answers to the first 25 questions of the survey fall into three categories. About 70% of the respondents chose the correct option to 15 questions, while only half of the participants knew the right answer to 7 questions. Finally, the majority of the respondents over 80% were unaware of the remaining 4 questions.

Most students failed to mention *when Thanksgiving is celebrated* or *what the most popular US sport is*. It is worth mentioning that almost all the participants irrespective of their department were well aware of what date *the 4th of July is* or *what the red and white stripes on the American flag symbolize*. The students of the department of International Relations, Political Science, and Public Administration gave the most accurate answers to questions related to political or historical events such as *the date of the Cuban Missile Crisis* or *who founded the Peace Corps*, due to their familiarity with the topics. Half of the respondents confused *Mount Rushmore* with a lake, demonstrating their lack of knowledge of US geography.

The following table illustrates the most frequent responses to 5 open-ended questions of the survey, the choice of which is probably influenced by abundant media content and sources about the US.

What US landmarks do you know?	<i>the Grand Canyon, the Golden Gate Bridge, Mount Rushmore, the Empire State Building, the Hollywood Sign, the Statue of Liberty</i>
What popular US holidays and celebrations can you mention?	<i>Halloween, the Day of Independence, Thanksgiving, Christmas</i>
What is the most popular American food?	<i>Burgers, Hamburgers, Fast Food, Donuts, Hot Dog</i>
What are basic American values?	<i>Freedom, Equality, Justice, Dollar, Democracy, Tolerance, Liberty, Big Opportunities</i>
What is the first image that comes to your mind when speaking about the USA?	<i>Good life, Money, Freedom, the Statue of Liberty, Donald Trump, Barack Obama, Rich Life, New York, Netflix</i>

Of particular interest is the answer “good asphalt” which one of the respondents probably associated with the image of the USA as a country with high-quality roads, which in its turn is subconsciously associated with a developed infrastructure, and, thus, with a strong economy.

Culture Teaching Activities in an ESP Class

Students may have various perspectives and background knowledge on different aspects of American culture and related areas in an ESP class. Teaching American culture means teaching literature, arts, music, sport, politics, history, geography, and much more. English learners, however, may lack familiarity with the content conveying information on U.S. governmental processes, political terms, historical concepts, events and figures, and geographical place names. One of the common problems students encounter is reading and pronouncing geographical and historical names and place names and events in the target language, which, in its turn, negatively contributes to the development of four language skills. Having insufficient knowledge in US geography, learners often get confused when they come across place names and doubt whether those are rivers, mountains, or other types of proper names. Languagewise, *Chicago* and *Michigan* are the two most frequently mispronounced locations. In addition, students have little or no knowledge about the types of climate, terrain, and flora and fauna of the US, as well as weather conditions, which may require special terminology. Thus, topics related to American history and geography may pose challenges not only for the student but also for the teacher in the language classroom. However, a well-thought set of strategies and techniques may be quite instrumental and ease the process of perception.

To develop basic knowledge of American culture activities encompassing additional materials in cultural areas will help to organize the class in a more resourceful and productive way bridging the cultural gap and giving the learners a better feel of the country, and thus a better understanding of how the language functions. As a part of complementary teaching, ample resources and materials such as fact-finding sheets, videos, group presentations, and interviews may be applied.

As the fields to be explored are diverse, so are the teaching activities. Irrespective of the field to be covered, the teacher should always bear in mind that the set of classes is of complementary character and has to decide on the duration of the activity, which can be up to a 20-minute class as a part of the main class. It is recommended that a thorough lesson plan be designed to have the supplementary material fit well into the lesson. US history and geography are full of facts and terms, and names, and memorizing them will require plenty of effort. The

following in-class activities can be helpful to get students acquainted with the most important and intriguing historical topics of the country, as well as geographical place names and climatic conditions and terms.

Activity 1: Matchmaking Race

Level: Pre-intermediate-Advanced

Duration: 5-10 minutes

Format: Group work

Preparation: None

Procedures: Provide students with names of historical figures, events and dates printed on pieces of paper. Ask the students to work in groups by finding and matching the right halves. The group that finishes first wins the race.

The same activity can be adjusted for covering the geography of the United States, when introducing states and their capitals, or climatic zones and weather conditions.

A short video clip on flora and fauna will demonstrate the diverse and rich US nature.

Activity 2: Let's Explore US Nature

Level: Pre-intermediate-Advanced

Duration: 5-10 minutes

Format: Group work

Preparation: None

Procedures: Watch the video on the US nature and ask students to write down as many words and terms as they manage to hear. Watch the video for the second time. Hand out the worksheets containing the terms and their definitions. Ask the students to work in groups of four to match the terms with their definitions. After the groups have completed the worksheets discuss the results.

The following activity can be instrumental in a class of Economics and Politics.

Activity 3: How Much Do You Know About US Politics and the Economy?

Level: All levels

Duration: 10-15 minutes

Format: Individual

Preparation: None

Procedures: Ask your students to write down any term, concept, phenomenon, or name related to the politics and/or economy of the United States. Time the activity respective to the language level of the students.

One of the students has to read out the notes while others compare and read out their own set of words if they are different. On the completion of the activity, the teacher addresses those names and terms that students want to learn more about.

Activity 4: Music Is Art and Art Is Who We Are

Level: Pre-intermediate-Advanced

Duration: 5-10 minutes

Format: Individual/Group work

Preparation: Prior to the class, ask your students to surf the net and find information on the most popular musical instruments and genres of music and art and present them during the class.

Procedures: Students may demonstrate pictures of the instruments and compare them with the national instruments of students. The best way to introduce music genres is to play some pieces.

As far as integrating US literature into the ESP classes, is concerned, any list should include “The Great Gatsby” by Fitzgerald since the novel helps to project a better perception of the American dream exposing students to its values and beliefs.

Activity 5: Reading Is a Treasure

Level: Pre-intermediate-Advanced

Duration: 20-25 minutes

Format: Individual/Group work/Pair work

Preparation: Preliminary reading.

Procedures: Ask your students to work in groups and summaries the novel in a form of a mind map to illustrate the development and main ideas. Next, ask the students to work in pairs individually and examine two opposite characters of the novel, the protagonist and the antagonist. Discuss the novel with the students and ask them to voice their opinion.

Ask the students what books of American literature they have read. At the end of the class, offer the class a list of novels and poems in American literature for further reading.

Finally, a class covering US places of interest in each state will give the learners an opportunity to learn more than the general and standardized information about the country and have a deeper perspective on what the US can offer them as tourists. The lesson is structured in an interactive mode where students act as guides introducing facts and stories about historical places and other US sights. Visual tools will make “the tour” more impressive.

Activity 6: Guided Tour

Level: Pre-intermediate-Advanced

Duration: 5-10 minutes

Format: Group work

Preparation: Assign US famous landmarks as a research project. The students then have to work in pairs and prepare information on the sights of two or three states depending on the number of students.

Procedures: Ask the students to create short videos showing the landmark. In turns, students working in pairs guide the rest of the group introducing them to the sights and interesting facts.

At the end of the cultural class to help students understand the academic vocabulary offer a list of further reading activities and watching documentaries to develop a better understanding of the material.

Recommendations and Conclusions

As English language proficiency is becoming critical in all spheres of our life, integrating cultural aspects with the language-learning process in class will facilitate the process of learning itself motivating the learners and at the same time will broaden their mindset and perspectives. A complete understanding and mastery of the language are only possible when the cultural context is present. A series of discussions and interviews with the students at Yerevan State University identify that most learners find studying culture an inseparable and mandatory part of learning the target language. Background knowledge of different fields and conceptualization of ideas, beliefs, and customs alleviates and at the same time fosters the process of mastering the language.

To raise the students' cultural awareness, we recommend applying a series of culture instruction classes on American culture as supplementary material that comprise the following fields:

- US History and Geography (include information on important dates, places, events, and figures)
- American Arts, Music, and Sport (include information on popular art forms, genres of music, and instruments; names of sports and facilities)
- American Literature (include information about famous poets and writers, and outstanding literary pieces)
- US Politics and Economics (include names of political parties, figures, and actors; terms in politics and economics; main US industries)

Knowing the history, economic and political structures, customs, and traditions of the target language country as well as customary manners of behaviour will help students master the language, avoid embarrassing situations, and feel more confident.

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Սույն հետազոտությունը ֆինանսավորվել է ԱՄՆ պետքարտուղարության Հասարակության հետ կապերի գրասենյակի դրամաշնորհի շրջանակներում: Այս հոդվածում արտահայտված է հեղինակի դիրքորոշումը, որի համընկնումը ԱՄՆ պետքարտուղարության դիրքորոշման հետ պարտադիր չէ:

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SOURCES OF DATA

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Ի. ԲՈՒՌԱԶՅԱՆ – Անգլերենի դասավանդումը ամերիկյան մշակույթի փոփոխության ինտեգրման միջոցով «Անգլերենը հատուկ նպատակներով» դասընթացին. – Սույն հոդվածում անդրադարձ է կատարվում «Անգլերենը հատուկ նպատակներով» դասընթացի մշակութային իրազեկման

կարևորությանը և առաջարկվում է ընդգրկել ամերիկյան ուսումնասիրությունների՝ մասնավորապես մշակույթի ոլորտին առնչվող որոշ տարրեր՝ որպես դասավանդման հավելյալ նյութ: Աշխատանքում կատարված հետազոտությունը հիմնված է ԵՊՀ բակալավրիատի ուսանողների շրջանում հարցման արդյունքների վրա՝ առաջարկելով անցկացնել ամերիկյան մշակույթին նվիրված դասերի շարք, որը կլրացնի «Անգլերենը հատուկ նպատակներով» դասընթացը և հնարավորություն կտա մեր ուսանողներին հարստացնել գիտելիքը ամենամեծ անգլիախոս բնակչությամբ երկրի մշակույթի մասին:

Բանալի բառեր. ամերիկյան մշակույթ, ուսուցում, ամերիկագիտություն, մշակութային իրազեկում, անգլերենը հատուկ նպատակներով

И. БУРНАЗЯН – Обучение английскому языку посредством внедрения элементов американской культуры на уроках «Английский для специальных целей». – Настоящая статья рассматривает необходимость изучения культурологических аспектов на занятиях «Английского для специальных целей» и предлагает включить некоторые элементы американистики, а именно культурные аспекты с ее составными элементами, в курс обучения английскому в качестве дополнительного материала. С целью выяснения в какой степени студенты знакомы с культурой изучаемого языка, был проведен опрос среди студентов различных факультетов Ереванского государственного университета. В статье предлагается ввести серию уроков, освещающих американскую культуру, которые дополняют основной курс «Английский для специальных целей» и дадут учащимся возможность обогатить свои знания о культуре страны с самым большим англоязычным населением.

Ключевые слова: американская культура, преподавание, американистика, культурная осведомленность, английский язык для специальных целей

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