

# Teaching Foreign Languages: Political Aspects

PhD Irina-Ana Drobot<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Foreign Languages and Communications, Faculty of Engineering in Foreign Languages, Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, Romania

Correspondence: PhD Irina-Ana Drobot, Department of Foreign Languages and Communications, Faculty of Engineering in Foreign Languages, Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, Romania.

doi:10.56397/RAE.2023.04.02

## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to look at the political context and factors influencing which foreign languages are chosen for being taught in a certain country at a certain time, as well as the way the relationships with other countries can influence which foreign languages are used in a certain country at a certain time. Whether or not the elites are those benefitting from foreign languages instruction is also a matter of political context. Various institutions, such as the European Union, can have their say in choosing which foreign languages are the ones that should be learnt, as well as how many foreign languages a citizen should know.

**Keywords:** cultural awareness, intercultural communication, diversity, multiculturalism

## 1. Introduction

Teaching foreign languages could be understood as an activity not related to politics, but on the contrary, completely removed from it, due to its association with philology, linguistics, as well as the creative aspects related to various activities meant to promote efficient and motivational learning.

In Romania, we can associate the foreign language classes with the following: the English language classes with being encouraged to express ourselves freely, to be creative while writing essays, communicating freely while preparing debates on various issues in class, doing role-play in pairs or groups for various situations of communication, e.g., at the hotel's reception desk, a job interview, asking for directions in the street, meeting an old friend and catching up. British and American English classes especially are often associated with free style of communication which is encouraged for learners. Grammar and translation exercises are also used, yet not to such a great extent as in teaching French as a foreign language in Romania. Verb conjugations and tenses are among the frequent topics of grammar exercises, together with articles for noun genres, and quantities.

The teaching practices of these two foreign languages given as examples could be related to the cultural dimensions developed by Hofstede (2003), namely power distance and uncertainty avoidance. The dimensions are applicable at the level of the nation, but also at the level of institutions, the latter of which can be businesses, as well as schools and universities. In the English language classes, just as in British and American culture, there is low power distance, meaning that the relationship between students and the ones in authority, namely the teachers, is a relaxed one. Teachers can treat students as equals, encouraging them to speak freely, and also be creative. Creativity is generally encouraged in individualist, not collectivist cultures. Collectivist cultures are centered on the actions of the individual while thinking of the good of the entire community or group. Individualist cultures focus on the benefits of the individual, on the self-development and achievements that can be done individually. At the same time, low uncertainty avoidance shows a large tolerance to uncertain situations. In class, this can be translated as teachers dealing with uncertainty, as they do not know how the students are going to react when given freedom of creativity and speaking, whether or not they are going to perform the tasks given to them, e.g., during a debate, group work or activities done in pairs. The teacher will need to supervise the

pairs or groups, and this may be impossible, since no teacher can monitor all students at all times. The students may begin talking about something else, especially if they may not know how to solve the respective task. In order to deal away with the uncertainty, they may prefer to ask the teacher about the correct answers or simply to see how other colleagues have solved their tasks. The issue of teaching foreign languages through the communicative method is also entailing uncertain situations, since students may not know if they are going to use the language correctly. The teachers become tolerant of their mistakes, and may correct them after they finish speaking. At the same time, teaching with drama is a usual practice recommended for English as a foreign language, yet this activity also involves a high degree of uncertain situations, since the method may not be suitable for all students or for all classes. Some students may feel shy and not be willing to join, and others may simply not be interested in such activities, especially if they are engineering students, and their background and future interests may require English for specific purposes, and role play situations related to communication in situations they may encounter in real life, e.g., a job interview, a dialogue on a construction site, etc.

Yet, teaching English with drama also enables students “to play (experiment), learn and practice living in the target language in a wholly supportive, unconventional, creative and fun way” (Almond, 2005, p. 7).

The cultural dimensions of Hofstede could be related to politics if there are laws or campaigns promoting some of these cultural dimensions. For instance, individualism could be promoted as an ideology through libertarianism, and through a minimal intervention of the state in the life of the citizens.

Being a teacher, in the area of foreign languages especially, is not associated with politics. The teacher is part of an academic community, and can focus on education, which is not, apparently, connected with political issues such as voting, participating in elections, knowing what happens in the various parties and what ideas they may further on have. Teaching foreign languages could be, to some extent, related to cultural aspects of the country the language belongs to. However, all of these are only first-sight, and superficial, impressions.

Foreign language teaching could be perceived as an artistic profession, in the sense that, nowadays, teachers use various creative methods in order to allow students to feel relaxed in the classroom environment, and motivated to communicate in the foreign language, as well as practice learning and feeling encouraged to speak in pair or group work, which can include speaking activities based on the students’ speculating what a certain image is about, or writing essays arguing for or against a certain issue, or practicing reading comprehension, listening or speaking skills. We can see foreign languages as means of communication, as well as pleasant pass-time for those that have good linguistic skills. Young students can see foreign language learning as means of connecting with their peers at international level, or within the culture whose language they are studying. They can also be enthusiastic about foreign language learning due to the possibilities offered to travel. Knowing a bit the foreign language of a country could help in situations where nobody knows an international language such as English. While everyone speaks English at a hotel or at conferences, especially if it is one of the languages of the conference, in small stores or in the street English may not be well-known and understood, or in public transportation means, in countries such as Finland or Turkey. It also depends whether we are talking about big cities or smaller areas.

While apparently foreign language learning is removed from politics, foreign language learning can also be regarded as a very down to earth subject. Politics is not restricted to political campaigns and to a topic discussed on the news. Politics should not be perceived in the case of the present paper as a topic we could put aside, but as a means of organizing various aspects in our everyday lives.

Teachers’ and students’ activity can, at times, intersect with political life, as in the case of various protests regarding teachers’ salaries. This holds true for schools and universities that are funded by the state. What is more, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs could be regarded as having political roles in promoting languages and cultures and the way they should be taught or the way examinations should occur. With respect to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2023), we can notice that it “attaches special attention to education and research as part of international cooperation, taking into account the fact that education is an important factor for the strengthening not only of the cultural, but also of the economic and political pillars of diplomacy.” According to its politics, “education may become an important factor in solving conflicts, as one of the most efficient means to prevent intolerance. Thus, MFA supports those educational projects that aim at introducing courses of human rights, multiculturalism and religious tolerance in school and university curriculums.” In the case of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the case of schools and universities, we could speak of institutionally-related politics, but which are, in turn, influenced by national and international political decisions.

There are decisions that can be taken at higher level regarding which foreign languages will be known and studied in schools and universities.

Languages of other countries can be introduced even as second official languages in cases where some territories

are conquered or if they become colonies. Former British colonies such as the Philippines, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong have English as one of the official languages and they have even developed varieties of New English. They can be defined as “native varieties other than British and American English (Bieswanger, 2008, p. 28).

According to Wells (1982, p. 623), “the imperial legacy” is visible in India, Africa and the Far-East (including Singapore, the Philippines, and Hawaii). English is spoken in such areas due to “a historical background of British or American colonization”, which means that “English plays an important national role as a second language. Some such places have, furthermore, developed characteristic local varieties of English.”

The issue of cultural equality is raised by the teaching of English as an international language, since English is not only used in the English speaking world as a native language, e.g., British, American, Canadian, and Australian cultures. It can also be used in the forms of varieties of New English, where it is influenced by the native languages, and where it becomes different from the Received Pronunciation English. Therefore, “According to Modiano, in order to promote cultural equality, ‘a multiplicity of teaching practices, and a view of the language as belonging to a broad range of peoples and cultures, is the best that language instructors can do’ (2001: 340). Baxter seems to share the same viewpoint when he says that ‘teaching materials should be drawn from all the various English-using communities, not only L1 communities, so as to introduce students to the different manners of speaking English and to build an attitudinal base of acceptance’ (1991: 67)” (Guerra, 2014, p. 28).

The issue of equality among culture could be understood as a political one, since nowadays we speak of values such as unity in diversity, multilingualism, and equal rights, respect for various cultures, which are all values promoted by the European Union.

Imposing the language of a country through conquest or through colonization of certain territories could be regarded as a political act.

The way languages influence one another through vocabulary is also a consequence of conquest or presence of a foreign country on a certain territory. For instance, the Romanian language vocabulary contains many words that have been borrowed or derived from Turkish, from the time when the Romanian territories had been under Ottoman Empire influence, but not precisely military occupation, in the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries.

Soft power influences which foreign languages and cultures are promoted and become attractive to learn, especially for young people. As a definition of the term, “Soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment. A country’s soft power rests on its resources of culture, values, and policies” (Nye, 2008, p. 94). For instance, the popularity of Japanese language and anime culture, of Korean language and Korean pop culture, of German, Russian, American, British, French cultures can be understood as soft power. In Romania, there has been the influence, in the past, towards the end of the nineteenth century of French culture, as well as language. Cities such as Bucharest, Craiova, Constanta, and Iasi were taking a specific Parisian atmosphere in their streets (Bulei, 2010, p. 33). The streets and the buildings were not the only cultural products influenced by contact with French culture; furniture also showed the influence of French culture (Bulei, 2010, p. 34). At some point in time, young people from the intellectual elite would go for their university studies to Paris. French language and culture had the appeal that the English language has nowadays in Romanian culture, but not only in Romania; all over the world, we notice the popularity of the English language, which is not even associated only with British or American culture anymore. Nowadays, the English language is used by many non-native speakers, as a common language everyone knows in circles where nobody has the same native language and where English can be regarded as a common language, since those in the group do not know any other common foreign language.

There are institutes where there are culturally related activities, such as films, exhibitions, discussions about history, traditions, as well as courses in the respective language, e.g., in Romania there is a Spanish cultural institute, Cervantes, a Turkish cultural institute, Yunus Emre, a German cultural institute, Schiller House, an Italian Cultural Institute, a Czech Cultural Institute, the Embassy of Japan, which organizes various activities within other institutions, such as certain universities or book fairs, and others. The activities of such institutions can be understood as means of practicing soft power, by promoting their language and culture, and making them attractive. The purpose is to establish collaboration on various projects, e.g., sending students to study abroad, making cultural exchange experience with teachers of the respective languages, and to show that the respective countries and cultures are on friendly terms with the culture in the country where they promote their activities. These activities could be regarded as means of maintaining diplomatic relationships.

Other political aspects regarding foreign languages could be seen at the level of various policies at the level of the European Union. Teaching foreign languages is part of the political aspects led by the EU. The language policy promotes “mobility and intercultural understanding” (European Parliament, 2023). Thus, “the European

Union (EU) has designated language learning as an important priority, and funds numerous programmes and projects in this area” (European Parliament, 2023).

Laws regarding the obligatory knowledge of at least two foreign languages by each citizen influences the practice of foreign language teaching and learning, as well as their importance in the school curricula, together with the consequences this can have later on, as foreign language skills will matter at a job interview, and in anyone’s future domain of activity, whether they are philologists or not. Professionals in the domains of engineering, medicine, architecture, IT, business find themselves in need to know at least one international language due to various collaborations that can be established in their jobs and due to their need to communicate research results to an international audience. Ever since they are students at university, these professionals start foreign language classes applied to their domains, namely foreign language learning for specific purposes. PhD students in the engineering domain, for instance, at the Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, where the author of the paper teaches, need to pass a test of translation, from English or French into Romanian, and the other way around, in order to show that their language proficiency allows them to have access to research at international level. International, standardized tests of language proficiency are also prepared and mandatory for students studying abroad on programmes such as Erasmus, as well as for those that decide to work abroad.

In the case of research, communication is the need that leads to the necessity of knowing foreign languages which are spoken at international level. Communication is one of the main values in today’s world, an aspect which is due to the political administration of the world.

The European Union also issues policies and rules regarding which languages are the official ones for translators and interpreters for their institutions. International languages are used, but also languages of member states. The European Commission (2023) lists on its site the following “official and working languages of the EU institutions”: Bulgarian, Spanish, Czech, Danish, German, Estonian, Greek, English, French, Irish, Croatian, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Hungarian, Maltese, Dutch, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Finnish, and Swedish. We should keep in mind that “the Commission uses languages to provide information to and interact with the public, organizations and Member States.”

Translations are a means of communication among countries and cultures, today as in the past, in various domains, political decisions included.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

The way foreign languages are taught can be regarded as reflecting the changes in the world around us, which start at political level. Due to globalization and to the easy connection through trade and travelling among countries and cultures, communication has become one of the main values in today’s world. What we are being told at various levels, including foreign language teaching and learning, in advertisements, in practices such as social media connections, socializing during scientific events such as conferences and workshops, the need to establish business collaborations and team work in project management, everything has as a common ground the value of communication. We could regard it as part of an ideologically imposed speech which is encountered everywhere today. While communication can be understood as a basic, universal need at the level of human relationship and could be regarded as an aspect in our lives that we take for granted, today the value of communication has been given larger proportions. The development of technology has facilitated communication, to the point where teaching and doing research have become more accessible than ever before, through online events but also through various means of publishing and platforms used for sharing knowledge and results of research. Foreign language teaching and learning can be more readily accessible due to technology, not only since we can connect so easily and teach or study online, but also due to the advancements in social media. Facebook groups and pages allow free access to foreign language resources, such as text based materials but also video materials, where the teacher’s explanations are readily available. Pronunciation learning is no longer difficult, due to the many readily available resources, such as audio and video material. Nowadays, we no longer depend only on video and CD cassette players to benefit from audio and video material for listening comprehension. We can also connect, as learners, with native speakers of our own age through various applications for foreign language learning. Interactivity is another keyword in today’s world, when it comes to teaching and learning domains. The active student is the ideal of today’s teaching, with student-centered teaching approaches. The student is expected to deliver, not just to listen and memorize. During lectures, interactivity is the ideal. The teacher is no longer supposed just to speak and spread knowledge, but also to be a moderator of discussions during class with another student or students, or even engage a few students in a brief discussion. Students are no longer expected just to look at the teacher as a source of authority, and adopt a passive attitude, taking notes and memorizing. They can see the teacher as a discussion partner, to whom they can also ask for an opinion, and not for an absolute answer, function of the topic. They can ask the teacher for their opinion in turn, and use the teacher’s feedback on various activities. For instance, when students prepare oral presentations on

various topics, using PowerPoint slides, as well as their own speeches, the teacher can offer opinions and advice regarding how convincing the speech was, and how efficient the methods chosen (visual, amount of text on the slides, duration, number of slides) can be for grasping the public's attention and maintaining it. In such an example, it is difficult to give a definite solution and come up with clearly-cut answer regarding the correct way to prepare and to give a presentation. Public speaking is a popular means of gathering a public nowadays for workshops, to motivate the audience to change their mindset psychologically to have a different perspective on their life, and make changes in their life for the better, to present certain products to the audience, and even to present research papers. Holding speeches and presentations could be regarded as having the speaker's skills in common. Political speeches are also a usual practice in today's world. The political world works by means of campaigns and convincing, on holding a persuasive speech with an emotional impact on the audience more than on arguing in a way based on reason and scientifically proven facts. In this sense, the practice of holding presentations in the foreign languages classroom can be understood as keeping up with the trends in today's world, at the level of politics, as well as organizations and institutions. Schools and universities are recommended to keep up with the outside world reality, in order to help students adapt to it and be prepared for it when they graduate and search for a job.

The role of the teacher and student in foreign language teaching and the way they changed could be understood as reflecting the way understanding the functioning of the roles of the citizen and the state: high power distance changed to low power distance, to some extent, all over the world, with the rise in democracies. As an example, in Romania during the Communist regime, the professor would generally deliver a lecture and only at the end ask the students if they had any questions. Discussions would be encouraged separately, during seminars. Currently, interactive courses can be regarded as the norm, when it comes to foreign languages courses.

The process of democratization also affected the availability of foreign language learning. Foreign language learning switched from it being the privilege of the elite to it becoming available to anyone: "The second half of the twentieth century brought a democratisation of language learning – languages ceased to be the preserve of the elite private schools and the selective 'grammar schools', and were offered in all comprehensive schools, to pupils across the full ability range" (McLelland, 2018, p. 12).

We can, therefore, on the one hand connect foreign language learning to the way it is legitimized politically or imposed through political aspects and by political institutions and structures, as well as, on the other hand, see foreign language learning as a reflection of, but also as an adaptation to, the world we currently live in.

If we take a further look at English as a foreign language, in the past it was deeply connected to, if not even inseparable from, British culture. The Received Pronunciation was considered not only the norm, as well as the ideal of pronunciation. Everyone learning was expected to emulate the RP standard, as well as the stereotypically polite way of the British, wishing for personal space and not imposing on them by making very polite and, apparently, avoidant, polite requests, such as asking someone for directions, or asking someone for permission to open or close the window. Later on, in Romania at least, after the fall of Communism, American culture and language gained the higher appeal, through soft power. After 1989, the political relationship between Romania and America grew stronger. The relationship began in 1880, earlier than 1989, however. After 1989, the US supported Romania to become a member of NATO (North Atlantic Alliance), which then paved the way for the acceptance of Romania into the EU. We could conclude that the American English language had gained a certain appeal due to the high hopes Romanians placed on their relationship with America at a political level. The relationships among the countries can be related to political alliances and cooperation, as well as to political communication. Some countries can be at odds politically, and this leads to conflicts to reflect at the level of the society's members. For example, since only recently, in Romania, the Russian Cultural Centre, later on called the Russian House, in the capital city, consisted of a usual small group of interested persons in various activities, such as film evenings, Russian language courses, painting exhibitions of various artists, or exhibitions consisting in posters related to the anniversary of a certain historical event in Russian culture. At the same time, poetry evenings were organized, as well as theatre plays from Russian authors such as Cehov, and even recitations of specific, traditional Russian scarves, from Pavlovsky Posad. Maslenitsa celebrations were also organized, which consisted of specific foods such as pancakes which are prepared on this occasion in Russian culture. However, while the small group is still interested in the activities of the centre, the organizers were asked to retreat from their activity, due to the support of Romania towards Ukraine, also sustained by the European Union, and due to the general negative perception of Russia during this war. The relationship between Romania and Russia is, thus, deteriorating at least for a segment of the population, due to the sympathy expressed for the Ukrainian refugees, and the culture of Russia is no longer seen as attractive. The Russian House institute will, therefore, soon cancel its activity and leave the site as a result. In this example, we can see how politics and decisions taken at world level, as well as the political relations among countries, can influence whether or not certain cultures can or not be promoted within a territory. Russia can be perceived negatively now by the political decisions taken against the Russian House institute, which was holding cultural activities and organizing various level courses in the

Russian language. Some Romanians can separate the two, politics and culture, while others cannot. Those that can separate politics from culture can be those that are, actually, less politically interested and less politically engaged. However, the large level decisions cannot be without consequence on our daily lives.

We also frequently hear that, at some point, we would all have to learn the Chinese language, since China has recently been rising as a world power at a geopolitical level, threatening to take the place of the United States in this matter. Why would understanding Chinese be necessary? It is believed it could become the new international language, and take the place of English. Then, it would be a necessity to understand what the rest of the world is saying.

Meanwhile, Chinese language courses can be found on mass online open course (MOOC) platforms such as Coursera, which are available for free for a limited amount of time for those who join. This means that promoting various languages and cultures is part of a political background which we may or may not be aware of as learners. There is always one or another ideological background superposed on the cultural background of every age in history in this sense.

Languages are learned function of the situations of the world at a certain time. In Great Britain, we can see how French has been learned as a foreign language starting with the period after the Norman conquest which happened in 1066. French started as “the language of the conquerors and the elite who collaborated with them,” and afterwards it “became, over the course of generations, the first foreign language and language of prestige for those outside the clerical education” (McLelland, 2018, p. 7).

In England, at some point, Dutch became popular, due to the “reflection of the importance of trading ties with the Low Countries, especially in the cloth trade, and the first textbook for English learners of Dutch was published in 1606, decades before any such text was available for German (1680).” Afterwards, we can notice, in the case of England how, “After French, it was German that flourished most in the eighteenth century, its prestige helped, no doubt, by the fact that Britain’s monarchs from 1714 (beginning with King George I) were from the German House of Hanover.” This led to the following situation: “when formal education became more widespread the course of the nineteenth century, French was generally the first foreign language learned, but German was most often the second” (McLelland, 2018, p. 7).

The current situation in today’s world is the following: approximately 60% of the world’s population is estimated to be multilingual (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Therefore, a change in today’s world is the one regarding how societies are increasingly becoming multicultural, and, by extensions, multilingual. Great Britain has changed from being exclusively populated by the British, who were using RP, and who had their distinctive personalities, to being populated by migrants coming from the former colonies, for instance from India. This is visible especially in large cities, where migrants can find workplaces. Therefore, the RP has diminished in use in the spoken language. The Indians speak their variety of New English, which is different from RP. Foreigners can speak a variety of English that has its differences in pronunciation and syntax from RP, standard English. The pressure to use standard English is, thus, diminishing. The multicultural society also poses issues regarding how teachers should address a class of multicultural students in order to motivate them. One of the issues is the encouraging of students to learn more than two languages: “Multilingualism and the development of multilingual education programmes aiming to promote language proficiency in more than two languages are becoming increasingly widespread due to historical, political and economic factors” (Bernaus et al, 2004, p. 87).

While the teacher adapts teaching to the needs of the respective class, the teaching of the foreign languages is supposed to the needs created by the present world.

### 3. Results

Our lives are never removed from a political context. As it can be seen from the analysis in the present paper, the political conditions of conquest and soft power relationships with other countries and cultures can dictate which foreign languages should be taught and studied. We can orient ourselves by what the rest of the generation and group do in our society, as to which languages to learn and which cultures to be preoccupied about. All around us, some cultures and foreign languages are being promoted through various means, e.g., through entertainment, films, bestsellers, conversation guides, advertisements for trips to the respective countries, offers for students to study abroad in a respective country, offers to study certain foreign languages in attractive setting, such as communicational contexts at a café.

As our world is gradually removing the hierarchical social structures, and doing away with social classes such as the aristocracy, we are all gradually becoming equals. Society is no longer based on privileges of birth. In the past, one was either born rich or was not, and social mobility was not an option for everyone. In some cases, it was impossible for someone to change social status, from poor to rich. The world was regarded as fixed, with everything already decided. However, with the better living conditions due to innovations and less dependency on each other for resources which ensured the basic needs for leading one’s life, social mobility became a usual

practice. Especially the United States encouraged everyone to start a new life and to get rich on their territories. Gradually, the tendency in the entire world is to move towards an egalitarian, democratic society.

The hierarchies are being removed in the foreign language classroom as well: “Foreign language teaching and learning have changed from teacher-centered to learner/learning-centered environments” (Moeller & Catalano, 2015, p. 327). We could claim that the current organization of society leads to various practices to be adopted in the foreign languages classrooms, since communication and ways of addressing have to do with the relationships that are established among people.

The European Union continues this tendency, by ensuring through laws equal rights for all citizens. The unity in diversity principle encourages respect and equal chances for everyone in today’s society. Doing away with discrimination is also one of the purposes of the laws of the EU. Understanding of differences is promoted through understanding of the cultural differences and sympathizing with them. By learning foreign languages, we can say that these are a sign of respect towards the members of other cultures speaking to them.

#### **4. Discussion**

We could claim that any foreign language that we learn has as a purpose the development of communication abilities, in various forms, written or spoken. The emphasis placed on communication in today’s world could be argued that is not anything new, and that languages have had this purpose since always. However, communication nowadays means understanding, respect, as well as showing that we accept the idea that there is unity in diversity and that we live in a world of multiculturalism. All cultures become interconnected through trade and various exchanges, ranging from various goods, technology, to personal and professional purposes communication.

The issue of communication with other cultures members is inseparable from accepting their differences and treating them with respect and as equals with us, as well as taking a step back and questioning the stereotypes we may have heard about. This is the purpose of the communicative approach to foreign language teaching: “Although there has been increasing interest in intercultural comparative studies among linguists, and intercultural learning is a concept often met in pedagogical literature, the concept of intercultural competence has rather come out of the sciences of persons and societies. The holistic view of learning means that learners are involved in every learning situation with their whole personality: as knowing, feeling, thinking and acting individuals. Understandably, intercultural learning is often identified with growth towards internationalism” (Kaikkonen, 2014).

Communication nowadays refers to treating anyone in terms of equality and respect for differences, belonging to any culture. The languages we learn can be regarded as a first gateway to establishing relationships or maintaining them.

The entire methodology for teaching foreign languages depends on the way we currently live and deal with other cultures and with the political relationships established between them and our own country.

Our need to explore other cultures through their mindsets, values, and traditions comes from the promotion of understanding cultural differences. Language is just one way to explore a culture, especially since, during foreign language learning classes, culture and civilization sections have always been included.

Therefore, with respect to intercultural competence, “language educators contend that foreign language learning should increase students’ intercultural competence (IC) which would allow them to see relationships between different cultures, mediate across these cultures, and critically analyze cultures including their own (Chapelle, 2010)” (Moeller & Catalano, 2015, p. 331).

Raising awareness about cultures can help minimize or avoid the experience of culture shock, which consists of a state where the person in the foreign country can no longer function in the new environment, after previously going through a state of very fast adaptation and enthusiasm for everything that is new, and ending up rejecting and finally accepting the differences. In the end stage of the culture shock experience, adaptation to the new environment is seen as the solution.

#### **5. Conclusions**

Foreign language learning is never separated from the learners’ contemporary world and from the contemporary world lifestyle of those living in the country whose language they are studying. Old textbooks depict a certain lifestyle in the country whose foreign language we study. Nowadays, the lifestyle has changed, not only due to technological development but also due to the multiculturalist values and due to the organization of society by the European Laws and also by the phenomenon of globalization.

While not all foreign languages methods of learning are explainable by using the political situation of the country or at world level, politics is one factor influencing adopting certain methods of teaching and learning. For the present paper, factors such as those related to cognition, psychology and the discoveries in the field of

linguistics were not taken into account, or, at least, not independently of the political context.

The truth is that there is a combination of factors at work when deciding how languages should be taught in a most efficient way. Yet, why certain foreign languages are chosen to be taught is the result of the political context of our country's relationship with the country to which the foreign language belongs to.

### References

- Almond, M., (2005). *Teaching English with drama*. Modern English Publishing.
- Baxter, James., (1991). "How Should I Speak English? American-ly, Japanese-ly, or internationally?" *Teaching English Pronunciation: A Book of Readings*. Ed. Adam Brown. London: Routledge, 53-71.
- Bernaus, M., Masgoret, A. M., Gardner, R. C., & Reyes, E., (2004). Motivation and attitudes towards learning languages in multicultural classrooms. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 1(2), 75-89.
- Bieswanger, M., (2008). Varieties of English in current English language teaching. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics*, 38(1), 27-47.
- Bulei, Ion, (2010). Influenta franceza in Romania si reactia contra ei. Retrieved from: [http://bmim.muzeulbucurestiului.ro/fisiere/24-Bucuresti-Materiale-de-Istorie-si-Muzeografie-XXIV-2010\\_031.pdf](http://bmim.muzeulbucurestiului.ro/fisiere/24-Bucuresti-Materiale-de-Istorie-si-Muzeografie-XXIV-2010_031.pdf).
- Chapelle, C., (2010). If intercultural competence is the goal, what are the materials? In: Proceedings of CERCLL Intercultural Competence Conference. CERCLL, Tucson, Arizona, pp. 27–50.
- European Commission, (2023). The Commission's Use of Languages. Retrieved from: [https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/service-standards-and-principles/commissions-use-languages\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/about-european-commission/service-standards-and-principles/commissions-use-languages_en).
- European Parliament, (2023). Language Policy. Retrieved from: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/142/language-policy>.
- Guerra, L., (2014). Using Translation to Teach Native and Non-native Varieties of International English.
- Hofstede, G. (2003). Cultural dimensions, [www.geert-hofstede.com](http://www.geert-hofstede.com).
- Kaikkonen, P., (2014). Intercultural learning through foreign language education. In *Experiential learning in foreign language education* (pp. 61-105). Routledge.
- McLelland, Nicola., (2018). The history of language learning and teaching in Britain, *The Language Learning Journal*, 46(1), 6-16, DOI: 10.1080/09571736.2017.1382052.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (2023). Public and Cultural Diplomacy. Education. Retrieved from: <https://www.mae.ro/en/node/2940>.
- Modiano, Marko, (2001). "Linguistic Imperialism, Cultural Integrity, and EIL." *ELT Journal*, 55(4), 339-46.
- Moeller, A. K., & Catalano, T., (2015). Foreign language teaching and learning. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Second Edition, pp. 327–33. Elsevier.
- Moeller, Aleidine Kramer and Catalano, Theresa, (2015). Foreign Language Teaching and Learning. Faculty Publications: Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education. 200. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/teachlearnfacpub/200>.
- Nye Jr, J. S., (2008). Public diplomacy and soft power. *The annals of the American academy of political and social science*, 616(1), 94-109.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S., (1986). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching: A description and analysis*. Cambridge Language Teaching Library. Cambridge University Press. <https://archive.org/details/approachesmethod00rich>.
- Wells, J. C., (1982). *Accents of English: Volume 3: Beyond the British Isles* (Vol. 3). Cambridge University Press.

### Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).