

## Cultural Products and Practices Leading to Cultural Perspectives: Practical Applications

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Incorporating cultural products and practices is a standard part of most foreign language courses. Achieving the final learning goal, perspectives, presents more of a challenge. Yet, perspectives are the gateway to students being able to advance their intercultural development. This paper will show how instructors can gain an understanding of alternate methodologies to teach the target culture and help students make personal connections through reflection on their own experience. A background in cultural humility and cultural competence informs foreign language assignments for culture acquisition. Templates of assignments are recommended that support instructors to personalize assignments that incorporate reflection and alignment of cognitive domains. Sample activities are offered that scaffold student reflection on cultural products and practices to achieve a more nuanced perspective of the target culture as well as potential assessments of these critical thinking questions.

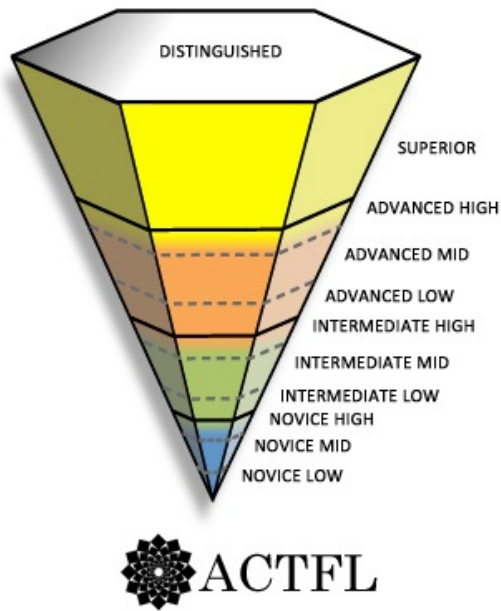
### Cultural Products and Practices Leading to Cultural Perspectives: Practical Applications

In foreign language classes, learning the culture of the target language is essential for appropriate interaction in the culture since language and culture are viewed as inseparable. Culture, as operationalized by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) includes cultural products, practices, and perspectives. These cultural products, practices, and perspectives are not easy to teach, they are not explicitly outlined by ACTFL, and reflection in the target language is often beyond many students' proficiency levels. In order to help students be able to infer cultural perspectives from cultural products and practices, instructors need to scaffold the lessons and evaluate in which language the reflection would best serve the goals of the lesson.

ACTFL recommends a series of skills in five different modes: Interpersonal Communication, Presentational Speaking, Presentational Writing, Interpretive Listening and Interpretive Reading, and recommends that instructors create activities using all of these to ensure that students are able to gain functional knowledge about the target language. ACTFL has created specific performance indicators for levels of proficiency:

- Novice (with subsets of Low, Mid and High)
- Intermediate (Low, Mid and High)
- Advanced (Low, Mid High)
- Superior (no subsets)
- Distinguished (no subsets)

The Superior and Distinguished levels of language ability are the highest, and are attained after many years of study and/or extended immersion in the target culture. Students completing a university foreign language requirement advance through the three subset levels of the Novice category, and depending on individual factors, may finish the requirement at either Novice-High or somewhere within the Intermediate subsets. Since second language acquisition is not linear, as illustrated in the cone below, it is understandable that every level beyond Novice requires exponentially more time and learning to advance, which accounts for the typical results in university-based language training.



(ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012)

Teacher licensure bodies recognize this, and many have made Intermediate-High to Advanced-Low, depending on the difficulty of the language, as the minimum needed to achieve a foreign language teaching license. This is typically the proficiency level achieved in a baccalaureate program. At all levels, Can-Do statements illustrate skills in production, rather than cultural competence. The Distinguished level is the only level to mention culture in terms of communication. The principal difficulty is that cultural knowledge is embedded, but not explicitly described in all levels, since culture is part of language. A student's ability to be proficient in culture is not specified in the statements until the Superior level. Teachers therefore have no guidance for designing curriculum concerning cultural knowledge.

As is easily seen, there is no direct line to follow for intercultural development in the Interpersonal Communication mode. This holds true for Presentational Speaking, and Presentational Writing as well. Interpretive Listening and Interpretive Reading, both receptive skills, include culture at the Superior and Distinguished levels.

However, ACTFL does address the importance of teaching culture, specifically in its Standards. Here there is a separate category for Cultures, which is dedicated to having students use the language to “interact with cultural competence and understanding,” stating specifically:

- Relating Cultural Practices to Perspectives: Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the cultures studied
- Relating Cultural Products to Perspectives: Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the products and perspectives of the cultures studied (World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages, 2015).

In both cases, the standards state that the cultural practices or products be related to cultural perspectives.

Among the competencies outlined by ACTFL, students must learn to use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the cultures studied, as well as between the products and perspectives of the cultures studied (World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages, 2015). Using the language means that students are able to explain and reflect on the relationship between products and practices using cultural perspectives on what these products and practices mean in a given context. However, order to use language this way according to the ACTFL standards, a student would need to reflect in the target language, which is beyond the proficiency of most foreign language basic level classes.

### **Scaffolding the Process**

Moving from concrete products and observable practices to the more abstract concept of perspectives can be a difficult progression for students. Viewing an activity that teaches cultural products, practices, and perspectives as a progression that follows a developmental process can help structure a series of tasks. These tasks provide conceptual scaffolding to support each new level of abstraction. The concept of “scaffolding”, first described by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) as an extension of Vygotsky’s theories of social cognition, describes how the instructor organizes learning in steps to help students move from easier to more difficult cognitive tasks. Often, an activity teaching cultural products and practices may not progress to the level of perspectives because that next step is quite challenging. Nevertheless, it is worth the effort, regardless of the students' level of achievement in the language.

Scaffolding the experience with reference to Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive tasks offers a guide to organizing activities (Krathwohl, 2002). In this organization, description is the most accessible task. At this basic language learning level, students can describe what they observe using nouns and verbs. At the next level of complexity, language students can explain why a speaker might engage in a particular cultural practice. Once this base of knowledge has been established, students can begin to create insights about the cultural values that are expressed by a particular cultural practice, although their language proficiency may not allow them to express these insights in the target language. Learning this process of observation and analysis helps students become better critical observers of new cultures.

### **Cultural Competence and Cultural Humility**

Learning the metacognitive skill of reflection helps students move from memorizing rules for practices to being able to become critical observers of practices. A problem with the concept of "cultural competence" is that the term seems to suggest that if a person understands the rules of practices, then that person can be a full participant in a culture. Unfortunately, "the rules" change depending on to whom one is speaking, when, and how. In addition to this contextual variance, a person who is not used to interacting in a multicultural environment could be challenged to learn all the permutations of "the rules" for every individual with whom he or she interacts, and some target cultures may have an overwhelming number of “rules” for a language learner to master. This complexity requires an

attitude of being ready to learn what is required for a given situation. This attitude, first identified by Tervalon and Garcia (1998) as "cultural humility", is a precursor to being able to observe and learn culturally appropriate practices.

Boesen (2012) operationalizes cultural humility as the attitude of being confident that it is okay not to know what is going on, of being ready to humbly ask questions to find out what to do, with the self-awareness to suspend judgment. Our language students may feel insecure about not fitting in or being judged negatively for cultural incompetence. Instructors can offer support by teaching how to learn to find out what culturally appropriate responses are. To do this, we must help students observe and infer, inquire and appreciate. This is the process of critical reflection.

A common misperception is that students will naturally engage in this process of critical reflection, either in a classroom or even in an immersion setting. It is not clear from research in reflective practices that students will follow the process of description, explanation, and creation of new insights without prompting (Killeavey and Moloney, 2010; Kuit, Reay, & Freeman, 2001). In a comparative study of cultural reflection practices, students who were asked to, "reflect on your experiences in [culture x]", gave only descriptive answers, the lowest level within the cognitive domain. However, those who were asked to describe, explain, and create new insights, did achieve the goal of reflecting at all levels of abstraction (Page and Benander, 2014). Other research in reflection also recommends giving students a framework to help them achieve increasingly challenging cognitive tasks. Bowers (2003) notes that instructors should help students with this difficult task, "recognizing the development of reflective ability is highly individualized and creatively cognitive" (p. 64). Approaching teaching cultural perspectives as an exercise in reflection can help instructors find frameworks to teach cultural competency.

In searching for an easily accessible series of reflective questions for students who are leaning to reflect, the following prompt works well (Page and Benander, 2014).

- Describe what is happening.
- Analyze why you think it is happening this way.
- Explain a new insight you have as a result of your observation.

Each item creates knowledge required to answer the next one. This process breaks down the steps into a manageable reflection that relates observation of products and practices, and guides students to begin to hypothesize about the relationship of product and/or practice to cultural perspectives.

### **Choosing the Language of Reflection**

Given that reflection is a complex task, the instructor must consider the students' language proficiency and balance that against the learning outcomes of the cultural perspective lesson. As discussed earlier, students at the Novice or even the Intermediate level are able to describe a product or what is happening in a practice, but the linguistic demands of explaining new insights is beyond their second language linguistic ability. For students at the

Advanced level, or perhaps Intermediate-High level, the challenge of explaining new insights might be a good opportunity to stretch into more complex language constructions required to express themselves. In the 90% target language instruction recommendation (“Use of the target language in the classroom”), conducting the cultural reflection piece in the students' native language for the remaining 10% might allow lower proficiency students to benefit greatly from the activity and further their intercultural development.

### Practical Applications

For the purposes of simplicity, the examples we offer here are in English, but instructors can choose the language of each section of the lesson according to their leaning outcomes and the students' proficiency.

One way to structure a products-and-practices to perspectives lesson is to present an authentic video of products and practices, and then provide a worksheet that guides students to make inferences about perspectives. Here is a lesson that guides students to reflect on the cultural perspectives that underlie Qatari dress.

#### *Sample Lesson: The Ghitra in Qatar*

1. View the video "Five Ways to Wear Your Ghitra (#Qtips, Mr. Q. -- [ILOVEQatar.net](http://iloveqatar.net))" This video is available on YouTube and at <http://iloveqatar.net>.
2. The class views the video together.
3. In small groups, students fill out the observation questions in the first column of the worksheet (see below).
4. The class comes together to discuss as a group, with instructor guidance to help them make inferences, and complete the perspective questions in the second column.
5. Optional: As homework, students write a reflection about what new insights they have about Qatari culture as result of the class discussion.

Table 1: Sample worksheet for "The Ghitra in Qatar" Lesson

Sample Worksheet	
Products	Perspectives
What are the five ways to wear your ghitra?	What does each way communicate about the person wearing it?
What are the three pieces of clothing required to wear a ghitra?	Which piece of the ensemble is the most expressive of who you are?
When do you wear each kind of ghitra?	What is important about each social occasion such that you need to wear your ghitra differently?

What style does Mr. Q wear in the “bonus ghitra” part of the video at the end?	Why would this be the most important style to know about even if it is not frequently worn this way?
What equivalent piece of clothing can you think of in your own culture?	How does comparing the ghitra to a piece of clothing in your own culture make you feel differently about the ghitra or your own piece of clothing?

*Sample Lesson: Oktoberfest in Munich*

1. Students work independently, using the instructions and informational and webcam links on a webquest document, as well as the questions for products, practices and perspectives.
2. The questions are arranged so that students list and describe first, then move to comparison/contrast, and end by summarizing and hypothesizing what they learned, based on what they observed.
3. Students submit the assignment.
4. During the classroom follow-up students describe what they saw, compare the Munich event to a local Oktoberfest, and report what they hypothesized (in English for Novice level and in German for Intermediate level).

Table 2: Sample Worksheet for Oktoberfest Webquest

Sample Worksheet	
Using the following websites, answer the questions within this document. You’ll have to do a bit of searching on these sites to find all the answers, so allow yourself plenty of time to find everything.	
<a href="http://www.oktoberfest.de">www.oktoberfest.de</a> (German site)** <a href="http://www.oktoberfest.de/en/">http://www.oktoberfest.de/en/</a> (English site)** <a href="http://www.oktoberfest.de/en/ressort/Webcams/">http://www.oktoberfest.de/en/ressort/Webcams/</a>	
Products/Practices	Perspectives
What are the dates for the 2015 Oktoberfest?	
In which German city is the original Oktoberfest hosted? Where in Germany is that city located?	
Where in the city is the Oktoberfest held?	
What hours is the Oktoberfest open?	
What does one liter of beer cost (in Euro)?	
Describe the types of food available.	
How much does it cost to get in?	
Who sponsors the tents there?	

Why and when was the first Oktoberfest held?	Why might the Munich Oktoberfest continue to be an important event in Munich and Germany?
What souvenir would you get if you went to Oktoberfest and why?	What souvenir do you think a German would get at Oktoberfest and why?
	<p>Visit one live webcam. (<a href="http://www.oktoberfest.de/en/ressort/Webcams/">http://www.oktoberfest.de/en/ressort/Webcams/</a>)</p> <p>In an essay, address the items.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Describe what you see.</li> <li>-Compare what you saw with what you expected to see.</li> <li>-Explain what you realize about the Oktoberfest event and the role it plays in Munich, Germany and the world.</li> </ul>
	What surprised you about Oktoberfest that you learned during this assignment?

### **Assessment**

In making inferences about cultural perspectives, students may not make accurate inferences since they are just learning the culture. The issue of accuracy may be secondary to learning the process of critical reflection. Certainly misconceptions should be clarified by the instructor or through more in-depth research, but earnest attempts at inference and elaborated reasoning might be good results even if not entirely accurate. Using a rubric to assess these activities includes all three levels of performance. Description, analysis, and insights can comprise the assessment criteria. Depending on the language of production and the proficiency of the students, additional criteria that assess language structures may be added. Here is an example of a general rubric that assesses student production of language around the task of relating products and practices to cultural perspectives (see Table 3).

Table 3: Sample Assessment Rubric for Cultural Perspectives Lesson



	<b>Proficient</b>	<b>Learning</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Absent</b>
<b>Observation</b>	Key elements of the product are recognized and described. How the elements relate to each other is described.	Key elements of the product are recognized and described.	The description is a list of nouns that identifies elements of the product.	Key elements of the product are not described.
<b>Analysis</b>	The practice is analyzed according to how, when, and with whom different elements and behaviors occur.	The practice is analyzed according to how elements and behaviors occur in a specific context.	The practice is analyzed according to one element of the product or behavior in a general context.	The practice is only described.
<b>Insights</b>	A specific cultural value is identified. The products and practices from the observation are used to support the inference of the cultural perspective.	A specific cultural value is identified and generally related to products and practices.	A general value is referred to.	The response describes personal feelings about the practices.
<b>Language Structures</b>	Few Errors	Some errors, but they neither interfere with meaning nor show a consistent pattern.	Consistent errors that do not interfere with meaning.	Consistent errors that interfere with meaning.

The instructor can use such a rubric to assess student worksheets, written reflection, or spoken reflections concerning the activity. In addition, perhaps with some adaptations, students might assess their own work to practice reflecting on their own processes of understanding cultural perspectives.

### Conclusion

Language education should include explicit instruction about the culture(s) associated with the language they are studying. The specific cultural practices and products, as well as the perspectives are not described in detail; rather, they appear in Can-Do statements defined by ACTFL. In the category of cultural instruction, ACTFL recommends that instructors introduce students to products and practices of a culture in order to progress in understanding the distinct cultural perspectives of that culture. For many instructors, bringing products to a class to discuss is fairly straight forward, and explaining specific practices follows easily. Students can identify the products and describe the practices without great effort. However, it is more difficult to help students realize the cultural perspectives, values, or worldviews implied by the products and practices. Some instructors may have difficulty creating activities or assignments that help students with this level of abstraction, or may feel they lack the depth of understanding of the perspectives to be the expert. Nevertheless, using appropriately scaffolded inquiry, involving authentic products and practices, students can gain new insights into cultural perspectives.

Relating products and practices to cultural perspectives can be challenging. For students, they must learn close observation as well as critical inference and reflection. For instructors, they must carefully prepare resources, questions and activities that guide students to make the necessary connections and inferences to see the relationships between products, practices, and perspectives. Treating these kinds of lessons as reflective activities can help with constructing these learning experiences. If we can help our students learn the steps of the process that lead from observation to cultural inference, we give them a valuable tool for more effective cultural learning.

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