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The role of proverbs in developing students' communicative and cultural competence

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The interlacement between language and culture highlights when proverbs from different languages are analyzed. The present work aims to discuss the role of proverbs in the teaching and acquisition of a foreign language. A world-known scholar of paremiology (the study of proverbs), Wolfgang Mieder, defined a proverb as a short, generally known sentence of the folk that contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation [1; 2]. Norrick argued that proverbs are characteristically used to form a complete utterance, make a complete conversational contribution, and/or perform a speech act in a speech event. This differentiates them from non-sentential items like proverbial phrases, idioms, etc. Proverbs make apodictic (expressed as undeniable truth) statements like *Money talks* or they evoke a scenario applicable to a range of analogous situations, as in *Little strokes fell great oaks*. They

provide highly recognizable, (relatively) fixed textual building blocks with unique rhetorical potential [3, p. 14].

According to our definition, proverbs are communicative units, small topical texts. They don't have a title; they are autonomous, and they represent the condensation of the observations of the people. They cover various areas of human life: health, nature, character, relatives/neighbors, officials, chiefs, human hopes, thoughts, laws, and everyday customs. Comprehension of proverbs and related expressions is closely linked to cultural literacy [4, 1998]. Researchers agree that to be culturally literate, people should become familiar with such figurative expressions as proverbs [4; 5; 6]. Communal beliefs and values, ideas about cultural behaviors and actions, cultural symbols, and images are passed on to the younger generations through stories, proverbs, and folk songs [7].

There is clear evidence that proverbs and other types of figurative languages play a significant role in cross-cultural communications and language classrooms. Using proverbs to explore two different cultures can guide students in analyzing the similarities and dissimilarities of cultures. It is also an essential method for students to explore the values often represented in the proverbs of the targeted culture and their own [8]. Such reasons as background knowledge, familiarity with expressions, the context in which the figurative expression is embedded, and academic skills may influence figurative language development. Familiarity with proverbs is a crucial variable to consider for proverb comprehension and processing [6, p. 6]. Furthermore, it assures meaningful communication between foreign and native speakers [9].

Some studies make comparisons between proverbs in different languages, analyzing if there are equivalent proverbs or not and how the meaning is maintained since they usually cannot be literally translated [10;11]. Exploring proverbs in foreign language classes encourages students to think in the target language without translating, adopting figurative language which is full of cultural references from that language. Kímsesiz [12] suggests that presenting proverbs in a comparative way provides more effective teaching, to build a cultural bridge between the native language and the target language.

Hatipoğlu and Can Daşkın [13] show that incorporating proverbs in English Language Teaching can enhance communicative competence besides cultural competence. They explain how proverbs can contribute to the development of each item of Bachman's Model of Communicative Competence: organizational competence (grammatical and textual competence) and pragmatic competence (illocutionary and sociolinguistic competence). Therefore, proverbs should be included in the coursebooks as part of the foreign language curriculum.

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