

FROM GRAMMAR TO CULTURE: REFRAMING FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING THROUGH AN ICC LENS

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Abstract. *The history of foreign language teaching (FLT) methodology is one of successive paradigm shifts, from the grammar-translation method through the audio-lingual and communicative approaches to the complex, culturally oriented frameworks of the present. This article argues that the most consequential contemporary shift is the reframing of FLT through the lens of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The article contends that genuine ICC integration requires not merely the addition of cultural content to existing language courses but a structural reconceptualisation of the objectives, methods, materials, and assessment practices of FLT. A comparative framework and an instructional integration matrix are presented as practical analytical tools for curriculum developers and teacher educators.*

Keywords: *intercultural communicative competence; foreign language teaching; grammar-translation method; communicative language teaching; curriculum reframing; cultural reflexivity; language-culture integration.*

Аннотация. *История методики преподавания иностранных языков представляет собой последовательность сменяющих друг друга парадигм — от грамматико-переводного метода через аудиolingвальный и коммуникативный подходы к современным комплексным культурно-ориентированным моделям. В данной статье утверждается, что наиболее значительным современным сдвигом является переосмысление преподавания иностранных языков через призму межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции (ICC). В статье обосновывается, что подлинная интеграция ICC требует не простого добавления культурного компонента в существующие языковые курсы, а структурной реконцептуализации целей, методов, учебных материалов и оценочных практик преподавания иностранных языков. В качестве практических аналитических инструментов для разработчиков учебных программ и преподавателей предлагаются сравнительная модель и матрица интеграции обучения.*

Ключевые слова: *межкультурная коммуникативная компетенция; преподавание иностранных языков; грамматико-переводной метод; коммуникативное обучение языку; переосмысление учебной программы; культурная рефлексивность; интеграция языка и культуры.*

Annotatsiya. *Chet tillarni o'qitish metodikasi tarixi grammatik-tarjima metodidan boshlab audiolingval va kommunikativ yondashuvlar orqali hozirgi murakkab, madaniyatga yo'naltirilgan konsepsiyalargacha bo'lgan ketma-ket paradigmatic o'zgarishlar jarayonidan iboratdir. Ushbu maqolada chet tillarni o'qitish metodikasidagi eng muhim zamonaviy o'zgarishlardan biri uni madaniyatlararo kommunikativ kompetensiya (ICC) nuqtayi nazaridan qayta talqin qilish ekanligi asoslab beriladi. Maqolada haqiqiy ICC integratsiyasi mavjud til kurslariga shunchaki madaniy mazmun qo'shishni emas, balki chet tillarni o'qitishning maqsadlari, metodlari, o'quv materiallari va baholash amaliyotlarini tarkibiy jihatdan qayta konseptuallashtirishni talab qilishi ta'kidlanadi. O'quv dasturi ishlab chiquvchilari va pedagoglar uchun amaliy tahliliy vosita sifatida qiyosiy model hamda o'quv integratsiyasi matritsasi taqdim etiladi.*

Kalit so'zlar: *madaniyatlararo kommunikativ kompetensiya; chet tillarni o'qitish; grammatik-tarjima metodi; kommunikativ til o'qitish; o'quv dasturini qayta shakllantirish; madaniy refleksivlik; til va madaniyat integratsiyasi.*

Introduction. Language teaching has never been a culturally neutral enterprise. Every methodological choice — the selection of a text, the design of a task, the correction of an error — encodes assumptions about what language is for, who the learner is, and what kind of person successful language learning is expected to produce. For much of the modern era, however, these assumptions remained largely implicit, and the dominant image of the successful language learner was a technically proficient user capable of producing grammatically correct, contextually appropriate sentences. Culture, where it figured at all, was treated as background information: interesting, perhaps, but ultimately supplementary to the real work of language acquisition.

That image has been decisively challenged over the past three decades. The emergence of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as a central construct in applied linguistics and language education reflects a growing consensus that linguistic proficiency, however impressive, is insufficient for effective participation in the intercultural encounters that characterise contemporary professional and social life. The linguistically fluent but culturally illiterate speaker is no longer an acceptable outcome of foreign language education — and, in many contexts, is no longer an economically viable one (Kramsch, 2014).

Yet the theoretical consensus in favour of ICC integration has not been uniformly matched by curricular or pedagogical change. Studies from diverse national contexts continue to document a persistent gap between stated ICC objectives and actual classroom practice (Deardorff & Jones, 2022; Lázár et al., 2007; Xolmatova, 2020). Teachers trained in grammar-focused or communicatively oriented methodologies often lack the conceptual vocabulary, practical tools, and institutional support needed to make cultural learning a genuine curricular priority rather than a decorative supplement.

This article takes that gap as its point of departure. Its aim is twofold: first, to trace the conceptual trajectory from grammar-centred to ICC-integrated FLT, showing not merely that the field has changed but why and how; second, to translate that theoretical account into practical frameworks — a comparative paradigm analysis and an instructional integration matrix — that curriculum developers, teacher educators, and classroom practitioners can apply directly. The analysis is structured according to the IMRAD convention, with separate sections for methods, results, and discussion.

Methods.

Design. The study employs a critical-analytical review methodology. It is not an empirical investigation in the conventional sense; no original data were collected. Rather, the article synthesises theoretical and empirical scholarship from applied linguistics, foreign language methodology, and intercultural communication research to construct an integrated analytical account. This approach is consistent with the tradition of theoretically oriented position papers in language education (cf. Ortega, 2013).

Source Selection and Scope. Primary theoretical sources were selected on the basis of three criteria: canonical status within the FLT or intercultural communication literature; direct relevance to the grammar-to-culture trajectory under examination; and recency, with preference given to revised or updated contributions from the 2010s and 2020s where foundational works have been substantially updated. The resulting corpus spans the foundational critiques of grammar-translation methodology (Sweet, 1899; Jespersen, 1904), the communicative turn (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980; Savignon, 2018), ICC theory (Byram, 1997, 2021; Deardorff, 2006; Kramersch, 2014), and empirical studies of ICC integration in language classrooms (Lázár et al., 2007; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Risager, 2023).

Analytical Procedure. The analysis proceeds in three stages. The first reconstructs the historical trajectory of FLT methodology, identifying the specific conceptual limitations of each paradigm that motivated the transition to the next. The second maps the internal architecture of ICC and its relationship to the four language skills (LSRW). The third evaluates the structural and pedagogical conditions under which genuine integration is achievable, drawing on empirical findings from curriculum implementation studies. Two analytical tools — a comparative paradigm table and an instructional integration matrix — were developed inductively from the literature to support systematic cross-paradigm and cross-skill comparison.

Results.

1. The Historical Trajectory: Three Paradigms and Their Limits. The grammar-translation method, dominant in European language classrooms from the early nineteenth century well into the twentieth, rested on a conception of language as a formal system whose mastery was demonstrated through accurate translation and the analysis of canonical literary texts. Its intellectual lineage was classical philology, and its implicit model of the educated language learner was the humanistically cultivated scholar capable of accessing the cultural heritage preserved in written texts (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The method was sharply criticised by reformers including Sweet (1899) and Jespersen (1904), who argued that it produced learners unable to communicate orally and that its preoccupation with written correctness bore no relationship to the conditions of actual language use. These critiques inaugurated the direct and audio-lingual methods, which prioritised spoken language and habit formation through repetition and drilling — a shift that, however, simply substituted one form of decontextualisation for another.

The communicative turn, consolidated in the 1970s and 1980s, represented a more fundamental reconceptualisation. Dell Hymes's (1972) seminal critique of Chomsky's competence/performance distinction introduced the concept of communicative competence: the knowledge of when, where, and with whom to use particular linguistic forms, as well as knowing how. Canale and Swain (1980) elaborated this into a four-component model encompassing grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic

competence. The communicative language teaching (CLT) movement that followed placed authentic language use, meaningful interaction, and real-world communicative purposes at the centre of the curriculum. For the first time, the social and functional dimensions of language received sustained methodological attention.

Yet CLT, for all its advances, carried its own limitation: a tendency to reduce culture to communicative function and to treat the social contexts of language use as transparent and unproblematic. Learners were taught to perform speech acts — to request, apologise, decline, negotiate — without necessarily understanding the cultural values and assumptions that give those acts their situated meaning. Kramsch (1993, p. 8) identified this as the "fourth dimension" problem: CLT addressed the interpersonal and contextual dimensions of communication but largely neglected the cultural and ideological. The result was, in Byram's (1997) phrase, a "native speaker fallacy" — the aspiration to produce learners who communicate like native speakers, without attending to the intercultural encounters for which most learners actually need their language skills.

The ICC-integrated approach addresses precisely this gap. Rather than treating linguistic proficiency as the goal and cultural knowledge as a supplement, it reconceptualises the competent language user as an intercultural mediator: a person who can navigate the meaning systems of two or more cultures, reflect critically on their own cultural assumptions, and facilitate mutual understanding across cultural difference (Byram, 2021; Elizarova, 2005). Table 1 summarises the key paradigmatic differences across the three eras.

Table 1. Paradigmatic comparison of grammar-translation, communicative, and ICC-integrated approaches to FLT

Dimension	Grammar-Translation Era	Communicative Approach	ICC-Integrated Approach
Primary Goal	Accuracy in written forms	Communicative fluency	Culturally situated communicative competence
Content Focus	Rules, paradigms, canonical texts	Functions, notions, real-life scenarios	Authentic cross-cultural discourse and values
Learner Role	Passive recipient of rules	Active communicative participant	Reflexive intercultural mediator
Teacher Role	Authority; grammar corrector	Facilitator; language model	Intercultural guide and co-inquirer
Error Treatment	Formal accuracy prioritised	Fluency over accuracy	Cultural pragmatic appropriacy foregrounded
Assessment	Written tests; translation tasks	Oral proficiency; task completion	Portfolio; reflective journals; ICC rubrics
Key Theorists	Sweet (1899); Jespersen (1904)	Hymes (1972); Canale & Swain (1980)	Byram (1997); Deardorff (2006); Kramsch (2014)

Table 1 reveals that the shift from grammar-centred to ICC-integrated FLT is not incremental but structural: it affects every dimension of the teaching-learning process, from goal-setting and content selection to learner and teacher roles, error treatment, and assessment design. Importantly, ICC integration does not discard the gains of CLT — its emphasis on authentic use, real-world tasks, and learner agency — but extends them into the cultural and axiological domains that CLT left underspecified.

2. The Architecture of ICC and Its Language-Skill Correlates

Byram’s (1997, 2021) model remains the most widely cited analytical framework for ICC in FLT contexts. It posits five interdependent components: *savoirs de savoir* (knowledge), *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), *savoir apprendre* (skills of discovery and interaction), *savoir être* (attitudes), and *savoir s’engager* (critical cultural awareness). Deardorff’s (2006) process model complements this taxonomy by foregrounding the developmental and recursive character of ICC: it is not a static attainment but a process of continuous deepening, beginning with attitudinal prerequisites (respect, openness, curiosity) and progressing through knowledge and skills to internal transformation and, ultimately, observable communicative effectiveness.

A persistent challenge in translating these models into classroom practice is the question of which ICC components attach most naturally to which language skills. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) argue that this is a false dichotomy — in genuine intercultural encounters, all skills operate simultaneously — but acknowledge that for curriculum planning purposes, a systematic mapping is valuable. Drawing on their analysis and on Celce-Murcia (2014) and Kramsch (2014), the following integration matrix was developed (Table 2).

Table 2. ICC component–language skill integration matrix with instructional strategies

ICC Component	Language Skill Integration	Instructional Strategy
Cultural knowledge & awareness	Reading: authentic texts with cultural subtext	Comparative cultural analysis; annotation tasks
Communicative attitudes (respect, openness)	Speaking: opinion exchange; debate	Structured controversy; Socratic seminar
Discourse & pragmatic competence	Listening: pragmatic inference tasks	Paralinguistic cue analysis; role play
Intercultural mediation skills	Writing: cross-cultural correspondence; genres	Case studies; genre analysis; email scaffolds
Critical cultural reflexivity	Integrated: portfolio; reflective journal	Ethnographic mini-projects; autobiography

Table 2 shows that ICC integration is not reducible to the addition of cultural topics to existing skills instruction. Each cell in the matrix represents a qualitatively different kind of learning activity than those found in conventional grammar or CLT curricula. Comparative cultural analysis of authentic texts, for example, differs from reading

comprehension exercises not only in content but in the cognitive and affective processes it requires: learners must adopt a dual perspective, moving between their own cultural framework and that of the text, and must engage in the kind of critical cultural reflexivity that Byram (2021) identifies as the most advanced component of ICC. Similarly, ethnographic mini-projects require sustained observation, documentation, and reflection — a research orientation quite foreign to the grammar-focused classroom.

Risager (2023) argues that the integration depicted in Table 2 is most durable when it is organised around what she calls "languaculture" — the understanding that every use of language is simultaneously a cultural act, and that cultural learning cannot be segregated into designated "culture lessons" without distorting both the language and the culture. This principle has important curriculum design implications: it suggests that ICC integration must be horizontal (distributed across all language skills and all courses in a programme) rather than vertical (concentrated in a specialist ICC course). Lázár et al.'s (2007) large-scale European study of ICC implementation found that programmes with horizontal integration consistently produced stronger ICC outcomes than those relying on discrete culture modules.

3. Structural and Pedagogical Conditions for Genuine Integration. The literature consistently identifies four structural conditions as necessary for ICC integration to be substantive. The first is curriculum alignment: learning objectives, content, pedagogy, and assessment must all be coherently oriented toward ICC goals. Where assessment remains grammar-focused or where examinations reward formal accuracy over cultural appropriacy, teachers face a powerful disincentive to invest in cultural learning (Byram & Wagner, 2018). The second is teacher competence: teachers cannot develop ICC in learners they have not themselves developed. This places urgent demands on pre-service and in-service teacher education (Fantini, 2020; Xolmatova, 2020).

The third condition is authentic materials: the development of cultural reflexivity depends on genuine encounter with target-culture texts, not merely culture-stripped language samples. Gilmore's (2011) meta-analysis demonstrated that learners working consistently with authentic materials outperformed their peers not only on ICC measures but also on conventional language proficiency measures, suggesting that authenticity is not a pedagogical luxury but a learning necessity. The fourth condition is time and recursivity: ICC development, as Deardorff (2006) emphasises, is not achievable in a single course or a semester. Programmes must provide repeated, scaffolded intercultural encounters across the full length of the curriculum, with each encounter building systematically on the last.

Discussion.

Implications for FLT Curriculum Design. The comparative and integrative analyses presented above carry several concrete implications for curriculum design. Most fundamentally, they suggest that the question curriculum developers should ask is not "how can we add ICC to our existing language curriculum?" but "how can we restructure

our curriculum so that language and cultural learning are mutually constitutive?" This distinction is not merely rhetorical. The additive question leads to solutions such as cultural topic weeks, country-of-the-month projects, or supplementary ICC modules — interventions that may enrich the curriculum cosmetically without changing its fundamental grammar-centred orientation. The reconceptualising question leads to the more demanding but more productive task of redesigning course objectives, task types, materials, and assessments in alignment with ICC goals across the entire programme.

At the classroom level, the integration matrix (Table 2) offers a planning tool that connects each ICC component to specific language skills and instructional strategies. Importantly, several of the strategies listed — structured controversy, Socratic seminars, ethnographic mini-projects, reflective journals — are not specific to language teaching; they are generic active-learning methods well established in other disciplines. This observation has a practical implication: FLT practitioners need not develop entirely new pedagogical repertoires. They need to redeploy familiar strategies in contexts that foreground cultural meaning-making alongside linguistic form.

The Problem of Assessment. The most persistently underaddressed challenge in ICC-integrated FLT is assessment. Conventional language assessments — written tests, grammar quizzes, standardised oral proficiency ratings — are structurally incapable of capturing the attitudinal, reflexive, and developmental dimensions of ICC identified by Byram (2021) and Deardorff (2006). Portfolio-based assessment, which allows learners to document and reflect on their intercultural encounters and the evolution of their cultural understanding over time, is increasingly advocated in the literature (Deardorff & Jones, 2022). Reflective journals, analytical cultural comparison tasks, and peer-assessed role plays that use ICC-specific rubrics offer additional assessment modalities. However, their adoption requires institutional commitment: they are more time-intensive to implement and evaluate than standardised tests, and their validity and reliability must be established through careful rubric development and assessor training.

Limitations of the Present Analysis. This article has several limitations that should be noted. As a theoretical-analytical study, it does not offer direct empirical evidence of the classroom outcomes of ICC-integrated FLT; its claims about pedagogical efficacy rest on secondary synthesis of published research. The comparative paradigm table (Table 1) and the integration matrix (Table 2) are analytical constructs that simplify complex and heterogeneous realities: actual classrooms rarely conform neatly to any single paradigm, and skilled teachers routinely blend methods in ways that resist clean categorisation. Finally, the article does not address the considerable variation in ICC integration across national and institutional contexts, nor the specific challenges facing teachers in resource-constrained educational settings where authentic materials and extended practicum experiences may be difficult to provide.

Conclusion. This article has argued that the reframing of foreign language teaching through an ICC lens represents not a refinement but a reconceptualisation of FLT's fundamental purposes. The shift from grammar to culture — or, more precisely, from grammar as the organising principle of FLT to cultural meaning-making as its animating concern — has been theoretically well-prepared over the past three decades through the contributions of Hymes, Canale and Swain, Byram, Kramersch, and Deardorff, among others. The comparative analysis in Table 1 shows that this shift operates across every dimension of the teaching-learning process, while the integration matrix in Table 2 demonstrates that ICC components can be systematically mapped onto the four language skills and addressed through pedagogical strategies already available in the teacher's repertoire.

The most important practical conclusion is that genuine ICC integration is a structural undertaking, not a curricular add-on. It requires aligned objectives, authentic materials, ICC-competent teachers, longitudinal curriculum design, and assessment practices adequate to the developmental and reflexive dimensions of intercultural competence. None of these conditions is easy to achieve, and their achievement requires sustained institutional commitment alongside individual teacher motivation.

The most important theoretical conclusion is that the grammar-to-culture shift does not represent the abandonment of linguistic rigour but its contextualisation within a richer understanding of what language is and does. Grammar matters — but its significance is fully realised only when learners understand it as a system of culturally embedded meaning-making rather than a set of abstract rules. The intercultural communicative competence framework offers precisely this enriched understanding, and its integration into FLT methodology is not a trend to be waited out but a structural transformation whose time has come.

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