

"TEACHING" A FOREIGN CULTURE: THE CHALLENGE

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It is a known fact that language and culture cannot be dissociated and therefore, the study of a foreign language needs to focus also on the "study" of the foreign culture, that is, of the elements that compose this foreign culture. The issue raised in this paper is precisely that of the difficulty of "teaching" elements of French culture to Sri Lankan students of French. Three main obstacles that bring about this difficulty can be identified:

- The distance between the two countries makes the cultural realities themselves difficult to conceptualize.
- The contact with the French culture is only through video, written documents and the teachers of French, many of who too have not experienced French culture.
- A French community outside of the capital city is almost non-existent. Students therefore do not have the opportunity of interacting with French people.

As part of our research we asked 50 teachers of French if they included the study of French culture in their teaching programme. We also asked them what methodology they used in transmitting or "teaching" French culture to their students. The results obtained varied in the following manner:

- 80% of teachers of French in the State Sector schools said they neglected this aspect since French culture was 'alien' to them. They had never *'lived' or experienced* it.
- 10% said they made reference to French culture in their classes since they had been to France for short-term summer training programmes and were able to explain a minimum of cultural elements. They supplemented their knowledge through reading and by listening to programmes on French television at the Alliance Française.
- Explanations were based on the knowledge acquired by the teacher through reading and this information was given to the students.
- 65% -70% of teachers were faced with the difficulty of selecting passages for study in the classroom. They were unable to explain cultural elements when they figured in the text and were therefore hesitant to use these documents in class.

Culture cannot be dissociated from language. How then can the problem of "teaching" elements of French culture to Sri Lankan students of French be addressed?

Key words: Culture, teach, elements, realities, language, difficulties.