



# TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED DIDACTICIZATION OF CULTURAL CONTENT IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL): SERBIAN, ITALIAN, AND TURKISH CUSTOMS

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## Abstract:

The paper examines the didacticization of cultural content in teaching English as a foreign language by comparing the Serbian custom of *Slava*, the Italian tradition of *Opera dei Pupi*, and the Turkish custom of *Tezhip*. The research aims to show how the application of ICT tools and artificial intelligence platforms can improve the processing of culturally authentic content and contribute to the development of students' intercultural and linguistic competence. The methodology includes four phases of didacticization: visualization, factography, personalization, and linguistic analysis. By applying these phases, students gradually move from basic familiarization with cultural elements to their deeper understanding and linguistic comprehension in context. The results indicate that the use of digital technologies and artificial intelligence increases students' motivation, enabling a more authentic approach to cultural content, and promotes active learning. The challenges indicated relate to the technical availability of resources and different levels of digital literacy. It is concluded that technology-assisted didacticization of cultural content represents an effective teaching model that integrates language, culture, and digital tools into a functional and contemporary educational approach.

## Keywords:

Culture, Customs, Didacticization, ICT, AI.

## INTRODUCTION

Most traditional language textbooks promote the importance of vocabulary and grammar structures, but nowadays, culture has become a central part of contemporary foreign language teaching. Culture has multiple layers; it is around us, always present, and can result in misinterpretation and misunderstandings, revealing the limits of language knowledge [1]. Both teaching and learning involve understanding cultural meanings, values, and practices. Cultural content contributes to developing intercultural communicative competence, which enables learners to interact effectively and appropriately in diverse cultural contexts [2]. When students learn about traditions and customs, they gain confidence in the process of interacting with people from other cultures. Once students acknowledge that Serbia, Italy, and Turkey are much more than nightlife, beaches, athletes, pasta, and fashion, they are more confident and demonstrate better performance in all language skills. Teachers should encourage them to do so [3].

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In the era of digital technologies and AI, language teachers are becoming cultural guides, promoting intercultural skills and helping students understand cultural nuances rather than teaching the language itself. The development of digital technologies and AI-supported platforms has provided new prospects for enhancing foreign language teaching and learning [4]. The rapid advancement of technology brings about a significant transformation in English language learning. Technology and AI-supported tools are used to create new content, including text, images, and computer programmes [5]. The paper explains how Serbian, Italian, and Turkish customs —*Slava*, *Opera dei Pupi*, *Tezhip*—can be adapted into classroom activities using digital platforms, multimedia resources, and AI-based tools. This paper is written using a qualitative approach. Language learning activities are designed to nurture both language skills and intercultural competence. It is shown that technology facilitates the development of cultural awareness.

## 2. BASIC CONCEPTS

The didacticization of cultural content in English language teaching refers to different aspects of language: linguistic, didactic, and intercultural principles. CEFR, as an international standard for describing language ability on a six-point scale, from A1 (beginner) to C2 (mastery) [6], delivers structure, while flexible and contextually adapted approaches enable teachers to prepare students for successful communication within a global cultural environment [7]. Professor Jean-Claude Beacco from the University of Nouvelle Sorbonne in Paris was commissioned in 2004 to develop a framework that includes cultural competence in foreign language teaching [8]. His model includes four levels of cultural content:

- Cultural content as a reflection of discrete, more or less scattered cultural elements,
- Informative, analytical, and statistical texts, as well as any other type of narrative, which allow the interconnection of factual knowledge (related to objects, phenomena, and processes in reality);
- Linking the overall context with specific, including incidental, events in a causal or chronological sequence.
- Intertextual interpretation of elements of reality (allusions, wordplay, and other forms of verbal creativity) [7].

This approach goes beyond simple fact-learning and encourages the analysis of discourse and the interpretation of cultural patterns. Plurilingual and intercultural education are aspects of teaching and learning that are promoted by the Council of Europe, and the aim is to develop both language and intercultural skills along with personal growth. This approach encourages learners to reach their full potential through the acceptance and respect of different languages and cultures in a multilingual and multicultural society [9]. Discursive pragmatics, as defined by the German linguist Klaus Altmajer in 2007, focuses on language use in real communicative situations and emphasizes that culture is expressed through observable cultural forms. According to Altmajer, culture can be seen as a connection of textual and discursive meanings, shaping how we interpret the shared reality based on socialization patterns [10]. The following sections illustrate practical examples of Serbian, Italian, and Turkish cultural phenomena, such as Opera dei pupi (in Italian), Serbian custom *Slava*, and Turkish custom *Tezhip* by implementing AI and ICT.

### 2.1. THE DIDACTIZATION OF SERBIAN CULTURAL CUSTOM: SLAVA

*Slava*, as the most significant family holiday, the foundation of origin and identity, is a universal but primarily religious and traditional Serbian custom [11]. Incorporating *Slava* into foreign language instruction enhances linguistic proficiency while fostering intercultural awareness and promoting plurilingual education. The didacticization of this cultural phenomenon can integrate conventional pedagogical methods with ICT tools and artificial intelligence to facilitate active learning at the B2 level. This lesson is created for the students whose mother tongue is neither Serbian nor Italian. It is an English as a Second Language lesson.

The lesson plan is designed according to the B2 level descriptors (for schools) [12], which implies the average age of the students is 16 to 19 years. During the class, the students are allowed to use classroom computers or mobile phones. Several ICT tools are used during this class, such as YouTube, PowerPoint, Teams, and Quizizz. The class is conducted through the Teams platform, which implies a hybrid approach, so it can be attended both online and in person.

- First of all, the teacher uses a PowerPoint presentation and the projector; the lesson objectives are elicited as a part of the first slide, where the short YouTube video, which shows *Slava*'s customs, is



posted [13]. This refers to the first phase of didactization – visualization [9]. Students learn about Slava at the beginning of the lesson by watching the video about the main parts of the celebration. This visualization phase helps students understand the cultural context. After the video, Mentimeter or Teams chatbox may be used to collect students' associations and impressions about the video, while AI tools such as ChatGpt or Gemini can provide simplified explanations or generate visual examples that support comprehension. The teacher facilitates the process of creating the prompt together with students in order for the information generated by AI platforms to be clear and to prevent AI hallucinations [14]. If needed, the teacher clarifies and explains the key elements of the custom.

- In the factography phase, the students are reading the text about Slava [15]. The text is posted on Teams in the form of an assignment for the students who attend the class online and copied for the students who attend the class in person. Students read and analyze the text about the origins of the Serbian Slava custom, focusing on key elements of the tradition such as the candle, ritual bread, wheat, and family gathering.
- The personalization phase is the point where students determine if their own cultural background can relate to the tradition of Slava by comparing it with family or religious celebrations from their cultures. Using digital tools (Google Slides or Chalkie.ai), they create presentations, while AI applications support brainstorming, organization of ideas, and language accuracy.
- During the last phase, the teacher provides worksheets, and the students are expected to analyze the short text about the custom, to elicit phrases, greetings, and short conversations used during the ceremony. The objective of the task is the comprehension of how language can convey cultural and ritual meaning.

## 2.2. THE DIDACTIZATION OF ITALIAN CUSTOM: *OPERA DEI PUPPI*

The puppet theatre known as the *Opera dei Pupi* emerged in Sicily at the beginning of the nineteenth century and enjoyed great success among the island's working classes. The puppeteers told stories based on medieval chivalric literature and other sources, such as

Italian poems of the Renaissance, the lives of saints, and tales of notorious bandits [16]. The approach of didactization is similar. The lesson is designed for C1 level students, university level. The lesson is designed to enhance the cultural awareness of the students.

- The English language lecturer plays the video about the custom as a part of the first phase – visualization [17]. After that, the students are discussing and eliciting the most important features of the custom, typing in the chatbox of Teams for the students who attend the class online and orally in person during the class.
- During the factography phase, the students are reading the article about the custom, eliciting key elements of the traditions such as: puppet theatre, knightly epics, handcrafted puppets, oral storytelling, traditional craftsmanship, heroic narratives, live narration, music accompaniment, intergenerational transmission, Sicilian cultural identity [16].
- The personalization phase is the point where students try to connect the tradition of *Opera dei Pupi* to their own cultural backgrounds. The students compare traditional elements of their own cultures to key cultural elements of the given custom: the creation of wooden puppets, manual work, knights, heroes, villains, and moral lessons. Using multimodal platforms such as Google Slides and Chalkie.ai, they create presentations in order to develop ideas, facilitate the organization of these ideas, and check language correctness.
- Linguistic analysis phase implies that students read a blog about *Opera dei Pupi* [18] to determine phrases, idioms, and vocabulary in general that describe the atmosphere of this custom. The students are advised to use effective reading strategies (skimming and scanning) to read short text about the custom and answer multiple-choice questions. The objective of the task is to motivate students to develop an understanding of how language is used to convey historical and cultural meaning within a specific artistic context.

## 2.3. THE DIDACTIZATION OF TURKISH CUSTOM *TEZHİP*

Tezhip, or the illumination, is a centuries-old decorative art performed on the pages of manuscripts, calligraphic texts, and miniatures [19]. Historically associated with the religious decoration, particularly of the Qur'an, Tezhip represents both aesthetic sophistication



and spiritual symbolism. The lesson plan is designed for B2-level university students to develop intercultural competence and cultural awareness.

- During the visualization phase, the English language lecturer presents a video [20], eliciting the most important parts of it, illustrating the process of creating Tezhip artworks, including stages such as design, gilding, and painting. Students observe visual elements such as symmetry, colour alignment, and floral patterns. After the video, students identify the most important features of the custom, and they are actively engaged in the learning process orally in class or via chat on the Microsoft Teams platform for online participants.
- Next phase is factography phase, students read a descriptive text about Tezhip, eliciting key elements of the tradition such as: manuscript illumination, arabesque patterns, gold leaf application, traditional craftsmanship, floral motifs, artistic discipline, historical continuity, and its role in Ottoman cultural identity.
- The third phase is the personalization phase, during which the students relate the tradition of Tezhip to their own cultural backgrounds by comparing it with decorative arts or symbolic visual expressions from their cultures. As there are various aesthetic principles, students identify similarities and differences, the use of symbolism, and cultural significance. Students are encouraged to recall a tradition or custom they are familiar with.
- In the final linguistic analysis phase, students read a blog about Tezhip [21] to determine key vocabulary, collocations, and descriptive language that refer to the artistic and cultural aspirations of this tradition. They then complete reading comprehension tasks, including multiple-choice questions, to reflect on the given content.

### 3. IMPLICATIONS AND POTENTIAL CHALLENGES

The teachers or lecturers are both facilitators and coordinators who monitor students' performance while they use AI platforms and ICT tools. It is of crucial importance that the teachers emphasize the critical use of AI tools and support students in checking and interpreting the generated information [22].

The didactization of the cultural content encourages personal engagement and strengthens intercultural competence, as students reflect on similarities and differences between different cultures. Using AI platforms and ICT tools can facilitate the process of adopting and understanding different cultural features because they promote active learning and collaboration [23]. Students' learning is at the centre of adopting new concepts. By using ICT tools and AI, students are encouraged to think rather than passively receive information from teachers. The teachers provide opportunities for students to build knowledge and understanding in response. Active learning, which is an integral part of the described didactization phases, inevitably increases students' motivation. The students are proactive, and they are in control of the learning process [24]. Interactive activities provided by ICT tools and AI platforms deepen the understanding of complex cultural and linguistic concepts [25]. Moreover, active learning activities facilitate the process of reflection, and students can apply learned concepts to real-life situations with greater ease, which means that they can easily compare the features of the given Serbian and Italian customs to the features of their own culture [26]. These insights illustrate that active learning strategies support the process of retention.

On the other hand, using ICT tools and AI platforms raises different concerns. One of the challenges is the lack of technological infrastructure within the institutions. The financial support needs to be significant; unfortunately, it is not always possible [27]. In addition, for many teachers it is difficult to use new tools and platforms and adapt the traditional methods they use to new circumstances [28]. Professional and tailored development for the teachers is crucial. In order for this problem to be resolved, teaching development programs need to be financed by the educational institutions. In addition, digital tools are developed in English, which can be an obstacle for non-native speakers to use. Not all of the teachers are competent to implement ICT and AI tools; therefore, frustrations and low motivation can occur [29]. When critical thinking is taken into consideration, it can also be challenged by using ICT and AI tools. The use of ICT and AI tools may replace deeper thinking because the complexity of both linguistic and cultural aspects of the content cannot always be easily adopted, and often the users begin to rely on quick answers instead of analyzing, evaluating, and verifying information themselves [30].

The results of this paper indicate that the integra-



tion of ICT and AI tools into EFL classes can contribute to the development of cultural content didacticization and intercultural language skills. Integrating these four stages of didacticization creates a functional and logical didactic framework that enables a gradual deepening of the understanding of cultural phenomena, from their basic acquaintance to a more complex analysis in a linguistic and cultural context. The usage of ICT and AI tools increases students' motivation since they are more actively engaged in the process of learning. In addition, this approach enables teachers to create tailored worksheets to address various students' needs. Didacticization of cultural content means that the culture is at the centre of the learning process and that the culture is systematically included in foreign language teaching; also, the development of digital literacy is a positive aspect of this approach.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The didacticization of cultural material in teaching English as a foreign language, based on a comparison of the Serbian custom *Slava*, the Italian tradition *Opera dei Pupi*, and the Turkish custom *Tezhip*, demonstrates the importance of integrating cultural content into contemporary teaching practice. The application of ICT tools and artificial intelligence has enabled an innovative and interactive approach to the processing of authentic cultural elements, making the teaching process more dynamic and accessible to students. The didactics process was implemented through four phases – visualization, factography, personalization, and linguistic analysis – which enabled a gradual deepening of understanding of cultural content, from basic familiarization to critical linguistics and cultural analysis. This approach has a significant impact on the development and adoption of language structures in an authentic context. Although certain obstacles have been detected, such as technical issues, levels of digital literacy, and funding for teachers' professional development programs, the advantages of this approach are significant. They are evident in greater student motivation, proactive participation in class, and a deeper understanding of cultural key features. Technology-assisted didacticization of cultural content is an effective model of contemporary teaching that combines language, culture, and digital tools into a single, functional, and student-centered educational process.

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