

Teaching World Languages: A Practical Guide

Chapter 11: Comparisons

The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century*, (2006), are the guidelines of foreign language instruction in the United States. The fourth standard, Comparisons, emphasizes the importance of comparing the home language and culture with the language and culture of the new language being studied. (For more information about the Standards, go to Chapter 2: [Standards for Foreign Language Learning](#).)

When students make Comparisons they activate existing knowledge and set it alongside their new knowledge. They draw parallels, consider the different ways of doing or saying the same thing, and finally gain insight into why people of the other culture do and say certain things. The two portals to



Fig. 11-1-1 ©Madartists

insight are through language and through culture. When students are able to make comparisons, they are better able to function in the other culture without making serious errors of language, action, or comprehension. In addition, the study of another language clarifies for students the way in which their native language functions and exemplifies how U.S. English reflects U.S. culture.

A major goal of incorporating the Comparisons Standard into our everyday teaching is to open the culture of the foreign language to our students, giving them direct access to it. Comparing the similarities and differences encountered in authentic situations will help form a solid foundation for continued study of foreign languages.

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Standard 4:1 Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.

Standard 4.2: Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.*

*from *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (2006)

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Objectives and Assessments

Objectives based on the Comparisons goal areas are different from other objectives because they explicitly require reflection and analysis of language and culture. It also is the only area where students reflect on their home language and culture.

The comparison of cultures can be included in almost any activity you design. By asking for reflection, analysis, and comparison of cultural practices or products, you are inviting the students to focus on culture and giving them a tool to deepen their understanding.



Fig. 11-3-1 ©Wordle

Vocabulary and Grammar

By asking students to reflect, analyze and compare languages, i.e. grammatical and semantic structures, you are inviting the students to develop their own understandings of how both English and the target language work. The understanding is the result of the students' own reflection and analysis, not simply a result of learning rules or vocabulary taught by the teacher. This subtle distinction has important implications for instruction. It suggests that teachers include inductive techniques to teach grammar by having students figure out rules from examples rather than always using direct instruction.

Encouraging students to reflect on their own language, English, and compare it to the target language is a very effective way of teaching English grammar. Many American students say they did not understand English grammar until they studied another language. Comparisons between word meanings, alphabets and phonetic systems also deepen students' understanding of their own language as well as the target language.



Fig. 11-3-2 ©Daniel Gilbey

Learning Objectives

Learning objectives for Comparisons are developed in the context of Communications and Culture objectives. Too often the Comparisons Standard is left out of curricular planning. When that happens, students learn language and culture, but they do not necessarily have the opportunity to reflect on and analyze what they have been learning. Also, the important insights they can gain about their own culture and language and about the nature of language and culture are not addressed.

Learning objectives drive all instruction. *Content objectives*, such as those described in the Standards, describe **what** students should know, and *performance objectives* describe **how well** students should be able to perform. The teacher identifies learning objectives for the course, thematic units, and lessons. Developing thematic units is an essential step in your instruction. For more on thematic units, go to Chapter 3: [Planning Instruction](#).



Fig. 11-3-3 ©SWCockey

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In the case of foreign languages, we develop objectives based on the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (2006), which include making comparisons with other languages and cultures. When you compare language learning experiences to other languages and cultures, you need to make sure your content objectives also address the standards of the other disciplines.

Once you have determined the learning objectives for a course, unit or lesson, including the Comparisons objectives, you can develop your assessment. Along with your assessment, you can develop a way to grade or evaluate student performance on the assessment.

We will continue to use an example unit on food for Grade 9 students of the first year of target language study to demonstrate how you can first plan objectives, then assessment, and then activities.

Content Objectives – WHAT students should learn

Content objectives for Comparisons are linked to the *enduring understandings* for the year and the unit. These are “big ideas,” often related to the culture of the language under study. The students explore them mostly in the target language. For more on enduring understandings, see Backwards Design in Chapter 3: [Planning Instruction](#).

Standards-based content objectives are different from the traditional language learning objectives. They describe *functions*, what students can do with the language, rather than specific grammar points or vocabulary. The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (2006, in press) provide *sample progress indicators* for students for each standard at various levels of proficiency, including Comparisons. The progress indicators are all functions, descriptions of what the students can do with the language. These can guide you in developing realistic objectives for your students. The progress indicators are provided for four levels of study, Grade 4, Grade 8, Grade 12, and Grade 16 (senior in college) on the assumption that the students have been studying the same target language since Grade 1. Since this is not usually the case, teachers can approximate what progress indicators are appropriate for their students by adjusting the years of study and then choosing functions that are appropriate (and of interest) to their students.

- Progress indicators for Grade 4 are appropriate for students who have studied the target language in grades K-4, 5-8, or 9-10.
- Progress indicators for Grade 8 are appropriate for students have studied the target language K-8, 7-12, or 9-12.
- Progress indicators for Grade 12 are appropriate primarily for students who have studied the same target language K-12.
- Progress indicators for Grade 16 are for highly advanced students.

For more on Standards and some examples of sample progress indicators, see Chapter 2: [Standards for Foreign Language Learning](#).

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Below are some sample Content Learning objectives for Comparisons for a first-year, 9th Grade class studying a unit on food. The objectives have been developed using the progress indicators for Grade 4 and Grade 8 students.

Sample Content Learning Objectives for Connections

Example Content Learning Objectives:

Grade 9

Year 1

Thematic Unit – Food

Enduring Understanding – There are similarities and differences in the everyday lives of people living in different cultures. There are similarities and differences between people of different cultures in the food they eat, and when and how they eat it.

Comparisons Objectives for Food Unit:

Students will be able to:

- use target language expressions and idioms to describe target language foods, and be able to compare them to similar English expressions,
- use proper table manners and expressions during a target culture meal and compare them to manners at a U.S. meal,
- talk about passing food to people using correct structural forms, such as direct and/or indirect objects or the imperative, in the target language, and then compare the target language forms with English, and
- compare and contrast traditional foods in the U.S. and target language countries.

Yummy == Oishii
So-so == Maa Maa
Yuck == Mazui



Fig. 11-5-1 ©Pixabay

These objectives are selected as areas where we felt it would be especially fruitful for students to take the opportunity to reflect, analyze and compare languages and cultures. Another teacher might choose different activities to focus on in a unit. Students could help choose what questions or areas they would like to compare and contrast across languages and cultures. What is important is that the students learn the processes of reflecting, analyzing and comparing languages and cultures.

Assessment

Teachers give students an assessment at the end of each thematic unit that measures students' progress on all the goal areas of the Standards and on the three modes of communication together. This is a *summative assessment*. Usually it is an *integrated performance assessment* where the students demonstrate how well they can do what they have learned to do during the unit.

You cannot always include all your specific objectives for each goal area of the Standards in your summative assessment, but you can include formative assessment within the unit activities

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to help you evaluate how well the students are able to meet all objectives. Formative assessments are ongoing assessments that you use every day to check student progress and understanding such as observations, quizzes, checklists, or your review of homework. For more on assessment, go to Chapter 4: [Assessment](#).



Below is a sample summative, end of unit, performance assessment of general progress for Grade 9, Year 1 class studying a food unit (We use the same summative assessment in the discussion of each of the standards.)

Fig. 11-6-1 ©SWCockey

Sample Summative Assessment

Students will work in groups to prepare presentations on the traditional foods of different target language-speaking countries and how they are eaten.

1. Each group will research the traditional foods of one country or region. A teacher handout with a series of key questions (in the target language) will guide their research. Resources may include (all in the target language) recipes, menus, short descriptions of foods, videos, pictures, advertisements, interviews, going to a restaurant that serves food from the region, going to a target culture grocery store, or cooking some dishes.
2. In the target language, students in each group will share their information and design a presentation for the class on the traditional foods of their region and how they are prepared and served. The teacher can encourage the students to be creative in developing presentations that will be of interest to the class. These could include skits, PowerPoint presentations, demonstrations of cooking and/or eating, videos, recipe books, etc.
3. Students give their presentations in the target language. Each student in each group participates. Presenters should be prepared to answer questions from other students after the presentation. Each student will listen and view the presentations of the others, take notes, and complete another handout that summarizes the content of all the presentations.

Performance Criteria –HOW WELL students should be able to do what they learn

Having clear criteria for what you expect students to be able to do and how well you expect them to do it is a huge asset in the language classroom. The *ACTFL Performance Guidelines for Grades K-12* (1998) include expectations for the three modes of communication: “Cultural Awareness,” but there are no criteria for how well students can incorporate Comparisons in language performance. There is no rubric for Comparisons in the *ACTFL Integrated Performance Assessment* manual, but using the sample progress indicators from the Standards, it is possible to develop a rubric that can help students (and the teacher) have concrete expectations for student performance. In practice, on any specific activity that involves making Comparisons, you have a rubric for the communication mode used in the activity with some Cultures criteria. In addition you can add sc specifically describe student performance in making comparisons.



Fig. 11-6-2
©SWCockey

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Sample Rubric for Comparisons for First Year students in Grade 9 Studying a Food Unit. This rubric is for an activity where students learn idiomatic expressions related to foods in the target culture and then compare to English.

Criterion	Exceeds Expectations 3 points	Meets Expectations 2 points	Does Not Meet Expectations 1 point
Able to use idiomatic expressions about food in the target language	<p>Can use most studied idiomatic expressions correctly in learned contexts and</p> <p>Can extend to unlearned contexts (different dishes or experiences).</p>	Can use most studied idiomatic expressions correctly in learned contexts.	Cannot use many of the idiomatic expressions related to target culture food.
Able to identify similar idiomatic expressions in English	<p>Can identify some similar expressions in English, and</p> <p>Can talk about how idiomatic expressions work in general.</p>	Can identify some similar idiomatic expressions in English.	Cannot identify idiomatic expressions in English. May not understand meaning of “Idiomatic expression.”
Able to identify similarities and differences in idiomatic expressions	<p>Can identify some general similarities and differences in the idiomatic expressions across languages, with or without help and</p> <p>Can speculate on what the differences tell us about perspectives.</p>	Can identify a few general similarities and differences in the idiomatic expressions across languages, with help.	Is not able to address similarities and differences in idiomatic expressions across languages, even with help.

You should communicate these expectations to your students by giving them the rubric before they start activities. The rubrics should be part of the activity, not just brought out at the end.

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Materials

Comparisons are inevitable when studying another language and culture. Integral to this process is making a comparison between the new and the known, resulting in the understanding that there is more than one way to resolve a need or to communicate an idea, thus broadening the students' worldview. The study of another language clarifies for students the way in which their native language functions and exemplifies how language reflects the culture.

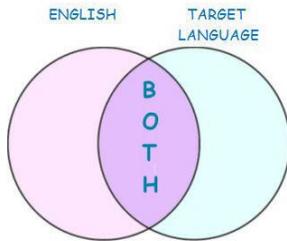


Fig. 11-8-1 ©SWCockey

Graphic organizers can help students in making comparisons. Particularly helpful is the Venn diagram. For on-line resources for this and other useful blank forms, go to [Resources](#) at the end of this module. A good resource for other types of graphic organizers may be found at the Fresno (CA) Unified School District's History-Social Science Department web page. <http://www.fresno.k12.ca.us/divdept/sscience/graphicorgan.htm>

Items to consider:

As for any theme or standard that you are presenting, the materials you use should be authentic, made by and for the target language community. Keep in mind the proficiency level of your students, as well as their interests and age. The challenge for you is to locate materials that are cognitively sophisticated for your students, but within their linguistic skills. Be sure to consider materials that are not text heavy:

- graphs, maps, posters, advertisements, and the like, will offer visual cues that will help with the meaning,
- topics with which your students have had some experience, or that are within familiar contexts, will enable some personalized identification with the material, making it easier for the students to own the information,
- formats the students are already using in other contexts will enable quicker understanding of the material since they know how to manage the manner of presentation.



Fig. 11-8-2 ©Eljay

Ideas for integrating comparisons into lessons:

The Internet is a rich resource to be regularly sounded for current materials. Below are some ideas to help you get started on integrating Comparisons into your daily lessons.

Music:

- Sounds of eastern (Asian), classical, traditional, folk, popular
- Instruments (Museum of instruments in Phoenix is good resource)
- Ways in which music is written

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Art, Architecture:

- Styles of architecture: what characterizes which style?
Similarities between eastern & western, Arabic & gothic
- Subject matter
- Decorative elements
- Dimensionality – ways in which depth are achieved on 2 dimensions



Fig. 11-9-1 ©Rob Williams

Sports:

- Popularity of same sport across cultures
- Variations in rules from one culture to another in same sport
- Most popular/least popular
- Unique to culture

Around the house:

- Use of hot water
- Use of ice to chill foods, drinks
- Daily Routines
- Meals, foods consumed



Fig. 11-9-2 ©Bazyuk

Clothing:

- Materials & fabrics
- Styles
- Colors
- Body covering

Social behaviors

- Greetings
- Formality vs informality
- Age
- Role of man, woman

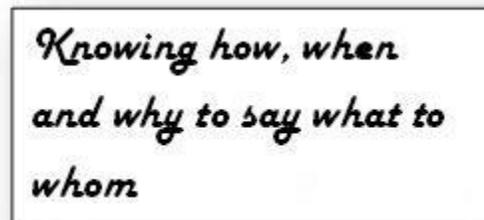


Fig. 11-9-3 ©ACTFL

What determines much of the above?

- Climate
- Availability of raw materials
- Social etiquette

Refer to the Materials section of Chapter 9: [Teaching Cultures](#) for additional ideas and resources. In addition, Chapter 10, [Teaching Connections](#), will have some relevant materials for you to consider.

Activities

Most of the activities we describe in this guide are for a thematic unit on food, and designed for a first year, Grade 9 class. We do this to illustrate that all the standards can be used to address a single topic, and to demonstrate that even first year learners can use the target language to do meaningful tasks with the language. The procedures in each activity can be adapted to any topic, and to any age or level of proficiency in the target language. In the activities we refer to materials, such as videos, that would meet the specific needs of the activity for this class. In reality, the materials you can find, adapt, and create will largely determine the details of your activities. We know that finding just the right materials is a very hard task, and will take up a lot of your time. At the end of each chapter is a list of resources, and the final chapter provides a summary of resources and references.

As you develop your activities, be sure to have a variety of opportunities, from a variety of sources, which encompass many different learning styles and expose your students to a variety of traits that will enable comparing and contrasting. There are two essential elements in the Comparison Standard: that of language and that of culture. Be sure to address both.

Activities that compare languages...

...should investigate the nature of the languages, the way ideas are expressed, and the culturally appropriate context in which ideas are expressed.

- Students can explore the social context of using the target language even in contexts as simple as greetings. They can compare, for example, situations in which they might use formal phrases to ask *How are you?* with those in which they would use a familiar phrase such as *What's up?*
- Students can explore cultural perspectives using idiomatic sayings. The use of color terms is a useful place to begin. Cooked food turns brown in English, but red in Arabic; an angry person's face is red in English, but black in Arabic.
- Students can compare specific parts of speech, such as indirect object pronouns or the impersonal subject, across languages to see how the two languages deal with the same linguistic issue.



Fig. 11-10-1 ©Perrush

Passing Food at the Table – Using Object Pronouns

Some grammar can be taught inductively as well as through direct instruction. You can set up an activity so that students will be able to figure out a grammar rule, rather than giving it to them through direct instruction first. To do this, you can ask the students to use the learning strategy Finding Patterns, and then present examples of usage that allow them to induce the rule. They will, of course, be using their background knowledge about language, another learning strategy, and for U.S. students, that will be their knowledge of English. When students figure out a pattern for themselves, they tend to remember it better. As always, we recommend that grammar be

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taught in a meaningful context. This activity is designed for a 9th Grade, first year class that is studying a unit on food. They are learning about food, eating a meal, and proper table manners in the target culture world. They are preparing to do a role-play about a formal meal with invited international target language-speaking guests. The language will be formal. The grammatical Language Comparison focuses on “what to say when you are telling someone to pass the food to someone else” in a formal context, without repeating names, i.e. using object pronouns.

1. Find a video where a lot of indirect object pronouns are used in a formal context. You might want to ask some native-speaking friends to act out a scene of a formal meal with guests where they use a lot of object pronouns. Record the scene on video.
2. Develop a handout with a sentence in in the target language such as “please give Xxxx the rice,”. Then reproduce the sentence with names in parentheses and a blank where the object pronoun would go. Have only one sentence for each pronoun, and list singular and plural forms separately. This is not practice but will be the students’ reference sheet for indirect object pronouns. Create another similar handout with English sentences and blank spaces for the English indirect object pronouns.
3. Tell students the objective of the activity – to figure out how the target language refers to people in sentences like “Please pass the salad to Dr. Björnson” without saying “Dr. Björnson,” and share how you will evaluate this activity.
4. Ask the students to fill out the pronouns using the English handout. (Please pass me the tortillas; I pass you the tortillas, pass him the tortillas ...) Ask them if they see any patterns. You might want to have the students create a table in their notebooks of person (I, you, he, she) by singular and plural. Remind them that even though they might not know the names of the parts of speech in English or be aware of grammar, that they use these patterns every time they speak and listen. Also remind them that the target language has patterns also, and that on the basis of what they already know.
5. Tell the students that “Finding Patterns” is a learning strategy that they can use to figure out the patterns of how the target language works. (You may need to use English to talk about the learning strategy.) It is like working out a puzzle.
6. Show the students the video, model the use of the pronouns, and let them work in pairs to deduce how to fill in the master sheet. You may help with spelling and you may coach and give hints, replay sections of the videos, several times if necessary, but do not give the answers. Let the students struggle with the evidence, make mistakes, self-correct, and come up with their own answers. Usually in the end they can figure out the rules.
7. Bring the class together and compare handouts. At this point make sure that the students have correct model sentences for later reference. Give any general feedback to the class.
8. Have the students compare the pronouns across the two languages. This may require a detour into English for Novice students. Are there similarities (i.e. changes in gender and number and person)? Are there differences? Do the similarities tell us anything about the cultures? Do the differences tell us anything? Be careful not to let the conversation veer towards stereotyping. Encourage the students to think about what this comparison might tell them about English-speaking culture and language.



Fig. 11-11-1 ©Dragonimages

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Perhaps one of the most important lessons for U.S. students in making grammatical comparisons is learning that English has a grammar, but it is not the only possible grammar. Many people say that they never really understood what grammar is or what it means until they learn another language.

Activities that compare culture...

...such as the example below, can investigate authentic materials and situations in order to identify similarities and differences. This enables the students to make sense out of the new culture and ultimately become more comfortable with and in it. The students end up with a broader worldview. The Internet and personal interviews are valuable tools to achieve this end.



Fig. 11-12-1 ©Lftan

Comparing Table Manners

This activity would be part of a food unit for first year students of the target language in Grade 9 who have already learned some vocabulary about food and studied the language for over six months. It would be part of preparing for a role-play of a target culture family having a meal with guests. The students will be asked to demonstrate proper table manners during their role-play, demonstrating understanding of the cultural practices around eating food. To encourage students to reflect, analyze and deepen their understanding of these practices, we will ask them to compare target culture and U.S. table manners, seeking similarities and differences in eating rituals. How to conduct a role-play activity is described in the Activities section of Chapter 6: [Interpersonal Communication](#). The objective of the activity described here is that students will be able to compare and contrast essential principles of table manners in the target and U.S. cultures.

1. Explain the objective of the activity to the students and share how you will assess their progress with them.
2. In preparing your students for a “family meal with guests” role play you will show them various models of target language-speakers having meals. You may want to select several specific principles of good manners that you feel are essential to the target culture. Find one or more authentic videos that demonstrate these practices in authentic contexts. They might be clips from TV programs, or informational programs, or videos of family events. If you use these videos, help students understand that there is diversity in good manners. You may want to do some modeling yourself for the class.
3. Prepare and give the students a handout that asks questions in the target language that will focus their attention on the table manners you want them notice in the videos, such as “How do they peel an orange?” “Do people put their hands on the table or on their laps when not using them for eating?” “Did you see anyone eating with their left hand?” “What do people do when they want something they can’t reach?” “Who is served first?”



Fig. 11-12-2 ©Hajime Nakano

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“How do they manage the fork and knife when cutting and eating meat?” You should make questions that can be answered easily by the students.

4. Review the questions on the handout with your students and help them with any questions they do not understand. You may need to do some acting to make your questions clear.
5. Show the students the videos and help them fill out the handouts as they discover the practices in the videos. Do not give answers, but be a coach. You can give hints, verify guesses, and replay specific scenes. Allow students to search for the information themselves. This usually means multiple viewings of the same scenes.
6. Once most of the students have answered the questions on their handouts, bring the class together and go over the answers to the handouts. You can ask individual students to demonstrate the meaning of the answers.
7. Give students another handout with the same questions in English about table manners in the U.S. There might not be agreement about exactly what are good table manners, but this will just underline the fact that there are differences in all cultures.
8. Ask the students to work in pairs. Give them a Venn Diagram, a graphic organizer of two overlapping circles (see [Resources](#) at the end of this chapter). Ask the students to compare the information they have about “good manners” in the target cultures and in U.S. culture. They should list similar behaviors in the part of the diagram where the circles overlap. Then, if they have observed any differences they can write the target culture practices in one circle and the U.S. practices in the other circle. Ask them to think and talk about what the similarities tell us about the two cultures. What might the differences tell us about the cultures? Bring the class together to share observations of similarities and differences. You may want to discuss the implications for perspectives of the two cultures. If the students are Novice or Intermediate Low, this discussion will probably need to be in English. Remind students of the dangers of stereotyping, both of the target and U.S. cultures.
9. To assess students’ understanding of the comparisons between target culture and U.S. table manners you can review their handouts and you could ask them to work in pairs to develop short scenarios that demonstrate the principles on which you have focused. For example, the scenario could be a target culture teenager helping his/her American friend prepare for a family meal in the home.

Breakfast

This activity is for the 9th Grade, first year class described above. In this activity the students learn about the similarities and differences in a common ritual, breakfast, across cultures.

1. Ask students what they ate for breakfast for the past few days. Select typical answers and write down three or four in English.
2. Tell the students (in the target language) that when you were in (whatever target language country in which you have traveled or lived) you would sometimes eat... (list here some



Fig. 11-13-1 ©Warrenpricephotography

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3. typical target culture breakfast foods, some familiar and similar to the foods the students eat and some unfamiliar, or not usually eaten in the U.S. for breakfast, such as rice, cold cuts, green salad, vegetables, cheese, olives, or sardines.). Show pictures of the foods, real foods, ingredients – whatever you can that is concrete – to teach a limited amount of selected vocabulary. Students can copy the vocabulary, or you could give them a handout.



Fig. 11-14-1 ©Nito100

4. Translate any important English words from Step #1 that you have not introduced in Step #2. Give students a handout entitled “Breakfast” with a Venn diagram, two overlapping circles. One circle can be labeled, “target Language Countries” (or the country you have told the students about), and the other “U.S.” The overlapping space can be labeled “Both.” Ask the students to copy the names of foods into the appropriate circle. They can work in pairs or groups.

5. Bring the class together. Ask the students if breakfast is the same or different in the U.S. and target cultures. How is it the same? How is it different? What strikes them as strange about target culture breakfasts? What might strike a target language speaking person as strange coming to the U.S. and having breakfast with a family? Would the students feel comfortable having breakfast with a target culture family? Could they become used to a different daily routine? You may need to detour into English for this discussion after you have reviewed what is the same and what is different. In “Comparisons” discussions, it is always interesting for the students to hear about your experiences and reflections on the similarities and differences in the cultures of your travels. You serve as an important role model for the students as a global citizen.



Fig. 11-14-2 ©moomoobloo

6. The students can then divide into groups to each write a letter to an imaginary target language student coming to visit the U.S. to tell them about the U.S. breakfast, what will be familiar and what will be unfamiliar. You can give model sentence structures such as, “In the U.S. some things we eat for breakfast are the same as what you eat, and some are different. As in (imaginary student’s country) we eat xxx, yyy, and zzz for breakfast. We also eat aaa, bbb, and ccc. I like to eat xxx, but I don’t like bbb for breakfast. If it is pertinent, this could also be a good time to remind your students that in many cultures people do not eat certain foods, and the target culture students should be informed about what dishes contain those foods and which do not, in case they do not want to eat it.
7. The students can read each other their letters in the groups and then hand them in for you to use for evaluation.

8. Follow-up activities can include reading a target culture menu that includes some of the breakfast foods, looking for the familiar vocabulary; writing letters as the imaginary target language student to tell the U.S. students about breakfast in their country; writing a real letter or blog for target language students to read about U.S. breakfast; and looking at target language advertisements that include foods for breakfast. A wonderful follow-up activity, if you have the time and resources and perhaps a parent to help, is to bring in food for a “tastes of a target culture breakfast” session. This is particularly effective if you pair the tasting with specific language



Fig. 11-14-3
©Naomi Hasegawa

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activities such as commenting on whether the students like or dislike the foods, and asking for, or offering others, specific foods. Students can photograph the breakfast foods, label them, and make a little booklet about breakfast in the target language world.

For additional ideas for comparing and contrasting language and culture, see [Appendix A](#).

Learning Strategies: What the Learner Does

Language learning strategies, such as those described above in the activity on identifying indirect object pronouns, are the thoughts and actions of students that they use to improve their learning of a language. Teachers can help students to use effective learning strategies by instructing them in what learning strategies are, when they are appropriate, and how to use them. For more on teaching learning strategies, see Chapter 1: [Essential Concepts](#).

Learning strategies that can be particularly useful in making comparisons across languages and cultures are *Using Background Knowledge*, such as students using knowledge of their first language to work out the structures of the target language; *Transfer*, which refers to transferring what you know across languages or disciplines; and *Find/Apply Patterns*, which refers to discovering a rule or using a rule. *Personalize* is also an important strategy in making comparisons since using it means the student not only makes an intellectual comparison, but truly relates concepts in the new cultures to her own feelings, beliefs and experiences.

Use Background Knowledge is a strategy where students use whatever they know to help them figure out meaning in a foreign language. This can be broader than transferring specific knowledge or skill.



Fig. 11-16-1 ©Wordle

Transfer is a strategy where students apply what they know in one context or discipline to another context or discipline. This can include content, linguistic knowledge, or skill.



Fig. 11-16-2 ©SWCockey

Find/Apply Patterns is the strategy that students use when they look for repeated patterns to try and deduce a rule. This is particularly useful in discovering and remembering patterns of grammar.



Fig. 11-16-3 ©SWCockey

Personalize is an important learning strategy that helps students understand the perspectives of other cultures. To use Personalize, a student needs to relate information about a target culture perspective to his/her own life, experiences, beliefs and feelings. This leads to experiencing and understanding a target culture point of view.



Fig. 11-16-4 ©Luanateutzi

Teaching Strategies: What the Teacher Does

Be sure you provide your students with a wide variety of opportunities for exploring the differences between their home and new cultures, for resolving those differences, and for successfully navigating through an encounter in the new culture.

Some general techniques for teaching Comparisons

With proficiency being the guiding light for our teaching, all of the activities must actively involve the students in their learning. These activities need to provide opportunities for students to discover and make comparisons in a variety of situations, using a variety of materials. Additionally, glimpsing how something is said or done in the new language or culture should provide insight into the students' own home language and culture. This is particularly true with the grammatical structure of the language. Students regularly tell their foreign language teacher that they understand better how object pronouns work in their native language because of having studied them in their foreign language classroom.

In a proficiency-oriented and learner-centered classroom, students

- spend a lot of time actively engaged in using the language,
- make comparisons based on discussion with other students,
- determine how they demonstrate the comparisons they have discovered.

Some general guidelines for how students will achieve these objectives are:

- *Accessing authentic information in both languages*
The teacher locates and provides access to a variety of materials that contain opportunities for students to make comparisons between the two languages or cultures. Be sure to include print, audio, visual, and kinesthetic materials.
- *Comparing the ways the two languages express similar ideas*
Students look at words, phrases, and structure to see how the different languages express the same ideas. For example, in English one says, "I broke the glass." In some languages, one may say "The glass broke."
- *Comparing the structure of the two languages*
Students look at the organization of the language to understand the grammatical structure. For example, in English, one says "the white house" while in another language one may say "the house white." A speaker of English might interpret the structure in the other language to indicate that the noun (house) has more importance than the adjective (white).

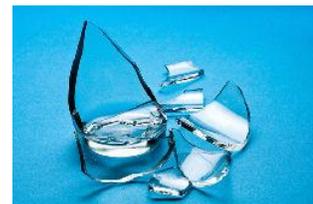


Fig. 11-17-1 ©Libux77



Fig. 11-17-2 ©SWCockey

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- *Looking carefully at various solutions to similar problems or needs*
These problems or needs are elements of the life-style of the two cultures. How do they/we organize their/our day? How does clothing differ? How does food differ? Why?
- *Using multi- and inter-disciplinary materials*
The Internet is a rich source for finding items and concepts to compare. They can be advertisements, songs, posters, books, or anything else.



Fig. 11-18-1 ©Elizabeth Burkhard

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References, Resources, Images, and Credits

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Resources:

Adair-Hauck, B. Glissan, E.W., and Troyan, F. *Implementing Integrated Performance Assessment*. Alexandria VA: ACTFL. Available at:
<http://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/implementing-integrated-performance-assessment>

This manual explains how to carefully create summative performance assessments that connect each of the three modes. The publication includes examples from Novice through Advanced levels.

Clementi, Donna and Terrill, L. (2013). *The Keys to Planning for Learning: Effective Curriculum, Unit, and Lesson Design*. Alexandria VA: ACTFL.

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The publication provides a template and several examples of units built around summative performance assessments in each of the three modes of communication (Interpretive, Interpersonal, and Presentational). At the ACTFL publication website, several unit samples and the blank template may be downloaded:

<http://www.actfl.org/publications/books-and-brochures/the-keys-planning-learning>

Daily Teaching Tools. *Free Graphic Organizers for Teaching Literature and Reading*. [Items for 1 grade through Advanced]. Available at: <http://www.dailyteachingtools.com/free-graphic-organizers.html>

edHelper.com *Graphic Organizers: Venn Diagrams, Concept Maps, Writing, Character, Reading*. Available at: http://edhelper.com/teachers/graphic_organizers.htm

Fresno Unified School District. *Graphic Organizers*. Available at: <http://www.fresno.k12.ca.us/divdept/sscience/graphisorgan.htm>

The Fresno (CA) Unified School District, History-Social Science Department, has a collection of graphic organizers that are applicable to a variety of ways to compare and contrast information and concepts.

Manis, Chad. Daily Teaching Tools. *Graphic Organizer Tools*. [Items for grade 1 through Advanced]. Available at: <http://www.dailyteachingtools.com/>

Musical Instruments Museum. (2014). Available at: <http://mim.org/>
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National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC). *Developing Autonomy in Language Learners*. Available at: <http://nclrc.org/guides/HED/index.html>
This is a learning strategies guide for the higher education level.

National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC). *Elementary Immersion Learning Strategies Guide*. Available at: <http://nclrc.org/eils/index.html>.
This takes a look at the various strategies children use to learn a foreign language in an immersion setting.

National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC). (2007). *The Essentials of Language Teaching*. Available at: <http://nclrc.org/essentials/index.htm>
This site gives an introduction to the language teaching methods in use. Contains sections on the principles, practice, and examples of language teaching.

National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC). (2007) *Sailing the 5 C's with Learning Strategies*. Available at: <http://www.nclrc.org/sailing/index.html>.
Includes resources on integrating strategy instruction into a language lesson. Learning strategies charts are available in multiple languages in the Appendices. Twenty learning strategies are highlighted.

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The REALIA Project. *Rich Electronic Archive for Language Instruction Anywhere*. Available at: <http://www.realiaproject.org/index.html>

The goal of the REALIA Project is to develop and implement a searchable digitized media database which will provide instructors of modern languages with teaching resources accessible via the Web. The project seeks to increase through collaboration the quantity of high-quality teaching and learning materials by providing a respected venue for media projects. Faculty review images.

Scholastic, Inc. *Graphic Organizers for Reading Comprehension*. Available at http://www.scholastic.com/browse/search/teacher?query=graphic+organizers&as_values_09497=&channelOnly=true

Images:

11-1-1	Comparisons - Dogs	© Madartists Dreamstime.com ID 4867162 Silhouette Big Dog Little Dog
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11-14-2	Breakfast Norwegian	© moomoobloo Flickr Img 4930 Northern Breakfast
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11-16-2	Knowledge Transfer	Design by: SW Cockey
11-16-3	Find Pattern	Design by: SW Cockey
11-16-4	Personalize	© Luanateutzi Dreamstime.com ID 34242472 Close-up On Artist Hands Personalizing A Clay Jug By Writing The Name Of A Person.
11-17-1	Broken Drinking Glass	© Libux77 Dreamstime.com ID 30195606 Broken Glass
11-17-2	White House	Photo by: SW Cockey
11-18-1	Clothing Dolls	Photo by: Elizabeth Burkhard

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Appendices

Appendix A: Additional ideas for comparing and contrasting language and culture

Comparing Language

- Identify cognates
- Identify English words derived from the target language
- Compare noun/adjective and subject/verb agreement between the two languages
- Compare basic word order of sentences
- Compare forms and use of pronouns
- Compare idioms from various parts of the target-language speaking world
- Compare how language indicates social distinctions – register
- Compare how language and interpretation can lead to misunderstandings
- Identify how language has changed through the 20th century and into the 21st century

Comparing Culture

- Compare lifestyles of target language immigrants with those of other immigrants
- Compare the role of family members
- Compare living arrangements
- Compare newscasts and other TV programming
- Compare art of the same period in each culture
- Compare business practices in the two cultures
- Compare health care in the two cultures
- Compare dietary practices
- Compare attitudes about school
- Compare children’s books

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Appendix B: Sample Rubric for Comparisons

Sample Rubric for Comparisons for first year students in Grade 9 studying a food unit. This rubric is for an activity where students learn idiomatic expressions related to foods in the target culture and then compare to English.

Criterion	Exceeds Expectations 3 points	Meets Expectations 2 points	Does Not Meet Expectations 1 point
Able to use idiomatic expressions about food in the target language	Can use most studied idiomatic expressions correctly in learned contexts and Can extend to unlearned contexts (different dishes or experiences).	Can use most studied idiomatic expressions correctly in learned contexts.	Cannot use many of the idiomatic expressions related to target culture food.
Able to identify similar idiomatic expressions in English	Can identify some similar expressions in English, and Can talk about how idiomatic expressions work in general.	Can identify some similar idiomatic expressions in English.	Cannot identify idiomatic expressions in English. May not understand meaning of “Idiomatic expression.”
Able to identify similarities and differences in idiomatic expressions	Can identify some general similarities and differences in the idiomatic expressions across languages, with or without help and Can speculate on what the differences tell us about perspectives.	Can identify a few general similarities and differences in the idiomatic expressions across languages, with help.	Is not able to address similarities and differences in idiomatic expressions across languages, even with help.