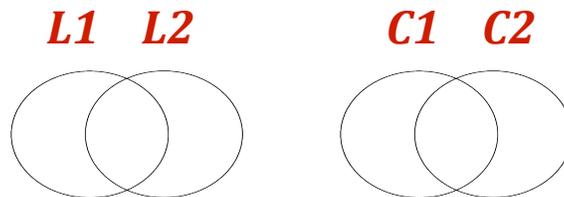


Sound Bites for Better Teaching: *Blinkers in English is a Winker in French*
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Linguistic & Cultural Comparisons



The Comparisons Strand of the Foreign Languages National Standards is designed to help the students see the similarities and the differences that exist between L1-L2 and C1-C2. It's important that students understand that there are no value judgments being made and that differences are not seen as negatives. It's rather an opportunity to delve into the mind of those from another culture and to try to see the world through a different set of eyes. To counteract the complaint from students that "That makes no sense" or "That's stupid," I often used the following example to indicate that there are some things that we Americans say in English that seem to make no sense: In English we use the word " blinkers" to indicate the directional lights on a car. But, when one blinks, one closes both eyes. However, the French say *le clignotant*, i.e., the winker, which involves only one eye. When turning left or right, how many lights are turning on and off? Just one. So, which one makes more sense?

Self Evaluation (no right or wrong answers)

- When making comparisons, do you tend to do them in English or in the target language?*
- How adept are you in predicting the problem areas because of L1-L2 grammatical differences?*
- When making cultural comparisons, do you try to explain the reasons behind the differences?*
- How up-to-date is your knowledge of the target culture?*
- Do you visualize the comparisons with the help of graphic organizers?*
- When making comparisons, do you focus on the differences more than on the similarities?*
- How do you combat the students' negative attitudes towards the target culture?*
- How do you avoid projecting an "us vs. them" attitude when comparing C1 and C2?*

TIP

Before introducing the target culture, ask each student to list 10 characteristics of American culture. Then, in groups of 3-4, have them list the 10 they all agree on which they will then share with the class. Are there any differences among the groups? Does everyone agree with all the findings? Then, ask the class to identify what an American is based on the group findings. Finally, the class will discuss the difficulty in determining exactly what defines the cultural characteristics of a people.