

## Title: Bridging Cultures: My Journey Through International Experiences

### INTRODUCTION

In language learning, reflective thinking and multiculturalism play complementary roles to each other. Reflective thinking helps learners look back on and improve their learning processes, and multiculturalism makes language learning richer and deeper. Integrating these two approaches allows learners to develop not only language skills, but also cultural understanding and sensitivity. Through this seminar, I thought deeply about reflective and interculturalism and I came to think about the power of sharing food. First, the concept of the words I understood is as follows.

**Reflective:** Reflective practice plays a crucial role in the process of learning a language. Through reflective thinking, learners can analyze their learning methods, progress, strengths, and weaknesses, and use this analysis to develop more effective learning strategies. For instance, if a learner struggles with understanding a specific grammatical structure, they can reflect on what the problem might be and how they can approach it differently. Additionally, reflective thinking allows learners to review their language use experiences, such as conversations in a foreign language, and identify what went well and what needs improvement. This ongoing self-assessment helps learners continuously enhance their language skills.

**Interculturalism:** In language learning, interculturalism emphasizes understanding the cultural context in which the language is used, not just the words and grammar. A language is more than a collection of vocabulary and rules; it is a cultural artifact that reflects the ways of thinking, customs, and values of its speakers. An intercultural approach enables learners to study the culture alongside the language. This makes language learning richer and more meaningful and equips learners with the ability to communicate effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. For example, a student learning Korean who participates in a kimchi-making event gains a deeper understanding of Korean culture, illustrating how cultural experiences are vital to language learning.

**MEANING OF SHARING FOOD:** Sharing food has many meanings. First of all, Sharing food is an expression of social solidarity. eating delicious food with together is one of the important ways of interacting and communicating. Second, In many cultures, food acts as a cultural link. Sharing food can lead to sharing religions, cultures, and traditions. These can help strengthen bonds with family and friends, and build social relationships.

## My experiences

### EPISODE 1-1. In UK

Almost 10 years ago, I was an exchange student in the UK. I was lonely and had a hard time because I was unfamiliar with foreign life. But it was nice to make a lot of good friends. I have experience making special food because my classmate invited me. They kissed me lightly on both cheeks. I think the menu was steak, salad and mashed potatoes. I was not fluent in English at the time, but I could understand all their conversations. It's probably because they spoke slowly and easily for me. Even after a long time, from ingredients to sharing food together, the memories of that moment remain warm in my heart. Sharing food means a lot. This experience motivated me to become better at English learning. If I have a chance, I would like to fluently tell them my story.



### EPISODE 1-2. In UK

I had a Spanish friend in my class, and her name was Christina. She is playful and we spent a lot of time together outside of class. We made many interesting memories. For example, we made Nutella sandwiches and shared them, and we watched soccer games together in downtown.



It was the program day of the suburban tour. We sat next to each other on the school bus. In the middle of a pleasant conversation, she asked me a question. "Why are you making um~ sounds? What do you mean?" I was embarrassed, but I explained. What I want to say to you comes to mind in Korean, but it takes time for me to translate it into English. She said, "It's the sound you make when people eat delicious food in our country. You need to be careful not to use that sound when you talk. I got upset and panicked to think that she always bothered my filler sound in our full conversations. At that time, I decided that I should be a person who is very good at English.

There are two main types of academic motivation: positive and negative stimuli. Positive stimuli include reward systems, self-actualization, interest and passion, and social recognition, all of which enhance a student's desire to learn. On the other hand, negative stimuli involve punishment systems, fear of failure, social pressure, and negative feedback, which also drive students to study. While both positive and negative stimuli can be effective, positive motivation is generally more desirable for long-term academic success and psychological well-being. But it seems that negative stimuli have been more effective for me.

## EPISODE 2. Kimchi Making with Anas & Javzmaa jane

I have international student friends who are interested in Korean culture. One was Syrian and the other was Mongolian. They were curious about the real life of Korean families that they saw in the drama. Last fall, the kimchi-making season, I invited my friends to my house. They were so amazed and fun because it was their first time to experience it in person. I was the interpreter for smooth communication with each other. I wasn't too worried because it was a group of friendly people. Especially, it was so impressive to see my parents and my friends, who were not good at English, communicating naturally through body language and some words. At some point, I felt that I didn't need any more interpretation.



They helped each other and made more than 100 cabbages into kimchi. The work was difficult, but everyone finished with smile. After that my mother cooked and shared it for all of us. We enjoyed the time. My parents wanted my friends, who would be lonely in a strange place, to adapt well in Korea. Even now, I often ask how they are doing. I feel like we became a family together at making kimchi event.

## The Interview

I conducted a brief interview to write this document. . The questions I prepared are as follows.

Q1. could you explain what kimchi is and why it's significant in Korean culture?

Q2. what are your initial thoughts on this experience?

Q3. from a reflective standpoint, how does participating in this process influence your understanding of Korean culture?

Q4. how has this intercultural experience impacted your perspective on cultural exchange and learning?

Q5. why do you think activities like this are important for fostering intercultural understanding?

Q6. what has been the most surprising or impactful part of this experience for you?

Q7. would you consider incorporating any aspects of this experience into your own cultural practices or sharing it with others back home?

There are two interviewees, and I summarized the answers.

### 1. Anas from Syria

Participating in making kimchi gives me a deeper appreciation for Korean culture. It's not just about the food but also about understanding the traditions, the communal effort, and the respect for preserving history through culinary practices. It's a humbling and enriching experience.

Activities like this are crucial because they go beyond surface-level knowledge. They allow for meaningful interactions and exchanges, where people can learn from each other and appreciate the depth of different cultures. It's a way to build bridges and foster mutual respect.

The most surprising part has been realizing how much history and tradition are involved in making kimchi. It's not just a recipe but a reflection of Korean values and history. The communal aspect of the process is also very impactful; it's about working together and sharing stories.

Thank you for this opportunity. It's been an enriching experience that I'll definitely remember and share.



## 2. Javzmaa from Mongolia

It's been very eye-opening. Engaging in this activity allows me to see the value in hands-on cultural exchange. It's one thing to read about another culture, but actually participating in a traditional activity like this fosters a deeper understanding and respect. It's a powerful way to learn and connect.



I think there's a lot to learn from the communal and reflective aspects of kimchi-making. I would love to share this experience with my friends and family in Spain and perhaps even try making kimchi with them. It's a wonderful way to connect and appreciate different cultures. Thank you so much! I've learned a lot and have a newfound appreciation for Korean culture. This has been a truly memorable experience.

To summarize : When my family and foreign friends make kimchi together, the experience can be analyzed from a language education perspective as follows:

### 1. Practical Language Learning

- Vocabulary Acquisition: Participants learn new vocabulary related to the ingredients, tools, and processes of making kimchi. For example, terms like "cabbage," "red pepper powder," "salt," and "to brine" are introduced and practiced.
- Understanding Sentence Structures: Explaining steps such as preparing ingredients, making the seasoning, and brining the cabbage helps learners understand and use sentence structures naturally. For instance, sentences like "After brining the cabbage, you need to apply the seasoning" are used.

### 2. Cultural Understanding

- Cultural Context: Participants gain insight into kimchi-making as an integral part of Korean culture, understanding its significance in family traditions and winter preparation.
- Cultural Comparison: Making kimchi together allows for comparing food preparation methods from different cultures, fostering a deeper understanding of each other's cultural practices.

### 3. Interaction and Communication

- Enhancing Communication Skills: Various situations arise during kimchi-making that require communication, such as handling ingredient shortages, adjusting the brining time, or fine-tuning

the seasoning taste. This collaborative effort enhances language skills.

- Non-verbal Communication: Gestures, body language, and facial expressions are used to complement verbal communication, especially when language barriers exist.

#### 4. Social Learning

- Collaboration and Teamwork: Kimchi-making is a collaborative activity, teaching participants the value of teamwork and social learning through cooperation with foreign friends.

- Patience and Perseverance: The lengthy process of making kimchi helps participants learn patience and perseverance.

#### 5. Integrated Language and Cultural Learning

- Integrated Experience: Making kimchi provides a holistic experience where language learning is deeply embedded in cultural practice. Participants see firsthand how language learning becomes more effective when it is contextualized within cultural activities.

## CONCLUSION

Sharing delicious food with local friends in a foreign country offers a profound lesson in reflective practices and interculturalism. This experience underscores the power of food as a universal language that transcends cultural boundaries, fostering connection and mutual understanding. Through these shared meals, I was able to reflect on my own cultural assumptions and biases, gaining a deeper appreciation for the diversity and richness of the host culture. This process of reflection not only enhanced my self-awareness but also highlighted the importance of open-mindedness and empathy in intercultural interactions. Ultimately, these moments of culinary exchange reinforced the idea that embracing and celebrating our differences can lead to meaningful and enriching human connections.