

Developing Intercultural Awareness through Representations of Christmas Culture in German Supermarket Advertisements

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to reveal the relevance of German Christmas cultural representations in Christmas-themed supermarket advertisements as intercultural learning materials. Actual materials that reflect the culture in context are needed so that learners can effectively improve their intercultural understanding. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, content analysis was applied to German supermarket advertisements published in 2024 entitled “Magische Weihnachtszeit” (Lidl) and “Feiert Weihnachten, wie ihr wollt” (Edeka). Both advertisements can be viewed on YouTube, which provides easy access to the video advertisements as learning materials. The selection of Christmas-themed advertisements was based on the similarity between annual celebrations in Germany and Indonesia, namely the celebration of Eid al-Fitr. This similarity makes it easier for learners with an Indonesian cultural background to reflect on cultural perspectives, thus enabling more effective intercultural learning. It was found that the Lidl and Edeka advertisements can be used as alternative culture-based learning materials because they contain cultural representations that can train students' understanding of sociopragmatic and sociolinguistic concepts, cultural practices, and cultural features. According to the CEFR, these concepts are key to intercultural understanding. The results show that Lidl and Edeka advertisements can be used as material for intercultural learning. The German Christmas culture represented in Lidl and Edeka advertisements can help learners, especially those at levels A2 to B2, to strengthen their understanding of the language and culture.

KEYWORDS

Intercultural Competence; Advertisements; German Christmas

INTRODUCTION

Language is a communication tool that is closely related to social and cultural contexts. The use of language in a global context enables intercultural encounters, giving rise to the concept of intercultural communication (Samovar et al., 2017). Intercultural communication is studied to strengthen linguistic understanding in the context of language learning (Oberste-Berghaus, 2024). Therefore, language learning needs to incorporate cultural understanding and appropriate intercultural communication learning.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a framework that assesses language proficiency and language use in social and cultural contexts. The CEFR explains that the key concepts of intercultural understanding include the ability to recognize sociopragmatic and sociolinguistic cues, as well as to recognize similarities and differences in cultural practices and cultural events (Council of Europe,

2020). By having intercultural understanding, learners can increase their motivation to learn, strengthen their interpretive and reflective abilities regarding cultural meanings, and understand the social context in language use (Iswandari & Ardi, 2022). In addition, cultural understanding can reduce misunderstandings and potential cultural conflicts, as well as broaden one's perspective on the values and viewpoints that develop in other cultures (Li, 2025).

To develop intercultural understanding, learning materials that are integrated with cultural understanding are needed. The materials used in learning should clearly demonstrate cultural aspects so that learners gain relevant understanding of cultural practices in real-life situations. According to Davidovich et al., (2023), active discussions about texts, audio, graphics, and films are efforts to improve intercultural understanding. Therefore, culture-themed advertisements can be a choice of intercultural learning material, because advertisements are a combination of text, audio, and visuals in a short duration. Thus, culture-themed advertisements become material that is integrated with language learning, so that learners can understand the content of the material and apply language functions correctly (Ardiyani et al., 2024).

Advertisements with strong cultural elements can be found around important festive days. For example, in Indonesia, around Eid al-Fitr, advertisements usually relate to traditional customs such as food, clothing, and activities typical of Indonesian society. Similarly, Christmas-themed advertisements in Germany depict how Christmas is celebrated and the Christmas atmosphere in Germany. This occurs because in the advertising creation process, local cultural aspects are often highlighted as a way to attract consumers' attention (Shambodo et al., 2025). Thus, culture-themed advertisements can be a source of culture-based learning, supporting the development of intercultural understanding. Previous research by Ulfah & Rosmiati (2024), shows that advertisements provide concrete visualizations of cultural contexts, so that cultural learning can be more effective. In addition, research by Aprillyanto & Suhartini (2022) also shows that advertisements contain cultural representations, as well as messages to preserve culture. The findings of Tirnaz & Haddad Narafshan (2020), show that the use of advertising media in language learning can increase cultural sensitivity. Previous findings emphasize that advertisements can be an alternative to intercultural learning materials.

This study aims to explore the relevance of cultural representations in German supermarket advertisements to intercultural learning. The focus of the study is on its relevance to intercultural competence as described in the CEFR framework. Through the analysis of advertisements, this study seeks to help German language learners understand the use of language in a real cultural context, specifically the Christmas culture in Germany. Christmas culture was chosen based on the similarity of cultural characteristics, where Christmas and Eid al-Fitr are two major celebrations that influence the national culture of a country (Solikhin et al., 2025; Spennemann & Parker, 2021). Thus, learners with an Indonesian cultural background can engage in a more reflective and effective learning process.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is a qualitative study with a content analysis approach. The data in this study are cultural elements in Lidl and Edeka advertisements, which are included in key concepts in improving intercultural understanding. These key concepts include sociolinguistic aspects, sociopragmatic aspects, cultural practices, and cultural features (Council of Europe, 2020). In this study, documentation techniques were used to collect data. Data collection was carried out by identifying scenes that contained Christmas cultural elements, then describing their cultural context. In addition, data in the form of verbal sentences

containing Christmas cultural elements were presented in the form of speech transcripts.

The data were analyzed through six stages of content analysis according to Krippendorff (2004). In the unitizing stage, the units of analysis selected in this study were images and verbal sentences in advertisements. This was followed by the sampling stage or the determination of the videos to be analyzed, namely the 2024 Christmas-themed advertising videos from Lidl's YouTube channel entitled "*Magische Weihnachtszeit*" and advertisements from Edeka entitled "*Feiert Weihnachten, wie ihr wollt*".

In the recording stage, data units and their descriptions were recorded. In addition, the data was simplified by reducing data that was deemed irrelevant to the research objectives (reducing). After the data was collected, an analysis was conducted to see the relevance of the findings to the theory (abductively inferring). In the final stage, namely narrating, the researcher presented the results of the analysis that had been conducted on the data.

Researchers have an important role in this study, as they are the main instruments responsible for collecting data, analyzing data, and drawing conclusions from the data. To facilitate the analysis process, researchers use research instruments in the form of documentation guidelines and analysis tables. The documentation guidelines table is used to collect data, while the analysis table is used to review the relevance of cultural representation to intercultural learning according to the CEFR.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the 2024 Lidl and Edeka Christmas-themed advertisements, cultural elements were found that are included in sociolinguistic cues, namely "*frohe Weihnachten*", which is a typical Christmas greeting in Germany. The sociopragmatic cue found was the sound of bells at Christmas, which signifies the time of Christmas Mass. There are also representations of cultural practices in the Lidl and Edeka advertisements, which include traditional Christmas foods, traditional Christmas activities, and traditional Christmas decorations in Germany. In addition, cultural features regarding the belief in the presence of *Weihnachtsmann* on Christmas Eve are also found in the advertisements. Thus, using the Lidl and Edeka advertisements as discussion material can strengthen language comprehension while broadening intercultural awareness.

Recognizing Sociopragmatic Cues

Sociopragmatic cues refer to the ability to recognize cultural signals and apply them appropriately in social interactions. By understanding cultural signals, individuals can understand how to behave when interacting, especially in different cultural environments. Sociopragmatic cues are found in Lidl advertisements.

Table 1. Table of Intercultural Learning Relevance Analysis

Cultural Representation	Meaning	Relevance of Intercultural Learning
The sentence "Wenn die Glöckchen leuten, wunsch dir was." (When the bells ring, make a wish.)	The sound of bells is a call to attend Mass at church.	B2: Can describe and evaluate their own cultural perspectives and those of others, and understand the hidden values that underlie prejudices.

Sociopragmatic instructions regarding Christmas Mass are closely related to religion and cultural rituals. Religion is a system of symbols that shapes the inner atmosphere and motivation of humans, linking them to images of a meaningful order of life (Geertz, 1993). In the context of Christmas Mass, the sound of bells serves to create an atmosphere of peace, hope, and joy for Christians. Through the ritual of Christmas Mass, the everyday

world and the world of faith can be connected, so that the birth of Jesus is commemorated with a symbolic ritual.

Ritual is a form of belief that is manifested through action (Geertz, 1993). Through the Christmas Mass ritual, Christians can directly demonstrate and strengthen their faith. This is because the Christmas Mass embodies values such as hope, love, and humility, which are part of the order of life desired by God. Thus, the Christmas Mass ritual serves as a reflection of the reality of Christian faith.

To improve intercultural understanding, learning materials that contain pragmatic instructions are useful for training accurate communication responses. At level B2 in the CEFR framework, learners are expected to be able to evaluate other cultural perspectives and understand the hidden values that underlie prejudices. The sound of bells is a symbol of faith in Christmas culture, while praying and making wishes when hearing Christmas bells are acts of faith. By studying sociopragmatic cues, learners can understand the values contained in Christmas Mass rituals and demonstrate appropriate reactions when in similar situations.

Recognizing Sociolinguistic Cues

Sociolinguistic cues refer to social signs and agreements in communication that have been adopted by groups of people in a particular culture. Cultural agreements such as greetings, rituals, farewells, and nonverbal aspects such as formal and informal registers are part of sociolinguistic cues. Sociolinguistic cues in the form of typical Christmas greetings in Germany can be found in Edeka advertisements.

Table 2. Table of Intercultural Learning Relevance Analysis

Cultural Representation	Meaning	Relevance of Intercultural Learning
The sentence “ <i>Frohe Weihnachten</i> ” (Merry Christmas)	<i>frohe Weihnachten</i> is a typical Christmas greeting that expresses empathy for others during the Christmas celebrations.	A2: Can perform greetings, farewells, and express gratitude and apologies appropriately, although still experiencing difficulty when situations deviate from routine.

The sentence “*frohe Weihnachten*” is a typical Christmas greeting in Germany. In this context, “*frohe Weihnachten*” is a seasonal greeting that encapsulates attitudes, values, and religious beliefs. According to (Geertz, 1993), a well-functioning religion has characteristics and messages that are meaningful to its adherents. The sentence “*frohe Weihnachten*” is a characteristic of Christmas in Germany, which contains the meaning of hope that Christmas will be celebrated happily. In this case, the greeting “*frohe Weihnachten*” describes the harmony between religious beliefs and the Christmas situation in Germany.

The appearance of the greeting *frohe Weihnachten* in Edeka advertisements has pedagogical potential. At level A2 in the CEFR, learners are expected to be able to use greetings appropriately, even in situations that differ from routine ones. The expression *frohe Weihnachten* in Edeka's advertisement can be used as material to introduce the use and pronunciation of greetings in the context of Christmas culture in Germany. Through Edeka's advertisement, the greeting *frohe Weihnachten* can help learners understand the situation of Christmas celebrations in Germany more realistically.

Recognizing Similarities and Differences in Cultural Practices and Events

Cultural events refer to a series of meaningful social activities within a particular culture, and describe the patterns of life of a community. Christmas celebrations in Germany are

cultural events, as are Eid al-Fitr celebrations in Indonesia. Both are religious celebrations that are widely observed by people in their respective countries and have an impact on culture.

In Christmas celebrations in Germany, there are cultural practices that can be studied to broaden intercultural knowledge. Cultural practices can be understood as what a social group does in a cultural context and why that social group does it. In the Lidl and Edeka advertisements, the cultural practices found can be seen in the following table.

Table 3. Cultural Practices in Germany

No.	Cultural Practices	German Culture in Advertisements
1	Consumption of snacks during celebrations.	Consuming gingerbread and <i>Gewürzspekulatius</i> cookies.
2	Consumption of special dishes served at a celebration.	Eating roasted turkey, sausages, potato salad, and Brussels sprouts for dinner.
3	Eat with family members.	Dinner with a special menu with a big family to celebrate Christmas.
4	The tradition of sharing.	The tradition of giving gifts to family members (<i>Bescherung</i>).
5	Room decoration	Decorating the Christmas tree, making a snowman (<i>Schneeman</i>).
6	Activities before the celebration	Opening the Advent calendar every day.

Similar cultural practices are also found in the celebration of Eid al-Fitr in Indonesia. (Hall, 1997) asserts that the meaning of a practice is formed through the way a particular culture interprets, frames, and gives meaning to that practice. Therefore, there are Christmas cultural practices in Germany that appear similar to Eid al-Fitr cultural practices in Indonesia, but have different values, beliefs, and cultural perspectives. It is important to explain the similarities and differences between cultural practices. According to (Byram, 2021), factual information about the culture being studied must also be reinforced with a comparative analysis with the learner's background culture. Thus, learners can reflect on cultural differences and similarities more easily.

In the first and second columns of Table 3, there are cultural practices involving the consumption of snacks and special dishes during celebrations. Both Christmas in Germany and Eid al-Fitr in Indonesia involve the cultural practice of consuming snacks. In German Christmas culture, the snacks consumed are gingerbread and *Gewürzspekulatius* biscuits. Gingerbread and *Gewürzspekulatius* biscuits are snacks made from spices. The use of spices as the main ingredient in gingerbread and *Gewürzspekulatius* biscuits creates a warming effect on the body, making them ideal for consumption in winter. Gingerbread cookies and *Gewürzspekulatius* biscuits have become foods synonymous with Christmas, as Christmas is celebrated during the winter season.

Similar to the culture in Indonesia, snacks such as *Kaastengel* (cheese sticks), *Nastar* (small cookies filled with pineapple jam), and *Kue Putri Salju* (cookies sprinkled with powdered sugar) are snacks consumed during Eid al-Fitr (Prastowo et al., 2024). The difference in cultural practices lies in the reasons for consumption. Gingerbread cookies and *Gewürzspekulatius* biscuits are consumed because their flavors are suitable for winter and are associated with the history of Christmas celebrations in Germany. In Indonesian cultural practices, snacks are served as part of the tradition of *Silaturahmi*. People visit each other's homes to forgive one another and socialize while enjoying cookies.

In addition, there are also similarities in cultural practices related to the consumption of each country's traditional dishes. In every culture, there are key concepts in food presentation, namely staple ingredients, seasoning principles, and cooking techniques

(Meiselman & MacFie, 1996). When it comes to celebrations, a dish is chosen based on cultural rules about what is considered appropriate to serve on special occasions.

Traditional foods such as turkey and Brussels sprouts are staple ingredients available during the Christmas season in Germany, and are served in large portions to families. However, in Indonesian culture, traditional Eid al-Fitr foods such as *Lontong* (cylindrical rice cakes wrapped in banana leaves), *Ketupat* (diamond-shaped rice cakes in woven coconut leaf containers), and *Opor Ayam* (Javanese chicken curry) are staples served as a form of nutritional recovery after fasting (Prastowo et al., 2024).

In the third column of Table 3, the cultural practice shown is Family Meals. In the cultural practice of family meals, eating together is a means of strengthening social relationships while expressing gratitude for major celebrations, such as Christmas and Eid al-Fitr. Differences can be seen in interaction patterns; in Germany, family dinners are more private affairs involving only immediate family and close relatives. In Indonesia, the tradition is to serve food to guests or family members who come to the house to socialize (Prastowo et al., 2024). This practice is quite common in various regions in Indonesia.

Eating together with family shares the basic values of togetherness and the importance of involving those closest to us in important celebrations. In addition, food becomes a medium for connecting across generations and social statuses. According to Dunbar (2017), eating together is a physical human need that has an impact on social relationships, such as increasing happiness, life satisfaction, trust, and closeness to social groups.

Table 3 column 4 shows cultural practices of sharing. In cultural practices of sharing, the main concept is to give an object or item to another person. The concept of gift-giving is not merely a transaction system that ends when the gift is given (Gregory, 2015). The object given becomes a symbol of the social relationship between the giver and the recipient. Through the object given, relationships between individuals can be created, strengthened, and maintained.

In Germany, there is a tradition called *Bescherung*, which is the tradition of distributing gifts to family members who celebrate Christmas. The gifts given are useful items for daily needs, toys, and even food and drinks. During the Eid al-Fitr celebration in Indonesia, there is a tradition of THR. THR or *Tunjangan Hari Raya* (Holiday Allowance is non-wage income) that must be paid by companies to workers ahead of Religious Holidays (Rahardja, 2021).

The notable difference in the practice of sharing culture lies in the timing of the giving and the recipients. Gifts in the *Bescherung* tradition are given to family members on a reciprocal basis and are only given on Christmas Eve (Friedrich, 2021). In the cultural practice that occurs in Indonesia, family members who receive THR will usually share it with younger family members. The giving is not limited to a specific time, so it can be given at any time when meeting during the Eid al-Fitr period.

In the fifth column of Table 3, there are cultural practices related to Christmas decorations. Christmas trees and snowmen (*Schneemann*) are typical Christmas decorations in Germany. These decorations are related to the tradition of decorating Christmas trees and winter. In German Christmas culture, *Schneemann* is used as a decoration because Christmas is celebrated during winter. During winter, abundant snow becomes a medium for activities and creativity in the winter period (Woitsch, 2022). In addition, fir and pine trees are plants that thrive in winter, making them suitable for use as Christmas tree decorations. Christmas trees are a typical decoration because decorating Christmas trees is a symbol of family togetherness during the Christmas period (Perry, 2010).

In Indonesian cultural practices, a typical Eid al-Fitr decoration is hanging ketupat. The difference between the cultural practices of Christmas and Eid al-Fitr decorations lies in

the reasons for using the decorative materials. In Indonesian cultural practices, ketupat is also a typical Eid al-Fitr decoration in Indonesia. In the beliefs of the Javanese people, ketupat is called “*Kupat*”, which is an abbreviation of “*Ngaku Lepat*”. *Ngaku Lepat* in Indonesian means to admit mistakes. The use of janur or coconut leaves as ketupat wrappers contains the philosophy of “*Jatining Nur*”, which means conscience. Thus, ketupat contains the meaning that humans are bound to make mistakes, so it is best to forgive each other with a conscience (Sriyana & Suprapti, 2024).

The practice of distinctive decorative culture shows that objects used as ornaments are not merely for beautifying a room. Ornaments serve as a medium of communication that conveys symbolic meaning, indicates the identity of social groups within a community, and guides social behavior (Glăveanu, 2014). Distinctive decorations within a culture become part of a collective memory that continues to be developed and passed down within a community.

In the fifth column of Table 3, there are cultural practices in Germany in the form of activities carried out before a celebration. Turner (1991) introduced the concept of liminality in a cultural event. Liminality refers to a time and place where thoughts, feelings, and desires move more freely, allowing for the emergence of new perspectives and patterns in social life. In a liminal state, individuals are in a position where they have left their old social status but have not yet fully entered a new status after the ritual has ended. In the context of Christmas and Eid al-Fitr, Advent and Ramadan are liminal phases, when individuals take a break from their daily routines and worldly status in preparation for sacred moments. During Advent and Ramadan, there are strict rules regarding social and religious behavior. After the liminal phase ends, Christmas and Eid al-Fitr become moments of perfection, as well as a period of transition from the spiritual world to everyday life. Christmas and Eid al-Fitr become celebrations of the new perspectives and lifestyles gained from the spiritual process that has been undertaken.

Learners obtain sparking material that can stimulate discussion related to cultural similarities and differences. In addition, learners can practice interpreting the cultural meanings presented by reflecting on the differences and similarities in cultural practices according to their respective backgrounds. This is in line with the requirements of intercultural learning at level B2. At level B2, learners are required to be able to explain events from other cultures and relate them to events in their own culture, or from a familiar culture (Council of Europe, 2020).

Recognizing Cultural Features

Cultural features refer to beliefs and values that are formed from culture. Knowledge about important figures and history in a culture is part of understanding cultural features. In addition, cultural features also include knowledge about cultural issues and values that develop within certain social groups (Council of Europe, 2020).

Table 4. Table of Intercultural Learning Relevance Analysis

Cultural Representation	Meaning	Relevance of Intercultural Learning
<i>Weihnachtsmann</i> is someone dressed in red who comes at Christmas.	Placing boots in front of the door on the evening of December 5th to receive gifts from <i>Weihnachtsmann</i> .	B1: Can explain their own cultural features and those of other cultures to people from the same cultural background or from a different cultural background.

In the Edeka commercial, the German Christmas tradition featured is the figure of *Weihnachtsmann* (Santa Claus). The characteristics of *Weihnachtsmann* reflect the values

of kindness and generosity. In addition, *Weihnachtsmann* has a historical background that forms the basis of the ritual of giving gifts at Christmas. The figure of *Weihnachtsmann* originated from a religious leader with a generous attitude who liked to help the poor, Sankt Nikolaus. Due to developments and the influence of globalization, the appearance of *Weihnachtsmann* has changed to what is known today.

There is a belief circulating in German society that on December 6 (*Nikolaustag*), *Weihnachtsmann* will come bearing gifts. The gifts are placed in boots (*Nikolaus-stiefel*) that have been prepared the night before. In this belief, the boots are placed in front of the house door, where they will be filled by *Weihnachtsmann* with small gifts such as oranges, cookies, and nuts.

According to CEFR standards, learners at the B1 level are expected to be able to explain their own cultural features as well as those of other cultures to people from the same cultural background or from different cultural backgrounds. *Weihnachtsmann* is a cultural figure used to convey certain values and social practices to the younger generation (Kennedy et al., 2022). The cultural features contained in the Edeka advertising video can equip learners with the ability to reduce cultural misconceptions and deal with ambiguity. In addition, by understanding cultural features, misunderstandings in communication can also be minimized.

CONCLUSION

In line with the concept of intercultural understanding in the CEFR reference, Lidl and Edeka's 2024 Christmas-themed advertisements contain cultural representations related to sociopragmatic cues, sociolinguistic cues, cultural practices, and cultural features. The cultural representations in Lidl and Edeka's advertisements can be used as discussion starters to improve intercultural understanding. At the basic learning level, the Lidl and Edeka videos can be used as a reference for information related to greetings, interactions, and activities typical of Christmas in Germany. At the independent learning level or levels B1 and B2, learners can use the Lidl and Edeka advertising videos as discussion material. Through discussion, conversations related to descriptions of the Christmas environment and atmosphere, personal experiences related to Christmas culture, expressing opinions, and even constructing arguments related to Christmas culture in Germany can be generated. Thus, existing German language comprehension is strengthened with cultural understanding, so that communication can run more smoothly.

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