

## REVIEW OF 'CULTURE BOUND'

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Culture seems to impose its own laws on every communicative act. Therefore to engender effective communication culture has to be considered at every point in the language teaching process. Meaningful communication is only achieved when there is some measure of cultural congruence between participants. Culture as a "structured system of patterned behaviour" is ubiquitous in man's action. Culture intrudes everywhere—in areas as diverse as intonation, patterns, body language, degrees of formality, vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, tense choices, value systems, where to buy stamps everywhere. It is axiomatic that some consideration of cultural determinants should be undertaken before entering the classroom. This book attempts to address this neglected area of language teaching and, in so doing, must be applauded. Teachers, we are told, are constantly teaching culture but are rarely aware of it. The principal aim of this book is to make this teaching point explicit, to establish an informal working model for teachers of what language and culture are and how they affect each other and thought. The second section of the book treats comparisons of particular cultural instances or how such a comparison might be undertaken. There is an article contrasting the North American and Mexican personalities, in another a representative student from the Middle East is sketched whilst in a third the writer explores different attitudes towards the written text. The third section provides the teacher with ideas as to how certain of these theoretical propositions and cultural analyses might be effectively applied in the classroom.

So, if one is to agree that cultural elements should play an explicit part in language teaching the next question must be, presumably, which culture? The obvious answer is, the culture of the target language. Yet if we are dealing with the English language which variation are we referring to? Do we mean US English, British English, Australian

English or Indian English perhaps? At first sight these differences may not seem so great, at least from outside the speech community. However, it is certain that both, say North Americans and Britons, would argue that value systems are at variance and that everyday life in the US does, in no way, resemble life in Britain. Therefore if one speaks of the survival of the recently-arrived language learner in the country, the cultural orientation of the teaching is of great import.

The culture in and behind the English language is not monolithic therefore selection has to be made regarding, which 'norm' is to be adopted. This highlights our own predicament as employees of an overtly British institutes of culture where the majority of students have only experienced and will only experience interaction with North Americans. We hope to resolve this contradiction by attempting to build general cultural awareness (that the student is a product of 'a' culture rather than 'the' culture). Whilst extra-curricular activities are concerned more exclusively with elements of British culture.

An additional problem, which is this time a more direct criticism of the book, lies in the cultural background of the teacher. Throughout the section dealing with classroom applications it is always taken for granted that the teacher possesses an innate knowledge of the culture which he/she is endeavouring to illuminate ie. that he/she is a native speaker. Unfortunately (for the writers) the native speaker is in something of a minority in Mexico as in most Third World countries. This then would seem to invalidate much of the advice appertaining to practical teaching strategies. Furthermore several of the articles are directed towards North American teachers exclusively which tends to impair the relevance to other native English speakers. Most teachers do not enjoy the immediate grasp of cultural incongruence necessary for teaching from an inter-cultural perspective using these teaching notes. Therefore, the book's principal utility to non-native speakers will be in awareness building. It is certain that teaching materials can be produced for non-native teachers anxious to pursue a cultural orientation in their teaching but this will be subject to other research not found here.

The one article which may be of immediate use to native and non-native teachers in Mexico alike is that of J.C. Condon. This is a discussion of specific Mexican cultural themes which differ from those predominating in the US. It is a true comparative analysis and therefore does not take as self-evident North American cultural preoccupations but indeed articulates them and contrasts them directly with Mexican ways of thinking. The article then is relevant to non-native speakers too. However, whilst it might be of use to individuals who only possess experience of a single culture, to those foreigners who are already living here it might be regarded as somewhat superficial (better to read a book such as 'Distant Neighbours'). Nevertheless the articulation of points of inter-cultural dissension carries relevance in itself and could be used effectively as reading material for advanced classes towards a consciousness raising discussion.

The majority of the articles that appear in this first section are of a most stimulating nature. The areas of study vary greatly. The opening shot deals with issues concerning the relationship between language and thought and is, in some ways, a reprise of the linguistic relativity debate. Another article of particular note concerns the development of written language. This article demonstrates how the ad hoc introduction of English in Korea has served to wreak socio-cultural havoc in the Korean academic community through destabilizing the writing system and provoking a schism in the community itself. Other articles treat the acculturation process and related issues—issues centred on 'entering' a new culture rather than interacting with it.

The second section is equally diverse. It deals with cultural differences and similarities and ranges from one side of the earth to the other, taking in a variety of the myriad manifestations of culture along the way. From Mexico, to the Middle East, to China; from body language, to textual analysis, to bullfighting. The highlights include an incisive article comparing compliments across cultures. Some cultures apparently rarely compliment whilst they consider North Americans given to complimenting to excess. Examples of compliments from other cultures are offered and one can see without any difficulty whatsoever how compliments can be the source of cultural misunderstanding. However the crux

of the article concerns an investigation into complimenting formulas in English. One is struck by the total lack of originality. For example, 80% of compliments depend on adjectives for their semantic value and these adjectives vary little (nice/good/beautiful/pretty/great). Compare this with a sample Iranian exchange:

S: Your shoes are very nice.

A: It is your eyes which can see them which are nice.

Wolfson concludes: "Contrastive analysis must be generalized to include not only the level of form but also the level of function" (P.119).

The prior reference to 'bullfighting' alludes to R. Lado's article which advances a methodology for the comparison of two cultures. Bullfighting is given as an example of a cultural misunderstanding residing in the idea that some non-Hispanic cultures have of the bullfight being cruel. Lado argues that the status of animals in Hispanic cultures differs from that of animals in English-speaking cultures. He offers various pieces of cultural evidence the most persuasive of which is of a linguistic nature. He says that we can see that animals enjoy a superior status in Anglo cultures because we refer to parts of animals bodies and the bodies of human beings using the same words. On the other hand, in Spanish there are completely different words for referring to parts of animals-'lomo'='animal back'/'espalda'='human back'; 'pescuezo'='animal neck'/'cuello'='human neck'.

The third, 'classroom application' section of the book is, as outlined elsewhere, of somewhat less interest. However, a useful common-sense article that does appear is entitled 'The culture bump and beyond' by C.M. Archer. This contains several practical hints as to how to adjust teaching techniques to the cultural characteristics of the class. The 'culture bump' itself is a point of culture clash where individual of culture 'A' offends an individual of another culture 'B' by acting in a way which is completely acceptable in his/her own culture 'A'. Archer's treatment of such an impasse is to defuse the antagonism by depersonalizing the confrontation. Both students and teacher are encouraged to analyze the situation in structural terms, that is, as an inability to synchronize two forms of culturally-determined behaviour rather than



as one individual behaving antagonistically towards another. So, the article deals explicitly with awareness building designed to alter student perception away from the pre-conception that he/she is a product of 'the' standard culture (and therefore all else to be treated as aberrant deviation) towards an awareness of cultural pluralism where the student does not sit in judgement on others' behaviour. Given diversity between and within cultures, this must be a wholly more attainable and indeed desirable goal than attempting to inculcate the values of the target speech community in the language learner.

As noted at the beginning of the article, culture is everywhere in language teaching. Given the breadth of the topic then a book of this nature must only be an introduction to the area, and this book is just that. An introduction is by definition eclectic and here we have a selection of 'samples' on the subject of culture in language and language teaching. Some articles are useful to certain teachers in certain geographical regions, others may be useful to teachers in different types of institution, others may be useful to course designers, some may be thought provoking for students themselves. The books principal utility to many will be in raising their awareness as to culture in language teaching. Classroom applications must await individual teacher research or the appearance of literature dealing more intimately with specific teaching situations in different cultures. Furthermore it may be argued that some of the ideas that are promoted in the 'applications' section already appear in course books and if they do not they can hardly be described as anything more than standard teaching techniques.

There are a couple of additional factors that have to be taken into account when calculating how much time and attention to attach to exclusively culture-oriented teaching components. The first refers to statistics determining how much English is spoken between two non-native speakers in contrast to that amount between a non-native speaker and a native speaker. In fact, more English is spoken between non-native speakers than in conversations with a native speaker participating.

Does this mean that there are a multitude of variations of English (determined by these speech fellowships) established on cultural foundations which have little to do with the 'classic' native English speaking cultures? This statistic at least obliges a teacher/course designer to examine closely the requirements of his/her own students.

The second factor which may be an important consideration in estimating the value of teaching culture concerns the English of Science and Technology. This has been one of the principal determinants of ELT growth in recent decades. This species of English is culturally neutral, that is, it is not the exclusive domain of any national culture but rather is an autonomous English culture in its own right. This stands as a further proviso concerning the teaching of culture.