The other side of the coin: What should we do about culture?

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Task 1: focus questions

• What is ‘culture’ in the context of the AMEP?

• What do you know about approaches to the teaching of culture in TESOL?

• How do you do to teach culture to your students, and apply an understanding of culture to AMEP classrooms?
Culture in contemporary TESOL

- Widely acknowledged as significant, necessary for effective communication in a language
- Element of understanding language use
- Need for appreciation of cultural differences and respect for the cultures of our learners
- TESOL and orientation to Multicultural Australia
- TESOL and appreciation globalisation and intercultural interaction as a norm, rather then an exception
- Increasingly a topic of interest and publication, after a period of some neglect
- Some recent challenges to our conventional understandings
Culture and the antecedents of Communicative Language Teaching

Antecedents to communicative language teaching:

- Grammar translation
  - ‘High Culture’, culture as the Arts
- Direct method
  - attention to everyday way of life and language of ordinary people
- Audiolingualism
  - teach differences in cultural behaviours by contrast with learners’ own culture
Culture in communicative language teaching

• Culture seen as closely linked to language
  - Language presented in meaningful (social) contexts
  - Understanding of culture as part of making meaning
  - Culturally based variations in language use
• Understandings of culture based on anthropology
• Teach culture incidentally to the context, as issues arise
• Acknowledgement of the cultures of learners
New ideas and issues related to the place of culture in TESOL

• Post structuralist ideas about the nature of culture and of the ways we understand cultural backgrounds
• ‘Critical TESOL’ claims that TESOL is involved in fitting learners to predominant ‘moulds’, rather than enabling and promoting cultural difference
• English as a (global) lingua franca - leads to questions about the importance of cultural learning in EFL contexts that may have implications for ESL
• Intercultural approaches to language teaching questioning the assumption of native speaker-like goals as the target of learning
Post structuralism: challenges to the understanding of culture

• Nature of culture becoming increasingly abstract - to system of understanding (the ‘road map’ rather than the ‘traffic’)
• Culture as a process, the ways we negotiate and interact
• Culture as subjective, a sense of identity
• Culture as less significant than other aspects of individual identity, eg gender, age, social status, family role, profession
• National Cultures as artificial and restrictive
• Hybrid cultures
• Language learners as occupying ‘third places’
• Atkinson - blend of traditional and new insights is possible and useful
Critical TESOL

• TESOL not value free, but promotes certain interests, at the expense of others
• privileges native speaking teachers, and those who become like native speakers
• TESOL has the potential to be disempowering of those it claims to help
• TESOL moulds students to meet mainstream Anglo norms
• TESOL aspires to (monolingual) native speaking norms as the target of learning and to ways of teaching and learning valued in English speaking societies (‘Inner circle’ countries - a minority of English speakers)
English a lingua franca

- Most speakers of English use it as a second or subsequent language
- Most learners will never live in or visit English speaking countries or live in communities where their L1 is used
- English is often used as lingua franca between non native speakers
- Learning about English speaking culture can be alienating or threatening in expecting change in people
- Native speakers modify expectations for Non Native Speakers and so native speaker norms not so relevant
- ‘Other’ cultures more significant in cross cultural interactions, rather than English if lingua franca
Intercultural language teaching

- CLT allows for the teaching of culture, but not systematic enough
- Linguaculture is what needs to be learned - culture needs to be systematically bound up with learning of the language
- Second language use involves understanding of the nature of cross cultural communication
- Second language speakers make intercultural transitions and need to understand themselves in these contexts
- Bilingual competence, not monolingual competence, the appropriate target for second language learners
Where does this leave us?

- Our theories are ahead of our practice
- Our theories are also incomplete and inadequate
- Our practices and assumptions need to be re-examined
- We have little research-based evidence about cultural learning - and it is a difficult phenomenon to research
- We have some complex models and theories, that are difficult to apply to many teaching contexts
Some starting points

- A dynamic understanding of culture, incorporating new insights with more traditional understandings
- A need for a more conscious, explicit and systematic approach to dealing with culture, that is responsive to the context of particular learners
- An appreciation of bilingual norms as the targets of learning, rather than ‘native speaker’ only
- Some conceptual starting points for this
Points of articulation between language and culture

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<th>Culture</th>
<th>Language</th>
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<td>World Knowledge</td>
<td>spoken/written genres</td>
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<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>pragmatic norms</td>
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<td>Culture in Context</td>
<td>culture in general structure of text</td>
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<td>culture in organisation of units of texts</td>
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<td>culture in linguistic structures/ words/syntax/ non verbal</td>
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Fantini’s process model

• For any aspect of language being taught, cover these dimensions:
  - Presentation of new material
  - Practice of new material within a limited, controlled context
  - Explanation or elucidation of the grammar involved (more so for adolescent/older learners) (could be deductive or inductive)
  - Transposition and use of new material in freer, less controlled contexts
  - Sociolinguistic exploration – interrelationship of contexts of use and appropriateness
  - Culture Exploration – appropriate interactional strategies and learning about values, beliefs customs etc
  - Intercultural exploration comparing and contrasting target culture with students’ native culture.

Fantini (1997) pp 40 to 44
Some other useful concepts

• Understandings of the general characteristics of different cultures and ways of comparing them
• Teaching what is ‘culture general’ and ‘culture specific’
• Use of contrast between new culture and students’ home cultures
• Training of students as ‘cultural researchers’, as cultural teaching and learning always incomplete
Some starting points?

• Nature of cultural learning relates to the context of learning, rather than universal. What are the cultural learning needs in the context of the AMEP?

• A Cultural ‘curriculum’ is related to a language curriculum - but not exactly the same. Needs to include both cultural ‘products’ and ‘processes’

• Teaching Methodology needs to allow for cultural input, experience, reflection and comparison

• Attention to ‘culture general’ understandings, and cultural observation skills will be productive, as an addition to a ‘culture specific’ focus
Some challenges

• The vastness and complexity of cultural phenomena
• The difficulty of describing cultural phenomena
• Dealing with different sets of cultural perceptions and starting points
• Developing a framework for a ‘systematic’ treatment of culture in TESOL
Application tasks

• Can you apply either Crozet & Liddicoat or Fantini’s model to the unit/topic you are teaching now? How helpful is it?

• What might be useful guiding principles for the teaching of culture in the AMEP?

• Can you map the cultural syllabus of the course you are teaching at the moment?
Some reading


• Crozet, C & A Liddicoat (1999) The Challenge on intercultural teaching: Engaging with Culture in the classroom’ in J. Lo Bianco et al Eds ‘Striving for the Third Place’, Melbourne NLLIA,


• FizGerald, H (2003) ‘How Different Are We?’ Avon, Multilingual matters

• C. Kramsch (1993) Culture and context in Language Teaching’ Oxford, OUP
