Culture Interculturality and Identity in English Language Teaching

DR TONY YOUNG, NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY, U.K.
AT HIROSHIMA UNIVERSITY
MARCH 22ND, 2016
Overview

1. Some orientation questions.
2. Defining culture, language and culture.
3. Approaches to culture in language education.
5. A study – Intercultural communicative competence: exploring English language teachers’ beliefs and practices
6. Q&A
Orientation questions

1. Atkinson (1999) argues that apart from ‘language’, ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’ there are no more central concepts in English Language Teaching (ELT) than ‘culture’. Do you agree? Why/Why not?

2. How important to your sense of self is your first language? How does your identity change when you use a second language? Are you ‘still you’? What factors affect any change? In what ways might any changes be positive/negative?

3. What do you need to do in a foreign language beyond knowing some vocabulary and grammar, and have some ability to speak, listen read and write? In general, how important is ‘cultural knowledge’ in using second (third...) languages, do you think?
Defining culture (1)

A difficult, contested word, understood and used differently by different people, in different places, for different reasons, but here goes - (see Young, Sachdev & Seedhouse, 2009) ...
Defining Culture (2)

Two broad approaches seem especially applicable to language education:

1. The humanities –

Culture as the human-made environment we inhabit - high and low culture (poetry and comic books), material productions (food, buildings), social institutions.

2. Social science -

Here culture refers to the attitudes and beliefs, ways of thinking, behaving and remembering shared by members of a group. For example, what people think is polite, beautiful, worth working hard for, healthy, useful to learn. This sharing is never universal in a society, although the powerful sometimes like to pretend it is (‘National Values’) – this ‘culture’ is temporal, changing, challenged.
Defining culture – some things to talk about

Thinking about these two approaches to culture..., talk about these questions in groups then we’ll share some ideas in forum.

1. What ‘cultural’ aspects of using English do Japanese learners have most difficulty with, in your experience. You decide what ‘cultural’ means here...

2. What ‘cultural mistakes’ might foreigners make in how they behave here in Japan? Agree on some examples?

3. Which aspects of ‘English’ (or American) culture are often shown in English language textbooks or other learning materials? Agree if you can on some frequently used examples. Why are these examples chosen, do you think?

4. What should I see/do in Hiroshima to get the best idea of what ‘local culture’ is?
Language and culture

Some BIG questions:

1. Can you agree on what links culture, as defined above, and language.


3. How, do you think, does the English language reflect ‘English-speaking culture’ and vice versa?
Language and culture – some theoretical perspectives

A complex, inextricable link (some refer to linguaculture)

With the human-made environment, and norms, values and beliefs, language is a part of culture, but..

It also transmits and helps to form culture

Different versions of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis ...

Culture isn’t always perceived by those familiar with it – a fish doesn’t perceive the water it swims in...

So, people don’t ‘see the culture’ in their use of language (maybe) until they try to use a different one.

It is difficult – both in the head and in the heart/guts – to change what you are familiar with linguistically – to be intercultural... One reason why language learning is difficult for people, particularly adults...
Approaching culture in language teaching

Language learning and teaching literature exploring the link between language learning and culture can be divided into two broad categories.
Approaching culture in language teaching

The first of these is work which discusses and advocates particular approaches to ‘learning about culture’ (i.e. culture as content and aim for language programmes).

Here, a strong and consistent feature over a number of years has been a call for the learning of culture, and an engagement with cultural difference, to be at the centre of language learning programmes.
Approaching culture in language teaching

The second main category of literature relates to *culture as context for learning*

Contributions ranging from critiques of culturally loaded classroom practices (like pairwork) and of broader curricular approaches to culture and language (such as ‘the communicative approach’), to more general critiques of the sociopolitical and socioeconomic role of the English language teaching ‘industry’ (for example, ‘English Linguistic Imperialism’ or ‘Englishization’ in Asian Universities).
A way forward...?

Many have suggested intercultural communicative competence (or a derivative) as a way forward...

See for example:
Intercultural Communicative Competence

A response to the issues around culture and interculturality in language learning identified by Atkinson (1999) and others ...
Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) - background

Broadly *intercultural* approach has been advocated over recent years infiltrating broad curricular guidelines to culture teaching in FLT.

Perhaps a reaction to ‘traditional’ culture teaching (which tended to look at problems only and which tended to *not to focus on actual communication*).

Most fully realised in Byram’s (1997, 2008...) model for teaching and assessing ICC in foreign language teaching?...
Byram’s (1997) Model of ICC (1)
General Approach

Byram’s model attempts to bring together:

1. The long tradition of social psychological research into Intercultural/ Cross Cultural Communication
2. More poststructural approaches to culture/identity (negotiated, performed...)
3. Communicative language teaching approach and methodology (meaning more important than form, learner centredness...)
Byram’s (1997) Model of ICC (2): Culture as content vs culture as method...

As in ‘traditional’ culture/language teaching, the sociolinguistic and sociocultural norms of C2 dominant group(s) are the main target *content*

*Method* for culture teaching- learner to occupy a ‘C3’ between own C1 and C2, objectifying both.

Traditionally, *content* has predominated over *method*. 
Byram’s (1997) Model of ICC (3):

The ICC model stresses the need for language learners to develop methods of understanding culture, through:

- cultural relativity
- critical cultural awareness
- an open and enquiring attitude to difference and familiarity

In terms of identity - It also stresses the need for learners to maintain self-concept in the ‘C3’.

Task: What might ‘self-concept’ mean?
In ICC, **intercultural speaker** (ICS) supersedes the **native speaker** (NS) as model which prevailed in previous approaches. Why?

*Task* – think about:

Advantages of ICS?

Disadvantages of NS?
Byram’s (1997) Model of ICC (5)
The Intercultural Speaker....

- Learner not an ‘incomplete native speaker’ – an attainable target
- Cultural mediator, in the 3rd space, C3...
- Stress on sociolinguistic (SL) and sociocultural skills (SC) and knowledge. Utility. Communicative.
- Empowers non L1 learners/teachers (most teachers not NS, especially in English language education).
- ‘NS’ – idealised, not the reality...
- Reflects importance of English as Lingua Franca (?)...
- But depends on a fairly clear idea of target culture (with which to compare your own...)

**TASK:** Your reactions/critique/questions about ICC?
Outstanding on the research agenda...

The views of *educators* (brokers) on key questions:

- To what extent does learning a foreign language necessarily involve learning a foreign culture?

- Can/Should you teach someone to be more ‘interculturally effective’?

- If so, how?
A recap – so why teach ‘culture’

1. Intercultural contact and exchange is greater than ever

2. Language learning is the best place for culture learning given the inextricable link between language and culture

3. *English* FL teaching/learning is ubiquitous worldwide - main vehicle of intercultural contact and communication

   *Many* theoretical and rhetorical contributions, *little empirical investigation* of its applicability/application (Young, Sachdev & Seedhouse, 2009)...

**Task** – what are the problems with applying ‘culture learning’ to ELT?
Problems with teaching culture in EFL in the theoretical/rhetorical literature

1. Problematic conceptualisation of ‘culture’ (especially the dangers of essentialisation, reification and stereotyping)

2. Especially in EFL - which/whose ‘culture’ should be targeted for study?

3. Traditional focus on ‘big red buses and baguettes’- culture teaching as an ‘add on’, dealing with external, often exoticised, commodified versions of ‘cultures’. Still the approach in many EFL textbooks (where ‘culture’ is touched upon at all...)

4. Non-L1 English speaking teachers may lack confidence to inform about ‘the other’

5. Even L1 speaking teachers may have problems teaching culture in the same principled way they teach (e.g.) grammar

But little empirical study of the beliefs and practices of EFL teachers regarding how culture is/should be taught
An investigation-
Young and Sachdev, 2011

Main research focus for this study

To investigate the extent of the infiltration of the ICC model into teachers’ belief systems and practices in EFL in different national locations
Participants

Qualified and experienced EFL teachers

- N= 105:
  US 21, UK 50, France 34;
- mean experience = 9+ years
- Teaching in France was by French L1 speakers to largely monocultural classes, in US and UK English L1 speakers taught multicultural classes of sojourners
Methodology

50 questions (Likert Scales):

1. reported understanding of ICC
2. belief in its applicability
3. how ICC relates to perceived learner aims
4. actual priority given to inculcating ICC, and sociolinguistic and sociocultural knowledge

Of teachers on current EFL courses in each of the three national locations
Indicative findings: centrality of ‘culture’ and fostering positive intercultural attitudes

A consistent pattern of reported beliefs across the three locations:

A reported belief in the centrality of the fostering of positive intercultural attitudes and understanding

A generally highly positive view of the profession and of the possibility of EFL courses fostering positive intercultural attitudes

But cultural representation in published EFL materials seen as superficial.
Indicative findings: ICC infiltration

A reported knowledge of a broad outlines of the ICC framework (*but* little training in its particulars, or in its application to classroom activity)

The ICS perceived as a significantly better model than the ENS (but in US and UK they believed that *learners* perceive teachers as ENS and want ENS model)

What priority is actually being given to ICC and ‘culture’ teaching on current courses?...
Means of ranked current course priorities in all 3 locations; UK; US; and France (8-point scales)
Reasons for the relatively low priority for ICC elements?

**Task:**

Despite teachers apparent ‘buying in’ to centrality of intercultural language learning, and the ICC framework, these are being given a relatively low priority on actual courses. Why?
Why the low uptake of ICC?

**Ideas suggested in the study – do you agree – can you add anything?**

1. **Learner aims perceived as not focussed on inculcation of ICC, learner-centred courses reflect this priority (ICC not a factor in linguistic competence in the view of learners?)**

2. **Teachers ambivalent about own SC identity and about role as SC/SL exemplars and informants**

3. **Not, on this evidence, a confidence issue with non L1 English (significantly higher priority to SC in France)**

4. **Skills work (especially speaking) is being given a very high priority but is perceived as being ‘deculturised’- an interpersonal issue without strongly intercultural element**
Implications...

1. Teachers need greater training in the scope and content of the ICC model and in its application on courses. ICC has infiltrated broad curricular frameworks, but does not yet appear on teacher training curricula.

2. ‘Culture’ teaching as content rather than as method (contrary to the ICC model) seems still to predominate among most EFL teachers.

3. An element of learner awareness-raising and training on the practical benefits to accrue from intercultural competence needs to be built in to EFL courses.

*Any more?*
What we’ve done...

1. Tried to unpack ‘culture’, and language and culture
2. Looked at approaches to culture in language education
4. Looked at a study (Young & Sachdev, 2011)
Thank you

Any questions....?

tony.young@ncl.ac.uk
References and follow-up reading


