Culture as Content in EFL/EIL:

Helping Learners Develop Intercultural Sensitivity and Competence

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Why Use Culture as Content?

- Meaningful & engaging content
- Traditional content of L classroom
- Language teacher as culture "broker"
- Language class as "sheltered environment for asking cultural questions

Some Cultural Content

- *What are some ways in which you have included culture in your classes?*
- *What are some topics?*
- *What are some activities?*
- *What are some challenges you faced?*

What Culture?

- Explicit (visible) culture
- Implicit (hidden) culture

The Cultural Iceberg

Easy to see
> customs
> mores
> courtesies

10 %

90 %

Difficult to see
> values
> priorities
> assumptions

Big "C" and Little "c"

Big C (Visible culture): expressed in dress, speech, customs, behaviors

Institutions: religious, economic, educational, governmental, political

Culture: architecture, dance, music, food, fashion, holidays, heroes, popular culture

Little "c"

(Hidden culture): expressed in values, beliefs, attitudes (often taken for granted)

Attitudes, values, beliefs: what is right/wrong; good/bad

Cultural norms: ways of thinking, communicating (verbally and non-verbally), interacting, managing conflict

Cultural traditions and identity: individual or group roles
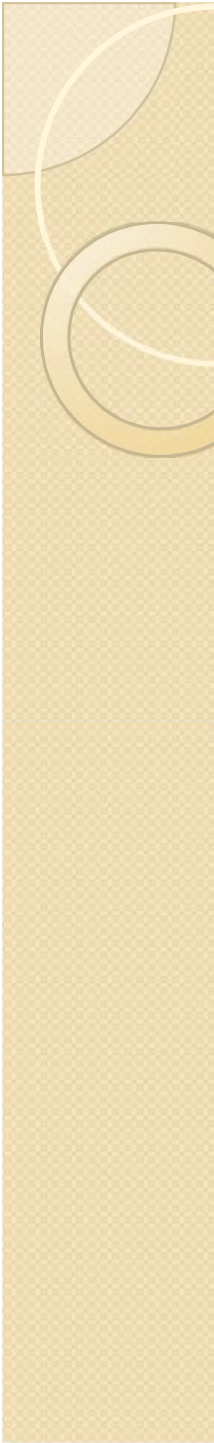
Challenge:

- **Understanding what is below the water is much harder than what is above.**

    AND

- **Teaching what is above the water is much easier.**

    BUT

- **To be meaningful, we must eventually get below the water!**

Another Challenge: Whose Culture?

- **Think about the textbooks you learned from or those that you are now using in teaching**

- **What cultures are emphasized in these?**

- **Share with a partner.**
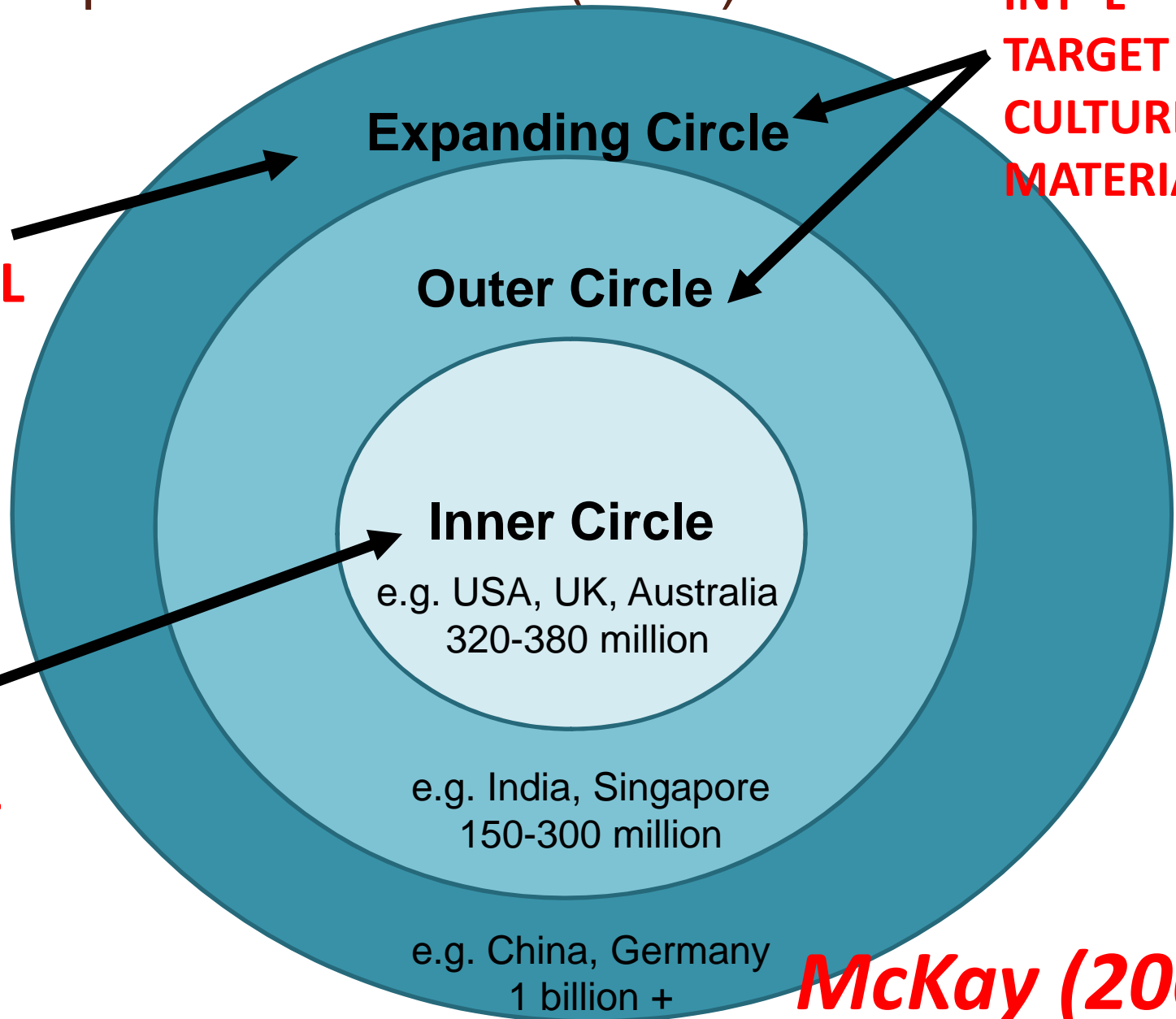
Whose Culture?

Here's the dilemma:

- **Traditionally** – the culture of dominant speakers of the language (UK, US, etc.)
- **More recently** – the culture of the learners (source culture)
- **But** – most learners are from the Expanding Circle and will use English with other speakers from this circle

Adapted from Kachru (1989)

SOURCE CULTURE MATERIAL (Russian)

INT'L TARGET CULTURE MATERIAL

Expanding Circle

Outer Circle

Inner Circle
e.g. USA, UK, Australia
320-380 million

e.g. India, Singapore
150-300 million

e.g. China, Germany
1 billion +

TARGET CULTURE MATERIAL

McKay (2002)

English as a Global Language

"English belongs to no one.
It is the second language of the world."

Roger Bowers, TESOL Plenary

(Note: 70+ countries in which English is an official L)

Culture for
Global Communication

Most English learners (those in the Expanding Circle) will communicate with others in that Circle (not to communicate with Americans, Australians, Canadians or the British).

- **They DO NOT need to internalize cultural norms of native (Inner Circle) speakers**
- **They DO need to be able to communicate their ideas and cultures to others.**

L. Smith (1976)

Culture in EFL/EIL:
Some Complications

- **Many students have limited opportunity for serious interaction with people of other cultures. Their cultural sources may be limited to superficial (& inaccurate) depictions in movies, TV, social media, etc.**

- **Their knowledge of their own "hidden" culture is likely also to be limited.**

Our Goal:
Intercultural Sensitivity/
Intercultural Competence

- **The ability to accommodate cultural differences**
- **The flexibility to adapt to different communication styles and behaviors**
- **Openness to and respect for cultural diversity**
- **An ability to listen, observe, and withhold judgment** (Deardorff, 2004)

"A Sphere of Interculturality"

Students need to develop a "sphere of interculturality" (Kramsch, 1992):

- **To reflect on their own culture in relation to other cultures; awareness of self**
- **To learn about culture as "difference" (even within one culture) as well as similarities**
- **To try to understand culture as members within it do**

Intercultural Competence

- **External (Visible) Goal:**

    Communicating effectively & appropriately with intercultural knowledge, skills, & attitudes

- **Internal (Invisible Frame of Reference):**

    Adaptability (to different communication styles & behaviors)

    Flexibility (in selecting & using these styles)

    Ethnorelative view of others

"Interculturalism" not "Biculturalism" is the goal.

(McKay, 2000)

What's Required?

Knowledge & Understanding

  Cultural self-awareness

  Understanding of range of cultures
   (world views; contexts)

Skills

  Listen, observe, interpret (withhold judgment)

Attitudes

  Respect for cultural diversity

  Curiosity & tolerance for ambiguity

The Stages of
Intercultural Competence

Awareness
    Understanding
        Respect/Tolerance/ Acceptance
        Behavior

Requires:
Understanding our own culture
Understanding reasons for different cultures
Learning to treat others with respect
Learning to interact with cultural sensitivity

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

- Helps explain the process of becoming aware of and sensitive to cultural differences
- Provides a means of evaluating progress toward intercultural competence

(M. Bennett, 1993)

Two Stages of Intercultural Sensitivity

- **Ethnocentrism**

    One's culture is the center of the world

- **Ethnorelativism**

    Cultures can only be understood relative to one another

    One's own beliefs & behavior are just one of many possibilities

Our task: to help learners move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism – to recognize and learn to live with difference

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS): A Continuum

Ethnocentrism

Denial

Defense

Minimization

Ethnorelativism

Acceptance

Adaptation

Integration

(Bennett, 2004)

DMIS Stages

- **Denial – Our way is the only way.**
- **Defense – We do things the right way.**
- **Minimization – We are all alike under the skin.**
- **Acceptance – It's OK to be different. There are reasons we act differently.**
- **Adaptation – We can work out the differences. (intercultural)**
- **Integration – We can act like ourselves in more than one culture. (bi/multicultural)**

So – Which Culture?

- **Source** – learner's own culture

- **International** – large number and variety of cultures where English is spoken (by English- and non-English speaking people)

Caution:

"Don't position the learner as an "outsider" or "foreigner [in a target, English-speaking culture]1"

Graddol, 2006

Where to Begin: Own Culture

A Fish in Water

Doesn't Know It's In Water.

Until It Leaves that Water!

Students' Cultures

Culture: shared attitudes, beliefs, worldviews, practices/behaviors

Co-Cultures: the many cultures we belong to because of gender, age, profession, etc.

Awareness of Own Culture

- **Cultural institutions**
- **Customs and traditions**
- **Family relationships**
    roles of elders, youth, men, women
- **Verbal and non-verbal communication**
    greetings & leave-takings

    spacing (proxemics)

    gestures & eye contact
- Folktales, traditional stories

Broadening Awareness: Identity Circles

- Draw a circle on a piece of paper.
- In the middle, write your name.
- Then, with spokes of a wheel, write descriptors that you feel are important in identifying you
- Compare with a partner.

National Culture

Everyone in a particular nation is exposed to "similar social metaphors, customs, languages and value sets that distinguish their cognitive environment from that of persons in other nations" even if there are differences in SES [socio-economic status], religion, gender, race, etc."

E.L. Herr (1987)

Cf: Datesman, Crandall, & Kearny. *American Ways: An Introduction to American Culture. 4th ed. in preparation.*

Macro and Micro Cultures

Macro Culture/National Culture

- **National culture** – citizens of the same country share at least some traits of the macro-culture
- National culture refers to experiences, beliefs, learned behavior patterns, and values shared by citizens of the same nation (Kottak, 1999).
- Note that in some countries – such as Japan – there is a lot of shared national culture; in others, for example, the US especially during political elections – there is less

Micro Culture/Sub-Cultures

- Small cultural units that exist within a larger culture
- In this room – by job - teachers, professors, writers, administrators
- Also by gender, age, geographic location, education, religion

Activities to Challenge
Denial & Defensiveness

What are some activities you have used to help students:

- *Become aware of their own culture*

- *Become aware of cultural differences*

- *Become aware of cultural similarities*

Positive Awareness
of Cultural Differences

Introduce cultural differences, emphasizing
visible differences in a positive way:

- **International Day – Food, clothing, songs, dances**
- **Be a Tourist – video or pictures of sights and important monuments**
- **For Young Learners – Cultural Show & Tell**

Great Resource: **TOPICS Online Magazine for Learners of English**
where Els publish their ideas
www.topics-mag.com

Values Inventories/Corners

Rate each of these from 1-5 1)strongly disagree; 2) disagree, 3) neutral, 4) agree, 5) strongly agree

- **The best way to learn language is by memorizing.**
- **Teachers should always correct students' errors.**
- **Motivation is the most important factor in learning a language.**
- **When learners are allowed to interact freely (for example in group or pair activities) they are learning each others' mistakes.**
- **Small group or paired activities provide opportunities to practice..**

(adapted from Lightbown & Spada, 1993, 2006)

Overcoming Defensiveness: Seek Commonalities

Lead students to recognize basic similarities among people of different cultures

- **Holiday jigsaw** – New Year's celebrations in several countries (what people wear & eat, what they do and why, etc.)
- **Same story/different country** – Cinderella story around the world
- **Proverbs** – similar values
- Watch segments of **videos/movies** with family life, children, friends

Overcoming Minimization

- Raise awareness of values and other **"invisible" aspects** of own culture & others
- Identify similar values in other cultures, but noticing the differences in the ways in which these are expressed
- Introduce cultural relativity

Getting to know
our own values

Select your 5 most important values:

Respect   **Independence**   **Fame**

Group Harmony   **Financial Security**

Competition   **Honesty**   **Social Responsibility**

Kindness   **Cooperation**   **Equality**

Respect for Authority   **Duty**

Compare yours by sharing with a partner.
What are the reasons for the differences?

Critical Incidents

- Who was involved?
- What was the situation? (time, place, purpose)
- What happened? (describe the incident)
- What was surprising?
- What should be done differently next time?

Critical Incidents

Can you think of a time when someone "broke one of your invisible rules"?

Why did they do that?

What were the possible reasons?

What did you learn from that?

Common/Uncommon

- **Pass out large index card with "Common" on 1 side; "Uncommon" on the other**
- **Have students find someone they don't know well.**
- **Without talking, write**
    - **5 Things We Have in Common**
    - **5 Things We Don't Have in Common**
- **Then talk. How right were they?**
- **How did they decide?**

Developing Acceptance

- **Accepts that other people may behave differently or have different value systems**

- **Aware of own culture and interested in learning about other cultures but do not necessarily adjust their behaviors**

- **"Difference is a fact of life."**

Acceptance Activities

- **Simulations:** Bafa Bafa, Baranga & other games in which people experience culture shock, then understanding & acceptance in playing the same game, but unknowingly with different sets of rules

- **Contrastive writing:** Present two essays, one in L1 and another in L2 on same topic OR two essays in English by writers from different cultures with different expectations (Kaplan, 1966, contrastive rhetoric)

- **Role plays** in which students practice interviewing for a job using home and another set of cultural rules

Helping to Foster Adaptation

- **Help learners use their knowledge of expectations of their own and of other cultures to evaluate a situation from another point of view (empathy)**
- **Help them to adjust communication & interaction styles to different norms**

Adaptation Activities

- **Cultural Information Project**: e-Pals, Sister Classes, or Face-to-Face Interview with people from different cultures & prepare presentation
- **Model United Nations**: Discuss international news & how it affects different countries
- **Debates** on controversial, cross-cultural topics
- **Journal entries** on changing cultural perceptions and identity

The Last Stage: Integration

- **Very challenging: Many don't reach this stage. It's possible to be "multilingual" without being "multicultural" (Paulston, 1992)**

BUT

- **Help students to feel comfortable with growing multicultural identity (internal culture shock)**
- **Encourage continued self-reflection & growth in views & actions in various contexts**
- **If desired, help to be intercultural mediators**

Integration Activities

- **Ethical discussions/debates**
  topics.nytimes.com/top/features/ magazine/.../the_ethicist/index.html
- **Cross-cultural training**
  http://www.intercultural.org
- **Digital stories about changing identity**

Activities for Young Learners

Parallel Storytelling:

- **Personalized** – Students dictate or write a similar story, but with details from their own experiences or culture

- **Environmentally Parallel** – Students change a story like the Tortoise & the Hare to one with animals they know, in their environment

- **Similar Folktale** – Teacher/students tell a story similar to Cinderella

Some Last Thoughts

Culture in the Language Class

- **Makes the class more interesting & meaningful**
- **Helps learners better understand their own cultures and themselves**
- **Promotes empathy and global understanding**
- **Provides opportunity for developing higher order thinking skills**

Thank you.

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