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to desire   to fight   to be   to choose   to die   to have   to breathe

THE CENTRE'S VIEW OF THE PERIPHERY: THE CASE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Introduction

The theme of 'Centre and Periphery' has been a topic of discussion in several disciplines lately. This paper addresses the issue of periphery and centre in English Language Teaching (ELT) and explores some of its dimensions .Whereas the first part of the paper initiates discussion concerning the operation of centre and periphery in the ELT field, the second part illustrates the centre's view of ELT periphery through an analysis of ELT discourse that comes from the centre. A theoretical articulation of the concepts of Centre and Periphery is found in Galtung's (1988) theory of imperialism in which the world is divided into a dominant centre and a dominated and dependent periphery. According to Galtung's multidimentional model, the norms, whether military, economic or linguistic, are dictated by the 'Centre' (the powerful western countries) and are then internalized by those in power in the 'Periphery'(mainly the underdeveloped countries). According to this view, through an interlocking and cyclical process which affects domains such as education, technology, popular culture, technology, mass media, among others, the centre's superiority and the periphery's dependence are sustained.

It is recognised though that centre-periphery relations and interests are sociohistorically specific and have thus been different in different sociohistorical contexts. However, as Altbach (1982:472) has noted, even today especially in underdeveloped countries, the organization of educational systems, from kindergarten to research institutes, reflects western models which originate from a powerful centre. In several of these countries, the English language has played an important role in the education system and has been the language which has been primarily promoted, together with the transmission of linguistic as well as cultural and social norms[1].

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[1] Although in the present discussion we will be concerned with the role of English language and explore the operation of Centre and Periphery in the field of English Language Teaching, this

Thus, for Tollefson (1995:2), it is important to examine English Language Teaching within the context of the spread of English as a world language, since it has been shown and repeatedly suggested that 'commonsense' assumptions about language teaching and learning are rooted historically in the relationships of unequal power that characterise contemporary society (Auerbach 1995, Pennycook 1995, Tollefson 1991).

Conceptualising centre and periphery in ELT

In the ELT field, the role of the centre has been important concerning the promotion of professionalism, in the sense that centre institutions from Britain and US have primarily served as models for the development of ELT for those in the periphery. For instance, research in the discursive practices of ELT has actually revealed that the discourse of ELT carries with it "an unquestioned belief of the superiority of the teaching theories, methods and practices of the donor countries and the inferiority of those of the recipient countries" (Dendrinos 1997:260).

According to Phillipson (1992:62), by promoting the superior skills of the profession and by projecting its philosophical and moral values as being of interest to all, the ELT centre has developed a mechanism of 'professional transfer' to the countries of the periphery, the rest of the world where ELT has developed. This mechanism of 'professional transfer' and dependency on the expertise of the centre has operated in different ways, one of which is the publishing industry and the availability of ELT books and materials which can be used for the teaching of English as a foreign language in different parts of the world. In fact, it is this professional transfer that facilitates the reproduction in the periphery of the institutions and practices of the centre and ensures the continuation of the centre's interests and the periphery's dependence.

This mechanism, which has played an important role in the development of the ELT field itself and has ensured the role of the centre countries in it, has also been significant for the promotion of teachers who come from the Centre and who are native speakers of English, putting at a disadvantageous position all non-native speakers who are teachers of English. Rampton (1990:98) suggests that "the supremacy of the native speaker keeps the UK and the US at the centre of ELT" whereas Pennycook (1994:176) argues that the insistence on

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by no means implies that other languages and cultures have not taken up the position of Centre in different parts of the world and in different historical periods.

monolingualism and the native speaker is closely related to the political economy of global ELT:

> If claims can be made that English should be taught in English and by native English speakers, then once again the English-speaking centre is able to maintain a strong hold over the production of language textbooks and forms of English teaching. Unilingual EFL textbooks can sell universally, and the skills of the native speaker English teacher are applicable anywhere.

Moreover, the insistence upon the native speaker as the preferred model has clear implications for the maintenance of language standards derived from the central English-dominant nations. According to Wu (qtd in Pennycook 1994:176), by labeling expressions which are unfamiliar to them as 'not English', native speakers tend to be dismissive of other possibilities which do not originate from the centre countries and do not constitute standard and legitimate language forms. As a result, these native speakers and language teachers of English stand as representatives of central language forms.

Furthermore, it is primarily the ELT centre which produces theories in key disciplines such as linguistics and applied linguistics which inform the ELT field[2]. At the same time, there has been a widespread mechanism to ensure the promotion of a common sense discourse and the spread of a prevailing ideology which promotes English as the language of development, science and technology and which systematically relates the learning of English directly to employment skills. For instance, a widely accepted position in the Western world is that by simply providing access to a language of power, such as English, one also is provided with access to those powerful domains in which English is used, such as international business (Dendrinos 1997).

Another effect of the operation of centre-periphery ideology in ELT is found in the argument which claims that the teaching of English remains the same all over the world and so do the needs of language learners. Concerning this argument, we cannot ignore, according to Dendrinos (1997:255), vested interests by the centre countries, taking into account that ELT constitutes a multi-billion business all over the world. This international conception of ELT can also be seen, Pennycook (1994) suggests, as a mechanism which ensures the participation of the centre countries in this international business. Recently,

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[2] See Pennycook (1994, chapter 4), for a detailed account of the role of linguistics and applied linguistics in ELT.

however, there have been several objections which strongly suggest that ELT is not and cannot be the same in different parts of the world. What is interesting though is that whereas the international nature of ELT is often stressed, this international aspect is rather one-sided with the Centre 'equipping' the Periphery, without at the same time taking into account the particularities of the Periphery.

Another interesting aspect of the centre-periphery issue in ELT concerns the intellectual dialogue among professionals. Despite the fact that over the last forty years ELT developed as an area of study in which systematic research has been conducted all over the world, analysis of ELT professional articles has shown that, at least until the beginning of the 1990s, it was primarily the ELT experts coming from the centre who most often identified the problem areas in ELT and the needs of language teachers and students all over the world (Mitsikopoulou 1997). On Phillipson's (1992:259) account, "centre perceptions tend to define both the problems to be pursued and the proposed solutions". However, this identification of the problems and the suggestion of 'appropriate' solutions from the centre has often proved one-sided and insufficient since the centre has rarely analyzed in detail the specific needs of the peripheries or taken into account practical and ideological local determinants.

At this point it is worth noting that it would be a mistake to conceive of the centre-periphery relationship in ELT as a deterministic one, with the centre imposing and the peripheries accepting. Phillipson (1992:63) warns us against the idea of a conspiracy theory with 'pure' peripheries and 'corrupt' centre. There are centres of power, both in the centre and in the periphery, and elites in both the centre and the periphery are linked by shared interests. Today most of the ELT elites of the peripheries have strong links with the centre. For instance, many ELT professionals from periphery countries have been educated in centre countries and through the medium of the English language, the centre language. Thus, what happens in the peripheries should not be seen as irrevocably determined by the centre. In addition, recent research has shown that ELT peripheries have developed ways of appropriating centre pedagogies to different degrees in terms of the needs and values of the local communities (see, for instance, Canagarajah 1999).

ELT Centre's view of the periphery

In what follows, I attempt an illustration of the centre-periphery relationship in ELT as conceived from the centre's point of view by analyzing
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ELT discourse from the centre. The purpose of this analysis has primarily been to explore the different ways through which an unequal relationship between the ELT centre and periphery is discursively construed. Adopting a critical discourse analytic approach, the brief analysis which follows is based on the assumption that centre-periphery relations are construed and activated (produced, reproduced, challenged etc) in discourse through the discursive practices of the ELT subjects. This approach views texts as instances of socially situated practices and it is not concerned with individual writers producing individual texts nor with their intentions, but with the effects that the texts entail for ELT disciplinary practices.

I will presently analyse a small number of extracts which come from two published ELT articles. These articles have been selected from a large corpus of published papers written by ELT experts from the Centre. The use of the limited number of texts analysed here is justified by the fact that my purpose in this paper has not been to arrive at generalizations of some kind, but to illustrate with specific examples from actual data some of the points already discussed.

The first article, entitled 'Culture, values and the language classroom' by R. Barrow was published in 1990 by The British Council (ELT Document 132). We read in the introduction of this article:

> On the face of it, teaching English, whether to ethic minorities in English-speaking countries or to members of non-English speaking countries, stands in little need of justification. The ability to speak the language of a country in which one lives has obvious values; but English is also useful for those whose mother tongue it is not, given that it is the second most widely used language in the world. It has an unsurpassed richness in terms of vocabulary, and hence in its scope for giving precise and detailed understanding of the world.[lines:1-8[3]]

What is interesting in this extract is not of course the statement that one needs to know the language of the place where she lives, in the case of ESL, nor the statement that English is a language with rich vocabulary. What is interesting is the naturalization process which is activated here through the statement that because of this richness in vocabulary the English language gives "precise and detailed understanding of the world". The connection between the importance of the English language and culture, in fact, the superiority of the English culture, is stressed throughout the article. In another part of the same article we read:

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[3] The numbers in brackets which follow the extracts from data indicate the lines in the article.

"Some cultures are superior to others, at least in certain specific respects" [line 250] and a few lines below "it would be an instance of relativism gone mad, if one were to pretend that some cultures are not superior to others in respect of their literature, their morality, their industrial capacity, their agricultural efficiency, their scientific understanding and so forth" [lines 262-66]. The argument concerning the superiority of some cultures at this point aims at promoting the idea that the English culture is one of these superior cultures. Going back to the initial extract from the introduction of the article, we read:

> However, it seems that **we sometimes get cold feet** in this enterprise and **worry about our right to proceed**, largely out of fear of what may be termed 'cultural imperialism'. **Are we not guilty**, the suggestion goes, of imposing the values and beliefs of the English-speaking western world on individuals and countries whose traditions are quite different? [lines 8-13, emphasis added]

An analysis of voices which populate this extract is rather revealing at this point. On the one hand, we identify the voice of those who believe that it is "our right to proceed". On the other hand, there is the voice of those who claim: "we are guilty of imposing the values and beliefs of the English speaking western world on individuals and countries". Who are though the people who voice this statement? In fact, it is the voice of the native speakers of English, the ELT experts and teachers of the centre, who make the above statement, as the use of the first person plural of the personal pronoun 'we' indicates. Surprisingly, this is a 'worry' that comes from the centre itself, not from the people who are the receivers of these values and beliefs. The receivers of this 'cultural imperialism', the people of the periphery, are in fact excluded from the article. They are primarily backgrounded. According to Van Leeuwen (1996:41), in the case of backgrounding, the excluded social actors may not be mentioned in relation to a given activity, but they are mentioned elsewhere in the text, so that we can infer with reasonable certainty who they are. In this sense, they are not so much excluded as de-emphasized, pushed into the background. By backgrounding the people who would most naturally express such views, and by having the 'worry' expressed by the people of the centre itself, the text develops an intellectual dialogue among the centre experts, rather than among the centre and the periphery experts. In a case like this, where the objections would most naturally come from the periphery, constructing this argument as an argument which is articulated by the centre itself entails a number of implications concerning the intellectual dialogue which takes place in ELT. The centre here
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is discursively constructed as being in a position to identify its own problems (or, more precisely, according to the article, the 'so-called' problems) and provide solutions. Strangely enough, this issue is not addressed by those who suffer the consequences, but it is voiced by those who seem to be the source of the problem itself, making it their business to deal with and disqualifying the periphery.

In addition, there is another instance of backgrounding in the above extract whose function, however, is different from the previous one. Those who use the term 'cultural imperialism' are also backgrounded, hence it is not made clear in the text whether the ELT experts who have coined this term are in fact coming from the centre or the periphery. According to Van Leeuwen (1996:41-2), backgrounding is also used for either taken for granted knowledge or for things which are not of immediate concern. Since there is no reference at all to the periphery experts, the implication might be here that the centre itself has in fact coined the term in the specific context of ELT.

Let us now turn to another point of interest from the same article. This is the repeatedly stressed view that the transmission of values and worldview is, in the case of English, desirable. We read at the beginning of the article:

> In this paper I shall argue that we do indeed transmit particular values and beliefs by teaching English as a Second Language, but that to some extent this is inevitable, that in respect of some values and beliefs it is desirable, and that therefore it is not something about which we should feel guilty. [lines 13-17]

And then, towards the end of the paper, we read:

> It is true that at a sophisticated level of language use students will encounter much that is foreign to their thinking, but we can reasonably argue that much of what they are introduced to is desirable, in some instances we may even say superior to alternatives. [lines 274-77]

These two extracts, from the beginning and concluding parts of the article, construct a consistent view of the argument being developed. The inequality of the cultures and the superiority of the English culture that we encountered in the previous examples come back here too, as lexical items and expressions such as 'desirable' and 'superior to alternatives' indicate.

Moreover, the fact that this article was included in an international publication of the British Council to be read by people all over the world gives

the whole argument proposed in this article another dimension. Although these publications strongly suggest to provide a forum of international exchange of ELT ideas, the above case constitutes an instance of an article which conducts this dialogue exclusively among centre ELT experts and which systematically excludes from the discussion the periphery experts and teachers, even in an issue which primarily concerns the periphery.

Finally, in another extract from the same article, the understanding of science and its principles is considered synonymous to the understanding of the language which most naturally expresses scientific laws, English:

> one obvious way, and the only way that we have any control over, to develop a conceptual grasp of the world is to provide understanding of the language that encapsulates our understanding to date. In short, and by way of example, if we wish to enable people to understand laws of science or principles of aesthetics or religious faith, the obvious way forward would seem to be to give them understanding of the language of these subjects. [lines 54-60]

The above extract relates scientific language and understanding of principles of scientific laws to the English language. This connection is systematically construed not only in the above, but in other extracts as well, in different parts of the article. In fact, this view which has been a rather popular one among centre countries has been disproved by recent research. For instance, in Nigeria, Afolayan (1984) has shown how the notion of importance of English for the understanding of science and mathematics has been exaggerated. He also proposes to the educational authorities to consider the promotion of the Nigerian languages as the languages of instruction in primary and secondary schools.

Overall, contrary to an apolitical view of ELT which has been consistently promoted by centre countries over the last few decades (Mitsikopoulou 1999: 1-4), the analyzed paper argues in favor of the superiority of both the English culture and the English language. Turning the 'cultural imperialism' attack against those who articulate it in the first place, the article does not attempt to mask the relationship between culture and language (a widely employed practice in ELT, according to Phillipson 1992: 67) but in fact argue: "What's wrong with it?"

The second article I will briefly analyze is entitled 'Team teaching: a case study from Japan' by P. Sturman and was published in 1992 in a collection of articles concerning collaborative language learning and teaching. This article is

describing a project in which both English and Japanese teachers worked together to teach English to first-year lower secondary school students. However, cultural and attitudinal differences led to the construction of 'us', experienced ESOL teachers from the Cambridge English School, The British Council, as opposed to 'them' Japanese teachers:

> All Japanese teachers feel that they do not have enough time to prepare the students well enough for the examinations, and accordingly that the team teaching project is taking away time from the essentials. This group of teachers also believes that the techniques and approaches they already use are successful, given the nature of the syllabus and examinations and, considering the overwhelming importance of the examinations, why should they change anything? They are polite, but genuinely believe that we are wasting their time, the students' time and a considerable amount of money as well. [lines 366-375]

Throughout the report there is a consistent construction of distance between the Japanese and the British teachers. 'We' British teachers participating in the project is distinctly separated from 'them' Japanese teachers and a contrast is implied between the two categories of teachers.

Moreover, although the project was to team teach a class, the published report was written only by the British teachers giving their account of what happened during the team teaching. Nowhere in this article or in another one of the same collection of articles do we have a chance to read the view of the Japanese teachers who participated in this project. Even the title of the article itself 'A case study from Japan' does not allow any room for the Japanese perspective to be heard. What we indeed have is the British teachers' account of what the Japanese feel and do. This brings forth another point related to the dissemination of ideas and views. As Phillipson (1992: 308) notes, it is generally easier to trace written sources originating from the centre than the periphery: "the issue is part of the more general one of the proliferation of centre journals and books… This is bound to over-represent the perspective of one party", in this case, the British view at the expense of the Japanese.

In addition, as we read in the above extract, the Japanese teachers did not actually want to take part in this project which they felt was wasting their time, yet it was imposed on them, perhaps by their educational authorities. This project can be seen as an instance of what has often been called 'educational aid' from the centre. As it is implied in this extract, the British teachers from the centre would like to implement some changes in the teaching of English, but to

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which the Japanese teachers objected. Of particular interest here is the imposition of this educational 'aid' project on periphery teachers.

Conclusion

It has mainly been during the last two decades that some systematic research has been conducted concerning the centre-periphery operation in ELT. Specifically, more research is conducted by researchers from the periphery which is evaluative and critical, and which explores aspects which concern the peripheries in different parts of the world. In addition, as also stated at the beginning of this paper, the centre-periphery operation is conditioned by sociohistorical and cultural determinants and should not be approached as monolithic. Similarly, ELT "has not been promoted globally as a result of a master-minded plan" but "is reconstituted continually in lived experience" (Phillipson 1992:307) through a number of hegemonic practices, embedded in discursive practices, which are associated with arguments relating the English language to modernization, progress and scientific understanding. In our post-modern society with its fast-moving technological advances, the centre – periphery operation will change, too. For instance, Phillipson predicts that eventually the centre's "inter-state" actors will not be necessary since the computers will ensure the centre's control over the periphery (1992:242).

Taking the above issues into account, it becomes important to sensitize language teachers all over the world about the operation of ELT centre and periphery and the various forms that this operation may take, and to place any discussion concerning the ELT centre-periphery operation within the wider context of ELT cultural politics. By 'de-naturalizing' the practices of the ELT centre, we can become more critical of both the 'cultural imperialism' which originates in the centre and, perhaps most importantly, develop an awareness and a better understanding of our own practices as peripheries.

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CAN WE STILL SAY "TYPICALLY ENGLISH" IN A CHANGING WORLD?

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> "The very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it"
>
> (Widdowson, 1994: 385)

1. What teachers should teach when referring to English? Its status is a matter of much current debate. Many questions and immediate consequences arise from the global spread of English. The use of English as an international language or English as a lingua franca (ELF) lead on the one hand to the idea of *globalisation* and on the other hand to *the national paradigm*. More and more voices say that English as an international language has become independent of its origin.

Even if "English" has become in many literature and linguistic courses "Englishes" , English is still a rather fixed entity when it comes to teaching and using the language as such. What English classes have in common is that they deal with English as it is used by its native speakers, either in the UK or the US. English as a native language (ENL) provides the yardstick against which students' work is judged in essays, cultural studies or language proficiency examinations.

2. The description of the language offered by reference works and textbooks is defined in terms of speakers for whom English is "either a majority first language…or an official additional language" (Greenbaum, 1996: 3) . We can hardly talk about any descriptive empirical work on the most extensive contemporary use of English world wide that of English as lingua franca (ELF).

Textbooks and English courses display topics that are sometimes common denominators, though the level is different. The *Prospects* series for example, (from intermediate up to super – advanced) offers such an example through:

- discoveries
- health
- music
- past time
- planet – earth – environment
- relationships
- studying languages
- television
- transport
- travel

Combining private and public discussions, casual conversations one – to – one interviews or texts presenting information, these topics are addressed to fluent speakers (to be formed) whose very early socialisation did not take place in English.

That is why several questions might remain open:

- which are the most- relied – upon and successfully employed grammatical constructions and lexical choices?
- are there aspects that contribute especially to smooth communication?
- what are the factors that tend to lead to "ripples", misunderstandings or communication breakdown?
- what do we understand by a communicative success?
- do we find commonly used constructions or lexical items and sound patterns, ungrammatical in standard L_1 English but generally unproblematic in ELF communication?

3. *Typically English* or *French* or *Romanian* is a common thing to say, but is it really possible to say that something is *typically* + nationality ? Is this kind of remark xenophobic ?

Task 1

For a fruitful discussion students are asked to read a series of quotations about the English and match them with the following themes:

o English people are careful with their money
o they are unwilling to talk about their health

o English food is terrible
o the weather is terrible
o the discipline of queuing

a) The English may not like music but they absolutely love the noise it makes

Sir Thomas Beecham (1879-1961)
English orchestra conductor

b) The most dangerous thing in the world is to make a friend of an Englishman, because he'll come and sleep in your closet rather than spend ten shillings on a hotel.

Truman Capote (1924-1984)
American writer

c) The English find ill-health not only interesting but respectable and often experience death in an effort to avoid a fuss.

Pamela Frankan (1908-1967)
American novelist, journalist and story writer

d) The climate of England has been the   world's most powerful colonising impulse.

Russell Green
American humorist

e) If you want to eat well in England , eat three breakfasts.

Somerset Mangham (1874-1965)
English novelist

f) An Englishman, even if he is alone, likes to form an orderly queue of one.

George Mikes (1912-1987)
Hungarian-born writer and satirist

Task 2
Students are invited to explain what the quotations mean to them (speaking or writing activity).

Task 3
Students are asked to discuss the content of the quotes: the age of the quote – an old quote doesn't necessarily mean that it is no longer true;

Americans are so often criticised by the British – this suggests that they are "getting their own back" (taking revenge) ; people remember humorous remarks longer but they may not be taken seriously enough.

4. A *discussion* can be continued by a *forum*. ; students can address each other as if they were speaking to people from another country, who do not know everything about your country. The advantage of such an activity is that students can say things which they know, other students already know , but which helps them to practise the kind of things they would say if they met people from other countries.

Task 1
Work in groups of four. Divide into two pairs.
Pair 1 . Discuss the following question and make a list of your nationality's
     good points.
Question: What are your country's good and bad national characteristics?
Pair 2 . Discuss the question above and make a list of your nationality's weak
     points

Task 2
Re-convene as a group of four and discuss what you have written. Debate the points you have raised in front of the rest of the class.

Task 3
Write either a two paragraphs letter to a friend or send an e-mail to a foreign student who is visiting your country for the first time . Do not forget to warn each of them on certain aspects and do not forget you own sense of self-worth.

5. Implications for teaching English should make researchers and "practitioners" (methodologists and   teachers) think about clear terminological distinctions between EFL and ENL, where they are important. "Non – native" speakers of English will no longer have a borrowed identity, but an identity of their own, as international users of an international language.

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HUMOUR IN THE CLASSROOM: CATEGORISATION AND SOURCES

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This paper presents the findings that resulted from an empirical study that I undertook with my students, 3-rd year Philology students majoring in English, during six language classes designed around humorous teaching materials, with a view to identifying types of humour occurring in the language classroom as well as their source.

I will present first an inventory of the *categories and subcategories* that I found in each lesson individually and in combination. The system has 3 main types, 8 categories and 27 subcategories. These have been identified through the application of grounded theory and through the development of the category system, but here I will also discuss possible explanations for the frequencies and proportions of the categories in the data.

Frequencies and proportions illustrating the main distinction, i.e. *material-generated categories* vs. *interactional categories*, are presented in Table 1. The differences between the two are due to the fact that in one sequence, which has one initiating utterance and hence one initiator, there may be several categories.

Lesson	Number of material generated categories of total number of occurrences (column 14 of the coding chart)	Number and % of interactional categories total number of occurrences (column14 of the coding chart)
1. Syntax	2-(25%)	3-(38%)
2. Talking about humour	1-(9%)	7-(64%)
3. Cinderella	14-(33%)	2-(63%)
4. Helen of Troy	0-(0%)	23-(82%)
5. Jokes	20-(47%)	22-(51%)
6. Misprints	29-(21%)	103-(76%)
Total	66	185
%	**25%**	**69%**

Table 1: Frequencies and distribution of the two main types of categories of humour occurring in the classroom: material-generated and interactional

Table 1 suggests that materials generate approximately a quarter of the humour, while interactional categories represent almost three quarters of the total number of occurrences of categories found in the data, i.e. 268.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the six combinations of interactional categories, i.e. frequencies and proportions of occurrences of *interactional categories* to the *total number of occurrences of categories*, expressed as percentages:

Lesson	Interactional Structural (column14 of the coding chart)	Interactional Thematic (column14 of the coding chart)	Interactional Structural Material (column14 of the coding chart)	Interactional Thematic Material (column14 of the coding chart)	Interactional Thematic Structural (column14 of the coding chart)	Interactional Thematic Structural Material (column14 of the coding chart)	Unclear	Total occur-rences
1. Syntax	0	1	1	1	0	0	3	8
2. Talking about humour	3	4	0	0	0	0	3	11
3. Cinderella	9	1	0	17	0	0	2	43
4. Helen of Troy	1	7	0	14	0	1	5	28
5. Jokes	11	0	4	6	1	0	1	43
6. Misprints	37	13	8	37	6	2	3	135
Occ.	62	28	11	73	8	3	19	**268**
%	23%	10%	5%	28%	3%	1%	6%	

Table 2: Frequencies and proportions of Interactional Humour categories

The largest category, Interactional-Thematic-Material-related, with 73 occurrences, is a topic-oriented category, which includes participants' personal opinions about the teaching materials, metacomments on the content, form or humour of the materials, reinvoking humorous materials, or production of materials after a model. This finding is enlightening in the sense that although the occurrences of interactional categories are more numerous than material-generated ones, i.e. 69% vs. 25%, the humorous exchanges *referring* to the teaching materials are the most frequent, an argument in favour of the importance of the choice of these materials. As I will show, this category completely excludes *Classroom-specific humour* and was problematic for the respondents.

The second largest category, Interactional-Structural, is activity-type oriented as laughter is the result of disruptions at the discursive or social level

(in terms of allowable behaviours). This is the category for which *Classroom-specific humour* was identified as the main subcategory, which therefore represents an important proportion of the humour occurring in the classroom. (Classroom-specific humour is present in other forms as a subcategory of other types of humour occurring in the classroom, therefore these figures do not say everything about it.)

I will now present the findings about a type of humour that I found specific to the context of this foreign language classroom, *foreign language classroom-specific humour.* First I describe the subcategory 'Classroom-specific humour' and give frequencies and proportions to the total number of occurrences of categories, then setting it in contrast to 'foreign language classroom-specific humour'.

Classroom-specific humour (CRH), has the following characteristics, which both derive from and inform the four analytical principles used in the definitions for the categories:

- CRH is generated in interaction**,** by the participants; it is not directly generated by a humorous point in the materials. (*material vs. interaction generated humour*)
- CRH is activity-oriented, the structural element, i.e. the structural expectations and the inferences of the participants, being typical for this subcategory. (*activity vs. topic-oriented categories*)
- CRH is associated with education-related topics. (*education-related vs. education non-related topics*)
- CRH is specific to the classroom situation. I assumed, for instance, that the humorous point in the teaching materials brought into the classroom would be perceived as funny outside the classroom too, or that, conversely, breaching the school regulations, e.g. bringing mobile phones into the classroom, would not generate a humorous reaction outside this environment. (*the funniness of the same episode inside vs. outside the classroom*)

As shown in Table 3, Classroom-specific humour overarches Interactional-Structural, Interactional-Thematic and Interactional-Thematic-Structural humour, hence this type of humour, irrespective of the details of actual analysis, is characterised by two elements, considering the above-mentioned distinctions used in categorising the data:

- it results from the *challenge of the allowable contributions* inherent in the activity type, and/or

- it is *associated with education-related topics, contained or not in the materials, local or general.*

Also, as indicated in the definitions, it is completely absent from the largest category of humour occurring in the classroom: Interactional-Thematic-Material-related. I will return to this apparently contradictory finding whereby the category best represented in the data excludes classroom humour.

Table 3 reminds the reader of the distribution of *Classroom-specific* vs. *Classroom non-specific* humour in the categories of humour identified in the data. I have completely excluded Material-contained humour and referred only to interactional categories on the assumption that material-contained humour would be relevant both per se and in the classroom situation, an assumption implicit in the fact that I had brought humorous materials to class with the intention of producing a humorous effect.

Humour occurring in the classroom	
Classroom non-specific humour	**Classroom-specific humour**

1. Interational-Thematic
 	
Banter   Local
 	
            General
 	
2. Interactional-Thematic-
 	
    Material-related
	1. Interactional-Structural
	
	CRH Discursive
	
	            Social
	
	2. Interactional-Thematic
	
	CRH Local
	
	            General
	
	3. Interactional-Thematic-
	
	    Structural

Border categories
Interactional-Structural-Material-related
Interactional-Thematic-Structural-Material-related

Table 3. Distribution of the category classroom-specific humour

Table 4 shows frequencies and proportions of classroom-specific humour to the total number of occurrences of all categories.

Lesson	Total occurrences Classroom-specific humour	Total occurrences of Categories
1.Syntax	3	8
2.Talking about humour	5	11
3.Cinderella	10	43
4.Helen of Troy	1	28
5.Jokes	14	43
6. Misprints	55	148
Total	**88**	**281**
%	**31%**	

Table 4: Frequencies and proportion of classroom-specific humour

Classroom-specific humour thus represents 31% of the total number of humorous occurrences. Similarly, the features of classroom non-specific humour (non-CRH) can be outlined on the same principles:

- Non-CRH is generated in interaction. (*material vs. interaction generated humour*)
- Non-CRH humour cuts across half of the category Interactional-Thematic. It includes 'banter', a term used to cover all education non-related topics. It also includes the category Interactional-Thematic-Material-related, for which a general term is *humorous talk around the text,* cf. 'teacher talk around the text' (Sunderland at al. 2001). (*activity vs. topic-oriented categories*)
- Non-CRH humour excludes education-related topics. (*education-related vs. education non-related topics*)

- Non-CRH humour covers a larger range of topics and situations than CRH and therefore it would be still perceived as humorous outside the classroom too. (*the funniness of the same episode inside vs. outside the classroom*)

Table 5 presents the distribution of varieties of classroom non-specific humour across the seven relevant subcategories in all six lessons and in the dataset as a whole:

Table 5: Frequencies and proportions of varieties of Classroom non-specific humour.

The acronyms stand for:
A =acting
BG =banter general
BL =banter local
com M =comment on material
MM =metacomment on material
MMC = metacomment on material
MP =material production
MR =material reinvoking

	Interactional Classroom non-specific humour							Total number of occurrences
Lesson	**A**	**BG**	**BL**	**Com M**	**MM**	**MP**	**MR**	
1.Syntax	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	7
2.Talking about humour	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	6
3.Cinderella	0	1	0	6	9	0	3	34
4.Helen of Troy	0	5	2	0	7	0	8	28
5.Jokes	1	0	0	0	2	0	5	30
6. Misprints	0	2	3	15	12	4	6	80
	1	9	7	21	31	4	22	**185**
	1%	5%	4%	11%	15%	2%	11%	
	33%							

Table 5 shows that classroom non-specific humour represents 33% of the instances of humour occurring in the classroom, while classroom-specific humour represents 31%. They are approximately equal in terms of frequency of occurrence, the rest of the occurrences having teaching materials as the source of their humour.

As indicated earlier, the fact that Interactional-Thematic-Material-related humour, largely represented in the data coming from the classroom context, excluded classroom-specific humour, was intriguing, all the more it contains as subcategories activities directly related to teaching, i.e. comments and metacomments on the materials, 'material production' and 'material reinvoking'. A possible explanation is the fact that this category is in fact a category specific to the *foreign language classroom*, where language is both an end and a means, unlike other classrooms. Similarly, the category Interactional-Thematic, realised by subcategories such as 'Acting', 'Banter', i.e. joking about topics non-related to education, is also typical of the foreign language classroom, where recitation or role-play are common (and specific) techniques, and where approaching a large range of topics in conversational ways is encouraged.

Seen in this light, the humour which is not classroom-specific, i.e. specific to classrooms *in general*, is in fact *foreign language classroom-specific humour*. The type of teaching that is normally done in the foreign language class is 'hidden' in this form of 'humorous conversational teaching': a disguised, non-traditional form. The fact that this category was not identified by the respondents (see Appendix 3B) suggests that students perceive it as the normal course of action in the foreign language class, where language is approached through language. This type of humour blurs the distinction between frames, in the sense that teaching is done jokingly, in the 'hidden teaching frame'. I suggest that it is also a form of socialising the students 'into' the world outside the classroom in a way that is authentic for the foreign language classroom situation (Cook 2000) to such an extent that it is not perceived by participants as 'teaching'.

Table 6 accordingly shows the category of foreign classroom humour, a type of humour that is not described in the literature:

Foreign language classroom humour								Total number of occurrences
Lesson	The joking frame (Interactional-Thematic)			The 'hidden teaching frame' (Interactional-Thematic-Material-related)				
	A	BG	BL	Com M	MM	MP	MR	
1.Syntax	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	7
2.Talking about humour	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	6
3.Cinderella	0	1	0	6	9	0	3	34
4.Helen of Troy	0	5	2	0	7	0	8	28
5.Jokes	1	0	0	0	2	0	5	30
6. Misprints	0	2	3	15	12	4	6	80
	1	9	7	21	31	4	22	**185**
	10%			39%				
	33%							

Table 6: Foreign language classroom humour

If we look at these findings in terms of the occurrence of the categories in conjunction with the materials, only a small proportion do not relate to/draw on the materials directly or indirectly, i.e., 1 occurrence of 'acting', 9 of 'banter general' and 7 of 'banter local', i.e. a total of 17 out of 193, less than 10%. These findings tend to support the importance that the teaching materials have in teaching with humour in the classroom, as although interactional humour sequences are in greater number, in the majority of cases their topic is nevertheless the humorous point in the materials.

This paper started from the assumption that the main source of humour in the classroom is the teaching materials that the teacher brings to the class. However, these materials are not the only source of humour. Many other things go on in the classroom which also provoke laughter, which in its turn can also have various functions. Though we can find explanations for some of the episodes, others remain unclear and contradictory.

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HOW DO TEACHERS AND THEIR TEACHING INFLUENCE THE STUDENTS?

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The Beginning of the Journey

It all started as a project for a graduate course in qualitative research. I did not know anything about research prior to this and I considered it a challenge. First I had to decide upon a title, a thing that is easier said than done since the research question is essential. In the end I chose something to do with teaching because I tried to find something practical, something I wanted to know more about and I realised that this was teaching. So I started reflecting on my own experience as a student and as a teacher. Then I discovered something that laid there in my mind but which I had not put into words before, namely that teachers do not realise how much they influence their students and how this affects the latter's whole life.

I thought of the teachers I have had and the ones who came to my mind first were those who influenced me in a negative way - from disliking the subject, to resolving not to choose it as a career. It seems that negative examples are usually easier to remember, as they stay vivid in our minds for a longer period of time, sometimes acting as a reminder of what not to do and sometimes simply being painful memories. But of course I was also positively influenced by some of my teachers and my career stands as a proof of their influence.

Then, several questions troubled me. Do other students feel they are influenced by their teachers or is it just me? To what extent do teachers actually influence their students? Are they aware or not of this influence they have? What exactly do teachers think that influences their students, what they are or what they do? How does this influence affect the students' future lives? These were all questions that came to my mind and the only way to find the answers was to start researching this topic and so I started a small-scale research.

The Opinion of the Experts

I wanted to find out whether this topic was covered before in research or not so I have read different books on teaching and I came across many useful pieces of information about how the performance of the students is influenced

by what the teacher does or does not do. For example, in their book *Classroom Management*, Levin and Nolan make the reader aware of different ways in which the teacher may influence the performance of his/her students. (Levin, Nolan, 1996: 38-67) Starting from the findings of different researches and using case studies, Levin and Nolan (1996: 38-67) present the multifaceted vicious circle: teacher's behaviour triggers student's behaviour and so on, focusing on the binary action – reaction to present a way of preventing disruptive behaviour. Self-esteem, the motivation of the students, or the expectations of a teacher are mentioned as factors influencing the learning process or the performance of the students.

Observational studies were conducted beginning with the 1970s in order to examine the behaviour of teachers towards the students whom they perceived as low achievers and towards students whom they perceived as high achievers. It was discovered that:

> […] Teachers often unintentionally communicate low expectations toward students whom they perceive as low achievers. These lower expectations are communicated by behaviours such as:
> - calling on low achievers less often to answer a question.
> - providing fewer clues and hints to low achievers when they have initial difficulty in answering questions.
> - praising correct answers from low achievers less often.
> - staying further away physically and psychologically from low achievers in the classroom.
> - smiling less frequently at low achievers.
> - making eye contact less frequently with low achievers (Levin, Nolan, 1996: 102-103).

These are only several examples of behaviours that communicate low expectations to students although several more are presented.

Suzanne Peregoy and Owen Boyle underline the importance of showing sensitivity towards students coming from different sociocultural backgrounds and suggest that teachers should know more about their students through personal interaction, through observation and interpretation of their behaviour. Teachers should help newcomers adjust to the new learning environment thus improving the student's performance and social development. (Peregoy, Boyle, 1997:4-23).

Rita and Kenneth Dunn on the other hand discuss about learning styles and how important it is for the teacher to be familiar to the different learning styles of their students and in this sense they have created a guidebook for in-service coordinators to assist in retraining professional teachers. (Dunn, 1999).

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But all these examples had only little to do with my topic since they did not consider the possibility that students might be influenced by the teacher's body language, gestures, choice of vocabulary, clothes, or personality. They focused on the performance of the student who is positively or negatively influenced and not on the possible effects that this influence might have on their future careers.

Insights of the Process

Since I knew very little about interviews and how to conduct them or about other techniques of collecting and analysing data I read the diary of Ma Yamona and found out how she had organised her own research (Yamona, 2000).

In this research I experimented with different methods of data collection, such as interviews, questionnaires, students' reflections on their being influenced or not by teachers. I have to say that self-reflections and some exam papers of 4th year students majoring in English helped me form an opinion or reach certain conclusions.

The interviews were conducted among students, teachers and parents, as I wanted to validate the information received from one with what the other two had to say about the same thing. Therefore I have conducted four one-to-one interviews and I did not find it very easy. I had never interviewed people before but the fear of the unknown was not greater than the will to experiment. The thing that I find most difficult when interviewing people is to look them in the eyes all the time and to try to remain objective and not get involved in a leading conversation. Recording the interviews was very helpful and less time consuming for the interviewees, but the transcribing part was not something I enjoyed too much.

In writing the research report I used several quotations from the interviews since:

"Stories without variables do not tell us enough about the meaning and larger import of what we are seeing. Variables without stories are ultimately abstract and unconvincing." (Miles, Huberman, 1994:302).

Concerning the questionnaires I can say that these were even more challenging for me than the interview because I had seen very many badly written questionnaires and I wanted to come up with a well-conceived one. Besides I felt I had to write the perfect questionnaire as now we were experts, we had a different status. This was not very easy because I had to use many

open-ended questions in order to find out people's opinions and this might account for the questionnaires that were not properly filled in. After writing them I asked fellow MA students to tell me what they thought and thus I understood what I had to re-write or change in order to make things clear. The return rate was good (about 65%) and the reason why this happened might be the fact that the respondents were my students (4th year), a semi-captive population, or colleagues of mine in the MA course, who knew the importance of taking the time to fill in a questionnaire for a research. This is also probably one of the most important things that I have learnt from doing this research, namely that it is important for a research to be successful to have respondents who can take the time to answer a few questions. I have learnt to look differently at the people in the streets of Timisoara who stop you just to ask a few questions and you find some excuse for having no time.

So What Did I Find Out?

I was very surprised to find out that most high-school students did not admit to having been influenced by their teachers. They mistook influence for manipulation and most of them said that they had strong personalities and nobody could influence them. However there were a few who realised that spending so much time with somebody implies being influenced.

"It is hard not to be influenced by people with whom you spend 6-7 hours a day. The teachers, without necessarily wanting to, are like parents for us. Every word, every gesture that is inappropriate is judged by the students. Some students may have teachers as role models, I for one have only met about 2-3 teachers whom I could have as model and who could influence me." (11th grader)

Others had contradictory opinions.

"I think teachers have a great influence on the life of their students. If the students are young the influence is even bigger!

In general, teachers have no influence on me, except the ones I like very much the way they teach and the way they are.

If I could choose, I would choose not to be influenced by anyone because I would like to be myself 100%." (11th grader)

A former teacher told me in an interview that parents and teachers have the strongest influence upon our lives and this is also the result of my research. I have found out not only that teachers have a great influence on their students, but that even the most insignificant things a teacher does are interpreted by the
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students as favourable or not as the first 11th grader said. This is also verified by my own experience as a teacher when the students look at me from head to toes with scrutinising eyes and by what L. D., a former primary school teacher said in an interview (Interview 4).

"First of all the elementary school students [...] have a model in their teacher. And then they see how their teacher thinks, how s/he solves a certain problem, [...] even her/his mere presence in front of the classroom has a great influence upon the students' future behaviour, even if then [...] s/he does not realise it, the student borrows something from the teacher's way of being. The children told me in the first grade, even P. was among those who told me, I think, that they went home, would take the dolls and do everything that I did during the class, everything I told them, the way I introduced myself, the intonation, the gestures, they did in front of the dolls, so they actually imitated me, involuntarily they imitated me. [...] First of all, the gestures, then the way of thinking, so we do influence the students very much, especially in elementary school. [...] In secondary school, they start creating their models; they start being critical, so it is a little more difficult to "shape" them. Therefore the first four years of school are decisive in their future formation."

The opinions of the 4th year and MA 1 students are divided in this respect. Some admit to having been influenced by their teachers so far and others do not. Most MA students admit to having been influenced by their teachers in the choice of their careers.

"My first to fourth form teacher made me love working with children; everything seemed so easy for her and she loved us very much. At the beginning I wanted to become a teacher of Romanian, then a Maths teacher, then a teacher of French until I made my final decision: English." (MA student)

This is obviously a case of a student who was influenced in a positive way by her teacher, but there are very many things that a teacher does that trigger the opposite reaction.

"During secondary school I hated Maths because my Maths teacher was interested only in the result of the exercise and the rest was not important. Then I said to myself I wouldn't ever do that." (MA student)

I could identify two categories here: a long-term positive influence and a long-term negative influence. We could say a few things about short-term influence although this is not the purpose of this research. This kind of influence works like a mechanism; it is triggered by different things a teacher does/ says or simply by the way s/he is at a certain moment. The teachers can

easily identify this kind of immediate response from the students, as students do not fail to show agreement or disagreement; approval or disapproval with what the teachers do.

As we have already seen from the examples, the long-term influence can be positive or negative. Further on we shall see what triggered a long-term positive or negative influence from what the interviewees said. First of all the fact that the teacher is or is not emotionally involved is essential for the further development of the students.

"[…] She loved us; her love, the way she taught us, the way she loved the subject she was teaching, the fact that she was kind and didn't want to punish us, she suffered when she punished us, made me love Russian and want to become a teacher of Russian." (Retired teacher, interview 1)

On the other hand

"[…] My Maths teacher was very severe, very strict and it seemed to me that she wasn't quite correct with us and that's why I didn't like Mathematics, I hated Mathematics; she used to shout at us […] I mean it was a kind of turning point for my career, so I would never, I would never have gone to study Mathematics…" (Retired teacher, interview 1)

Of course the bad things that teachers do will not always have the same result as was the case of another teacher whom I interviewed (interview 4). Her psychology teacher treated students from the countryside differently from those coming from cities in the sense that he did not expect them to know much. This made L.D. want to prove him wrong and made her study harder instead of demotivate her. However she mentioned the fact that there were many students who failed his exam as they did not want to learn for that subject.

An example of a teacher who is not emotionally involved is a 7 grader's Romanian teacher who is considered annoying by the students. When asked if she had teachers she didn't like P. answered:

"Does 'dislike' also mean hate?" [Laughs] "I hate my Romanian teacher; I can't stand him, but nobody can." (P. Interview 2)

Why does she consider him as annoying? Because

"[…] Everything he does, as if he wants us to do what he likes and he's so naïve; he thinks everybody's good and nice. That's the way he seems to think. Besides that he's really boring. If you look in our notebooks […] between the notebook and the textbook you will find very small differences; it's like we have two books, which is very boring because he sometimes just says 'copy that, copy that, copy that' […] in the classroom, not even homework. […]And

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he wants us to do lots of exercises. He gives us an immense amount of homework. One day we had to do, from Monday 'till Tuesday, we had to write about six pages.

[…]And another thing annoying about him is that he's always talking on the phone. The mobile always rings." (P. Interview 2)

If I were to make a prediction about the students in this teacher's class I would say that they will most probably not choose Romanian as a career and that they will lose interest and eventually stop learning it and therefore have to have tutoring in Romanian in order to pass the "Baccalaureate" exam at the end of the high-school.

Students have in my opinion very good radars when it comes to teaching methods, they can easily tell apart a good lesson from a not very good one although they are not experts in methodology. They simply know what to look for. For example when I asked P. why she liked a certain teacher she said that she is a good teacher. When asked to explain a little she said:

"I guess her methods are just good because we always get the lesson; we don't have to study very much at home." (P. Interview 2)

She also mentioned the fact that the teacher clearly explains to them what they will do during that class. Interesting activities, group work and a teacher who creates a pleasant atmosphere were among the things they like.

Students look for teachers who are open-minded, active, imposing, convincing, determined, who do not always give in to what students want (P. interview 2), who can create rapport with their students, who are kind, correct and close to the students.

"The problem with these teachers is that they don't want to get close to the students. This is very bad for the students. They won't be able to communicate with other people in the future due to this problem." (11th grader)

P. claims that a teacher who is open-minded, imposing, convincing has managed to influence her whole class in the sense that they are more united and can speak their minds (P., interview 2). P's mother (interview 3) has also validated this piece of information.

When asked what was that influenced her the teacher's way of teaching or her character, P. said that it was the character.

In the End

I found out that students are very much under the influence of their teachers, but that they do not always realise it. On the other hand teachers may

have known this when they first started teaching but probably forgot this along the way.

I would like to conclude by quoting L.D., a former elementary school teacher and now head mistress, who gives a good piece of advice to teachers who are not aware of the influence they have on their students.

"To invest feelings in what they do and to think of the fact that they have a responsibility, and a great one too, because if an engineer fails in making a screw he throws it away and makes another one, if we fail in shaping a personality, [...] how hard it will be to repair it, and maybe you can never repair it. So we have a great influence upon our students, upon their future development. We leave a mark upon their lives and it depends how we do it. If we are responsible, conscious, serious, we transmit these features, if we are superficial and indifferent to things we transmit these features, because this is the model they are offered; we spend 8-9 hours a day with them, how much time do their parents spend with them?" (L.D., Interview 4).

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ACROSS THE 49TH PARALLEL

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Background. Learning a foreign language is learning a foreign culture. Language education is a process of acculturation. Since language is always in context it reflects specific dominant assumptions and values, or ideology in a society. In an extended concept of communication the use of language demands a cultural as well as linguistic competence. Communication in a foreign language requires communicative competence, which is, in fact, intercultural by definition. Users of English have to be sensitized to cultural diversity in order to develop skills and competences enabling them to interact successfully in a multitude of English language contexts. The study of culture is a study of the close interconnections between language, literature and society - which is the main objective of a foreign language study.

The questions arises: which culture? Is it native speakers' culture? If so, will it be British, American, Canadian, Australian? In a quantitative perspective, speakers of English as a second and foreign language exceed in number first language users (Graddol, 1997). Therefore, the issue is which culture or cultures should be emphasized and how. We think that it is more helpful to assume a cross-cultural perspective, balancing between target and source culture elements as content input for both the foreign language and culture studies courses, thus promoting students' cross-cultural awareness and sensitizing them to the diverse dominant beliefs and values of varying culture systems (for a detailed culture course content cf. Yankova 2001, 2002).

Dominant beliefs and values are not static - they change over time. What is exceptionally useful for FL students is to develop skills to understand other cultures, to decode personal and societal values embedded in texts. Such activities are usually comparative (cf. Byram 1997, Kramsch 1993) and offer insight of source culture norms, target culture norms and develop awareness of the possible difficulties and misunderstandings which might arise in relating the two (or more) cultures.

We would like to suggest several classroom activities which aim at increasing students' awareness of target culture(s) based on humorous pieces

of writing about the US and Canada. We have also opted for native student culture as input, since students use English as a vehicle for their own particular purposes, which may not include use in an English-speaking country. The need to learn English is sometimes less integrative than instrumental. Besides, familiar cultural content facilitates the learning of a foreign language. These three-fold comparisons will enrich students' experience and sensitize them to the fact that although some culture elements are being globalized there is still diversity among cultures.

Emphasizing on cultural diversity cultural elements of any English speaking country can be employed in an activity.

Sample activities:
1. Labeling, or making or breaking stereotypes.

Looking for cultural patterns with the view of discovering intercultural similarities and differences.

Task 1. How do you perceive a 'typical' Canadian, American, and Englishman? Is there a stereotypical 'Canadian', 'American', 'British' character? Do you know any jokes about these nationalities?

Task 2. Read the following jokes and discuss whether they conform to, modify or challenge existing stereotypes.

An Englishman, a Canadian and an American were captured by terrorists.
The terrorist leader said, "Before we shoot you, you will be allowed last words. Please let me know what you wish to talk about."
The Englishman replied, "I wish to speak of loyalty and service to the crown."
The Canadian replied, "Since you are involved in a question of national purpose, national identity, and secession, I wish to talk about the history of constitutional process in Canada, special status, distinct society and uniqueness within diversity."
The American replied, "Just shoot me before the Canadian starts talking."

ELEPHANTS
An international symposium on elephants was convened. Every nation in the world was represented and was expected to deliver a report on elephants.
Germany contributed a report: "The Elephant -- A War Machine".
France's report was typically: "The Love Life of an Elephant".
America saw the economic values in: "Raising Elephants for Fun and Profit".
Great Britain had their own unique view: "The Elephant and the British Empire".
The Canadian report was, of course, typically Canadian . . .
"The Elephant: A Federal or Provincial Responsibility?"

Task 3. Can you think of any Bulgarian jokes that are stereotypic?

Task 4. Make a list of some characteristic features of the Bulgarian national character (e.g. industriousness, patience, thrift, negativist attitude, pessimism, lack of confidence in authorities, sense of humour, lack of social conscience, warmth in personal relationships, indifference in public relations).

2. Making three-fold comparisons: American-Canadian-Bulgarian.
Intercultural comparisons which involve more cultures lead to the development of multicultural competence. They also put a small country like Bulgaria on the radar next to the big two: Canada and the US and foster confidence in the Bulgarian students who are otherwise known to be hesitant in promoting their cultural and historical heritage (cf. Grozdanova 2002). We can start this activity by focusing on factual knowledge:

TEN THINGS AMERICANS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CANADA
- Our president is called a Prime Minister.
- We have never had a Prime Minister assassinated. Although we've been tempted, a few times.
- Members of our Senate are appointed by the national party in power. It is a life time position. Even though they are not elected by the people, they can still control government legislation.
- Our states are called Provinces. We even have three Territories.
- Our Prime Minister does not have a limit on how many terms in office they can do. The record is held by Liberal leader Pierre Eliot Trudeau who stayed leader of the country for around 16 years. It is known as the Trudeau Era.
- We have had a woman Prime Minister. Her name was Kim Campbell. She was Deputy Prime Minister (that's what we call our Vice President) when the Prime Minister of that time, Brian Mulroney, quit. There was an election shortly after that (the Deputy PM is not allowed to finish the term, like the Vice President is).
- You don't have to be born in Canada, to be Prime Minister.
- New York City has more murders in a week than the entire nation of Canada does all year.
- We have no right to keep and bear arms. So leave your guns home if you're visiting, otherwise they'll be confiscated at the border. We have very strict gun laws, and fully automatic weapons are pretty much illegal. It almost takes an Act of God to get a licence to own a pistol. (This may be a contributing factor as to why we only have about 600 homicides a year, nation-wide.)
- The border between Canada and the US holds the title of the "World's Longest Undefended Border".

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Task 1. What factual knowledge about Canada have you learned? (e.g. the head of the executive branch is the Prime Minister, members of the Senate are appointed for life, the administrative division is into territories, there is no limit on the number of terms a Prime Minister can serve).

Task 2. What can you infer about the US? (they have never had a woman President, you have to be born in the US to run for President, you have a right to keep and bear arms, etc.)

Task 3. Compare Bulgarian institutions and order (e.g. administrative division of Bulgaria, head of executive power, limit of terms in office, etc.)

Task 4. Devise a list: Ten things Canadians/Americans should know about Bulgaria.

3. Seeing foreign culture through the eyes of other foreigners.

Comparing different interpretations of one and the same realia offers students a better grasp and a balanced perspective of the dominant assumptions and values under study. Seeing American culture as perceived by Canadians, for instance, would fill in the blanks of American culture as perceived by Bulgarians.

THIS IS A LIST OF SURE SIGNS THAT YOU'RE IN CANADA.
- The CBC's evening news anchor is bald and doesn't wear a toupee
- There are billboards advertising vacations in Cuba, and Cuban cigars are freely available.
- Nobody worries about losing a life's savings or a home because of illness.
- We DO NOT have snow all year round. We DO NOT live in igloos. We DO NOT ride around on dog sleds. We DO NOT have to check the back yard for polar bears, before we let our kids go out to play.
- Stop asking if we know somebody in Canada, when you find out we're Canadian. We DON'T know everybody in Canada.
- We are not "just like Americans", we have our own national identity, we just haven't figured out what it is, yet. Someone once said that, "Canadians are unarmed Americans with health care." That pretty much sums it up, I guess. We are internationally (but unofficially) known as the "World's Most Polite Nation."
- Our national animal is the beaver. Sure it's just a rodent, but they're not even CLOSE to being extinct. You can still get money for beaver pelts. It is NOT our main unit of exchange; we have money, just like you.

Task 1. How do Americans perceive Canadians? (they think Canadians live in igloos, surrounded by polar bears, they think Canada is a small country, where everybody knows everybody else).

Task 2. How do Canadians perceive Americans? (TV anchors are chosen by the way they look, you can become broke because of illness, Cuba)

Task 3. How do Canadians perceive themselves? What image do Canadians like to give of themselves? What does it tell us about the values of the people who made the cultural material?

Task 4. How would you comment on the following quotations:

"The Bulgarian dream is not to be Bulgarian". Stanislav Stratiev
(contemporary Bulgarian writer);

"Americans are benevolently ignorant about Canada, while Canadians are malevolently well informed about the United States". J. Bartlett Brebner.

4. Using native culture as input

Using native culture as input rather than unfamiliar content facilitates student comprehension of the foreign language. An additional advantage for using source culture content is the augmented ability for students' self-expression in a new linguistic environment which acts as a great confidence booster in any foreign language student. Here are some activities that have proved useful in the foreign language classroom:

Task 1. Students compose a booklet in English about Bulgaria taking into account what they know about Canadian/American cultural beliefs and values and the stereotypes of Bulgaria.

Task 2. Students are asked to look for and record instances of using US/Canadian cultural icons in Bulgarian magazines, newspapers, TV, billboards, advertisements. The aim is to register manifestations of the target culture in Bulgarian society.

Task 3. Each student presents a native culture object in class, one that would be difficult for a non-native to identify. In groups, descriptions of the objects are written. Then a guessing Yes/No game is played – the teacher is a non-native, asking questions concerning the function of the objects. The idea is to use English to communicate purely Bulgarian cultural artefacts, thus promoting cross-cultural awareness.

Task 4. Students make a list of how they think they are perceived by foreigners. It might be under different headings, e.g. Top ten reasons for living

in Bulgaria, You know you're a Bulgarian if…Then they conduct a survey and ask foreigners living in Bulgaria (e.g. university lecturers, members of diplomatic missions) to make the same list and compare the perceptions or misconceptions.

Concluding Remarks.

Language communication is culture based. Whether it is the culture studies classroom or the foreign language classroom, the cultural component is always present. Intercultural skills are developed through being exposed to target cultural patterns in the context of native culture or in the context of other cultures. Thus, students are presented with the opportunity to uncover cultural similarities and differences, comparing and contrasting dominant beliefs and values in a given society, with the chance of seeing target culture through their own and through the eyes of other 'foreigners', acquiring a multifaceted perspective that respects diversity (plurality) in unity and finally develop multicultural competence.

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