

# On NOT Teaching Culture: A Discourse Approach to ELT

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# Traditional Approaches to Teaching Culture

- Customs and traditions
- Holidays
- Food
- Clothing
- Music
- Religion
- Language

# What does “Culture” mean?

Culture can be a set of *values, behaviors* and *ideas* of any one group of individuals that gives them identity and a sense of cohesion and membership.

*\*paraphrased from Scollon and Scollon, 2001*

# Culture can include such concepts:

- Personal space and body movement
- Eye contact
- Definitions of time, friendship, family
- Roles of men and women in society
- Socialization/social literacy
- Concept of the self

# Our First Problem: Culture Is Not an Object

- “Cultures” never meet each other
- The paradox of variety
- Description vs. interaction

# Our Second Problem: English Is Unique

- What is American/British culture?
- A minority of native speakers
- English as a Lingua Franca
- World Englishes

# In the Beginning: Target-based Communicative Competence

Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983):

- Grammatical
  - Command of the language
- Sociolinguistic
  - appropriateness
- Discourse (small “d”)
  - Extended use of language
- Strategic
  - Compensation strategies

# Intercultural Communicative Competence

- Learners must be able to navigate the increasingly complex world of English speakers Aptekin (2002).
  - basic skills of competence which can be applied across multiple situations.
  - Ability to adapt to new environments and reflect on communication success/failure.
  - A raising of awareness of diversity in all communicative situations.

# Discourse Groups

*A very basic definition: Any group of people who have something in common*

- Have common goals (Swales 1990)
- Contain unique styles of communication (Swales 1990)
- Membership is constantly maintained (Gee 1990)
- Can cross “cultures” (Scollon and Scollon 2001)
- Are readily visible in one’s own community

# Ideas for the EFL Classroom: A Discourse Approach

- Look for instances of intercultural (interdiscourse) communication in your own life
- Explore metacommunication and politeness strategies
- Identify diversity in the familiar
- Avoid stereotypes
- Use of the Utilitarian Discourse System (Scollon and Scollon 2001)
  - Clarity, brevity, sincerity
- Emphasize awareness

Let's Practice!

# What do these words mean?

- Green
- Love
- Family

Why do people smile?









# What do these mean to you?

- The phone is ringing.
- There is a man at the door.
- Are you cold?

# Thank You!

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