

LANGUAGE TEACHING AND CULTURE: AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE ON THE WEB

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"Culture and communication are inseparable because culture not only dictates who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds, it also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted... Culture...is the foundation of communication.

(Samovar, Porter & Jain, 1981: 24)

1. Introduction: Language teaching and culture

The importance of teaching culture in teaching languages has been recognised and widely discussed over the last two centuries. These discussions have drawn language teachers' attention to the fact that languages do not exist in separation from culture and that knowledge of culture holds a key to understanding of a language.

Recently this interconnection between language and culture have been explored, among many others, by such ethnographers as Ochs and Schieffelin, Poyatos and Peters and Boggs (Ochs and Schieffelin, 1984, Poyatos, 1985, Peters and Boggs, 1986; as quoted in Lessard-Clouston, 1997). Buttjes (1990) summarises the reasons behind this close relationship as follows:

1. language acquisition does not follow a universal sequence, but differs across cultures;
2. the process of becoming a competent member of society is realized through exchanges of language in particular social situations;
3. every society orchestrates the ways in which children participate in particular situations, and this, in turn, affects the form, function and content of children's utterances;
4. caregivers' primary concern is not with grammatical input, but with the transmission of sociocultural knowledge;

5. the native learner, in addition to language, acquires also the paralinguistic patterns and the kinesics of his or her culture (Buttjes, 1990: 55; after Lessard-Clouston, 1997).

Having acknowledged this close relationship between language and culture and the necessity of teaching culture while teaching languages, there arise two questions: what is culture and what methods should be deployed to teach culture through language (or language through culture) successfully.

2. Defining culture for language teaching

Michael Lessard-Clouston (1997) attempts to define culture for the purpose of ESL teachers, although the task is not an easy one as definition of a national culture denies pluralism and the concept is inherently complex. He finds the four descriptors for meanings of culture by Adaskou, Britten & Fahsi (1990: 3-4) as most helpful to language teachers:

- a) the aesthetic aspect, which includes the arts (cinema, literature, music and media);
- b) the sociological aspect, which refers to the organization and nature of family, interpersonal relations, customs, material conditions, etc.;
- c) the semantic sense, which encompasses the whole conceptualization system which conditions perceptions and thought processes;
- d) the pragmatic or sociolinguistic sense, which refers to the background knowledge, social and paralinguistic skills and language code which are necessary for successful communication.

Finally, he highlights the dynamic aspect of culture as stated by Robinson (1988), who sees culture as a dynamic "system of symbols and meanings" where "past experience influences meaning, which in turn affects future experience, which in turn affects subsequent meaning, and so on" (Robinson, 1988: 11, as quoted in Lessard-Clouston, 1997).

3. Strategies for teaching culture

Understanding the general and specific aspects of culture and its dynamic character should help educators in developing appropriate strategies for teaching it. Galloway (1985, as quoted in Hadley, 2001: 348) warns about the commonly used "Facts Approaches" to teaching culture, which result from poor preparation of teachers for teaching culture:

- a) "The Frankenstein Approach": A taco from here, a flamenco dancer from here, a Gacho from here, a bullfight from there;
- b) "The 4-F Approach": folk dances, festivals, fairs and food;
- c) "The Tour Guide Approach": monuments, rivers, cities, etc;
- d) "The 'By-The-Way' Approach: sporadic lectures or bits of behavior selected indiscriminately to emphasize sharp differences

For a comprehensive insight into the strategies and approaches to teaching culture interested teachers can be referred to Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein & Colby (2001). An in-depth analysis of these methods and techniques is beyond the scope of this article, but the following observations may fulfill the immediate, pragmatic needs of a teacher unsure about the ways the subject should be tackled in his/her language lessons, that, first of all, teaching culture requires careful planning, secondly, that the goals are shifting away from learning of cultural facts and, finally, that culture learning should be assessed.

Lessard-Clouston (1997) stresses the importance of planning for culture teaching by saying: "Just as we are intentional in terms of what grammatical structures we teach and how, we must also be systematic about our culture teaching" (Lessard-Clouston, 1997, paragraph 24). Such careful planning can be achieved, for example, through an application of Moran's chart called "A framework for learning/teaching culture" (Moran, 1992):

Aspect A : Knowing about (getting information)	Aspect B : Knowing how (developing behaviors)
<p>Nature of content: getting information - what is the capital of the US? - sports in American life. Learning objectives: demonstrate a mastery of the information. Techniques/activities: cultural readings; films/videotapes; recordings; realia (cultural artifacts); personal anecdotes. Teacher role: informant</p>	<p>Nature of content: skills - buying tickets to a sports event, - cheering for your team at a football game, Learning objectives: demonstrate an ability (a fluency, an expertise, confidence) Techniques/activities: dialogs, role plays, simulations, field experiences. Teacher role: coach or model.</p>
Aspect C: Knowing why (discovering explanations)	Aspect D: Knowing oneself (personalizing knowledge)
<p>Nature of content: values and assumptions - why are sports so important to Americans? - are you making an observation or an interpretation? - how does this compare with your culture? Learning objectives: critical thinking - demonstrate an ability: to infer; to generalize; to suspend judgment, - curiosity; tolerance; sensitivity; empathy. Techniques/activities:</p>	<p>Nature of content: self-awareness - what importance do sports have in YOUR life? Learning objectives: by behavior/statements demonstrate understanding of ones' feelings, values, opinions, attitudes, and act upon them. Techniques/activities: - learners examine and make statements about themselves, - reflective writing, - feedback on above activities. Teacher role: counselor or guide.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - learners interpret and make explanations based on above activities, - comparisons with their own culture, - ethnography, - reflective writing. <p>Teacher role: co-researcher or guide</p>	
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Figure 1. Partick Moran's framework for learning/teaching culture.

Teaching culture should not be just memorization of cultural facts but should aim for the acquisition of "interactional competence" (a term suggested by Allen and Moore at the 1996 culture conference in Minneapolis) and learning how to learn about culture. According to Paige (Paige et.al, 2001: 5), such learning would include:

1. learning about the self as a cultural being,
2. learning about culture and its impact on human communication, behavior, and identity,
3. culture-general learning, i.e., learning about universal, cross-cultural phenomena such as cultural adjustment,
4. culture-specific learning, i.e., learning about a particular culture, including its language, and,
5. learning how to learn, i.e., becoming an effective language and culture learner.

As any aspect of learning, culture learning should be assessable: "Culture learning assessment has been neglected in L2/FL education, and this is something that must be addressed if we are to enable students to truly understand and profit from this aspect of their L2/FL classes." (Lessard-Clouston, 1997, paragraph 25).

4. Australian language and culture on the World Wide Web

The Web offers wealth of materials to help language teachers "teach" culture in their classes. These materials can be divided into those concerned with the theories and principles of teaching culture, authentic cultural materials (or raw materials) and ESL/CALL materials such as lesson plans, exercises, webquests and many others.

The following annotated links are a collection of "Australiana on the Web" – a list of quality raw materials and ESL activities, which ESL/CALL teachers may find useful in creating their own lessons devoted to Australian culture.

4.1. Native Australians

Australia, the country and the continent, has always been a mysterious and exotic place to many people from around the world. It's native custodians are Australian Aboriginals, who have been developing their culture, their many languages (about 500 in fact) and their relationship with the harsh natural surrounding for over 40 000 years.

Raw Materials:

Aboriginal Art and Culture Centre online: <http://www.aboriginalart.com.au>.

This site is owned and operated by Australian Aboriginals from the Red Centre: Alice Springs region of Australia. Contains art gallery with traditional and contemporary art examples.

Didgeridoo and the role of music: <http://www.aboriginalart.com.au/didgeridoo/>. Didgeridoo is a traditional Aboriginal instrument, which you can view, hear and even learn to play with this site.

Aboriginal Dreaming stories (with videos and audios):

<http://www.dreamtime.net.au/dreaming/storylist.htm>. Storytelling is an integral part of life for Indigenous Australians. Dreaming stories tell about the origins of the world, people and nature and teach the rules of living.

Aboriginal Australia today: http://www.ozshots.com/aboriginals/index_eng.html. This important website provides an honest account of the lives of Australian Aboriginals today, which is quite far from the common, romantic imagery presented on many other sites.

ESL Activities:

Australian Aboriginals: <http://lstation.monint.monash.edu.au/web/aboriginals.htm> Pre-Intermediate, Reading: scanning for information. A web-hunt activity designed to gather basic facts about Australian Aboriginals.

4.2. White settlement and migration

White settlement and the subsequent waves of migration to Australia (gold rush, post-war, and refugees) has changed Australia's ethnic make-up and resulted in a multi-racial and multi-ethnic society which performs strong economically and, considering its small population of 20 million people, rates high among the developed nations in the world.

Raw Materials

About Australia: <http://www.about-australia.com/> (you will get greeted with the famous "G'day" there). General information is travel, business, news, weather, lifestyle and shopping.

ESL Activities

A Migrant Experience: <http://lstation.monint.monash.edu.au/web/migrantexp.htm>. Pre-Intermediate, Listening: for detail. This is a listening activity based on an interview with a post-war Austrian migrant.

Migrants - where are they from? http://lstation.monint.monash.edu.au/web/migrant_origins.htm. Upper Intermediate, Reading/Vocabulary: interpreting data. This page contains the Australian Government statistics on Australian migration from 1901-1996. The activity (useful for IELTS test preparation) requires students to interpret the data in the graphic form.

Gold Rush in Australia - Sovereign Hill.

<http://lstation.monint.monash.edu.au/web/sovereign.htm>. Pre-Intermediate, Reading: scanning for information. This simple web-hunt activity is designed for pre-intermediate students wishing to find out more about the Gold Rush era in Victoria, Australia and prepare for a visit to an outdoor Museum in Sovereign Hill.

Women on the Goldfields: <http://lstation.monint.monash.edu.au/web/women1.htm>. Intermediate: Reading: for facts, Speaking: an opinion, Writing: punctuation. This activity engages students in analysing and comparing lives of men and women in the gold fields. It also suggests a punctuation activity with a word processor based on the texts read.

Ned Kelly: <http://lstation.monint.monash.edu.au/web/nedkelly.htm>. Intermediate: Reading: for details, Writing: paraphrasing. This activity draws students' attention to the skill of paraphrasing through note-taking from reading. It is based on the real-life story of a famous Australian outlaw, Ned Kelly.

4.3. Australians and sport

Australians are well-known for their love of sport, which sometimes borders with obsession. Their love for the beach, for example, is reflected in their world-class achievements in swimming and surfing, while the love for outdoor activities makes them good at cricket, tennis and grass hockey. They love their "footy" (Australian Rules Football) and their rugby.

ESL Activities

The Aussie Cozzie: <http://beach.prace.vic.edu.au/stories/togs.php>. Pre-Intermediate, Reading: picture story and online exercises. "When Europeans first invaded Australia, the only people here who were good at swimming were the Aboriginal people..." This picture story is followed by interactive comprehension exercises.

Beach Safety signs: <http://beach.prace.vic.edu.au/info/safety-signs.php>. Pre-Intermediate, Speaking: beach signs, Reading: safety rules and online exercises. These elementary language exercises are designed to teach beach safety signs and rules to pre-intermediate ESL students.

Life Savers at Bondi Beach: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~prace/beach/bondi.htm>. Intermediate, Reading comprehension and online exercises. "Bondi Beach is a very famous beach in Sydney. Bondi started the first surf lifesaving club in the world. Surf Life Saving Organisations now operate in 26 countries around the world". This picture story is followed by a number of interactive exercises.

4.4. Australian English

Australian English has its distinctive features: its unique slang and vocabulary, often incorporates Aboriginal languages, especially for naming places and natural phenomena. Shortening of words and diminutives is also quite popular and confuses other English speakers.

Raw materials

Australian English: <http://eleaston.com/aus-eng.html>. This site is a collection of web resources about Australian English.

ESL Activities

Australian Slang: <http://homepage.powerup.com.au/~ozesl/quiz3.html>. This is an online multiple-choice quiz based on Australian slang.

4.5. Australian Art

Australian art is often associated with the traditional art of Australian Aboriginals, but Australians can be proud of many other artists, especially in the area of cinematography and acting. Painters Boyd, Namatjira, McCubbin, Roberts, Streeton, Nolan, Drysdale and Dobellare are well-loved for their depictions of Australian landscapes and the Australian way of life in the last century. Singers Dame Melba and Dame Joan Sutherland put Australia on the opera map of the world.

Raw Materials

Web-arts Australia: <http://www.web-arts.com.au/AART.html>. List of Australian painters with images of their paintings.

CD Collector: <http://www.cdcollector.com.au/>. This site lists CDs of Australian composers, singers, bands and orchestras.

4.6. Native plants and animals

When you think "Australia", you may think immediately of kangaroos and koalas. These marsupials (which grow their young in pouches) and many other species of fauna and flora have developed to fill specific niches of the Australian nature. Most of these 140 species of marsupials in Australia are found nowhere else in the world. Isolation and a harsh environment have also resulted in unique Australian flora.

Raw Materials

Australian Animals: <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/coloring/Australia.shtml>. This site provides pictures of Australian animals, with colour-in versions for younger learners.

Kookaburra song: <http://www.whatsthenumber.com/oz/unique/song9.htm>. This is a children song about Kookaburra, called also "the laughing bird". Lyrics and music provided.

Australian Flora: <http://www.austemb.org/flora.htm>. This site provides an overview of the most common native Australian flora.

Australian 12 Days of Xmas: <http://walelia.users1.50megs.com/carol.html>. This song is a re-make of the well-known Christmas song, replacing traditional words with those depicting Australian fauna and flora

ESL Activities

Dangerous Sea Creatures: <http://beach.prace.vic.edu.au/info/danger.php>. Intermediate, reading comprehension and online exercises. Australian seas are full of dangerous creatures. This site provides reading comprehension activities about these creatures.

Snakes Alive: <http://pageturners.prace.vic.edu.au/snakes-alive>. Elementary, reading: picture story and comprehension exercises. This picture story teaching about dangerous snakes in Australia is followed by online comprehension exercises.

4.7. Australian holidays

Santa comes to Australia in the middle of the summer season. He sweats in his suit and does his best to re-create the Christmas spirit. Then comes January when white Australians celebrate the landing of the first convict fleet in 1787. This date however is seen as a year of the "white invasion" by Australian Aboriginals. Other public holidays in Australia include Queen's Birthday and the ANZAC Day which is a day to remember those who died in wars.

Raw materials

Australian Xmas – Australian version of "Jingle Bells":

<http://users.tpg.com.au/sharenet/c/jinglebells.html>. This site provides a full "translation" of the Australian version of the Jingle Bells song from Australian to English.

ESL Activities

Australia Day Holiday: <http://lstation.monint.monash.edu.au/web/AusDay.htm>. Intermediate: Reading comprehension, Writing a postcard. This site is a web-hunt type activity based around the topic of Australia Day Holiday: its origins and the way it is being celebrated.

4.8. Australian food

Australians love their food and experiment with it quite a lot. They love alfresco dining and in one street can find restaurants and eateries serving food from many different countries. However, there are a few specifically Australian food items: vegemite spread, Lamington cakes, ANZAC Biscuits and Pavlova.

Vegemite is considered as much a part of Australia's heritage as kangaroos and the Holden cars. It is actually an Australian obsession and has become a unique and loved symbol of the

Australian nation. A published paper entitled "Vegemite as a Marker of National Identity" by Paul Rozin & Michael Siegal is the best indication of vegemite's importance to Australians.

Raw materials

Vegemite: <http://www.whatsthenumber.com/oz/unique/vegemite.htm>. This site gives a brief history of Vegemite, information of its nutritional value and also lyrics and the tune to the advertising jingle on Vegemite, called "Happy Little Vegemites".

Australian Food and Drink: <http://www.whatsthenumber.com/oz/unique/words1c.htm>. This site provides a list of Australian slang words on food and drink.

4.9. Australian songs

Australian spirit, pride and mateship are reflected in many songs. Australians are globetrotters and many take time off study or work to see the world, with Asia and Europe being most popular destinations. Feeling a bit isolated, they want to "see the world out there". Through songs Australians can express their love for the country, its people and its nature. The song "I still call Australia home" is a beautiful tribute to this country and its people.

Raw Materials

National Anthem "Advance Australia Fair": <http://www.genesis.net.au/%7Eanthems/aaf.html>.

Aussie Songs for Kids: http://www.gigglepotz.com/f_songs8.htm.

"I still call Australia home" (video): http://www.ausgirlschoir.com.au/highlights_qantas.htm.

Australian songs lyrics: <http://www.whatsthenumber.com/oz/unique/song10.htm>.

ESL Activities

Unofficial anthem "Waltzing Matilda":

<http://members.optushome.com.au/renatachylinski/matilda/index.htm>. All about the song and its authors with numerous language activities.

Conclusion

The present article aimed at giving a brief overview of the changing approaches to teaching culture and language over the last decades. It also suggested some practical strategies for planning for teaching culture in an ESL environment.

The second part of this article is devoted to two types of resources about Australian culture and language available on the World Wide Web. These are authentic, or raw, web materials and ESL or CALL web-based activities. It is hoped that this annotated list of resources will encourage language teachers to introduce their students to the rich and exciting culture of Australia.

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3. Anne Dunn, Chris Malakar and Moira Hanrahan produced many Australian-related online activities for beginner learners at Preston Reservoir Adult Community Education (a non-profit community learning organization), <http://prace.vic.edu.au/>.

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