

Confronting Culture and Ideology in ELT:

A study of cultural ideology in ELT, and
an examination of
some consequential pedagogic challenges and
possibilities which confront teaching practitioners.

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Abstract *This paper examines to what extent English is implicitly imbued with Western cultural values and ideology, and investigates whether to teach English as a foreign language is to tacitly teach these ideological values. This paper firstly examines the ideological discourse of colonialism, which in turn created ideologies of Western 'self' and 'other', and proceeds by illustrating its relation to modern, market driven values underpinning economic globalization. Furthermore, an examination of pedagogic materials and rationale illustrates how these market driven values permeate the ELT industry. It is discovered that many current textbooks utilized in the field contain examples which endorse these corporate brand values, whilst others contain examples of cultural simplification and vocational stereotyping. Therefore, to minimize these processes in language teaching, and to maximize student potential for creativity, this paper advocates pursuing a culturally comparative and critical pedagogy, which affords learners the chance to engage with English dynamically and substantively.*

Key Words: Language and culture, globalisation, colonialism, ELT textbook content, intercultural communicative competence

Interdisciplinary Fields: ELT, Colonialism, Globalization

1. Background

English is used and employed by more people globally than any other language, and is now regarded as the international language of communication. By 2004 Crystal had stated that "about a quarter of the world's population is already fluent or competent in English . . . in the early 2000s that means around 1.5 billion people" (Crystal, 2004: 68). However, Crystal also noted that there is "the closest of links between language and power" (2004: 128), whilst Del Hymes observed that "one's language may have power over, and affect the other" (Brumfit, 1987: 19). Furthermore, according to

Crystal, much of the 'power' which has underpinned the spread of the English language in the twentieth century has emanated from America (2004: 127). The United States has now become "the most powerful state in history" (Chomsky, 2003: 1), which, as Chomsky explains, "intends to rule the world" (2003: 1). Howatt and Widdowson note that the growing influence and power of the United States since the 1960s has overseen "a period of change which radically altered the scope and structure of ELT" (Howatt, 2004: 232). Moreover, they claim that native speakers of English "continue the tradition of using their language to exercise hegemonic domination, not only, or even principally, by direct military or administrative means, but through control of the media, and of economic, cultural and commercial globalization" (2004: 359).

However, language cannot structure or determine thought, and Halliday observes that "The speaker can see through and around the settings of his semantic system" (Halliday, 1978: 31). Instead, Vygotsky argues "language is a tool; the central tool for thought" (1987: 256). English is also a tool which can be utilised by those learning it to gain knowledge and to transcend boundaries. For example, Brumfit argues that "individuals develop their own repertoires from their store of linguistic capacity, crossing language and dialect boundaries as they do so" (Brumfit, 2006: 38). Nevertheless, while one observes a distinction between language use and autonomy of thought, it is also important to recognise that language is not completely value free. Bakhtin observed the connection between language and ideology, arguing that "we are taking language not as a system of . . . abstract grammatical categories, but rather language conceived as ideologically saturated" (Morris, 1994: 74). Due to this, Phillipson maintains that "ELT needs to be situated in a macro societal theoretical perspective" (Phillipson, 1992: 2). This paper will therefore attempt to investigate values and ideology implicitly embedded in English, whilst also discussing the impact that this may have upon ELT rationale and materials. This study will also attempt to consider what individual teaching practitioners in the field can do to combat this. It will proceed firstly with a short theoretical examination of the arguments surrounding language and ideology.

2. Language and Cultural Ideology

As one learns a language, one acquires the knowledge of rules both social and cultural. Sapir observes that "the mere content of language is intimately related to culture" (Sapir, 1970: 219). Furthermore, sociolinguists claim that there is a tacit interdependency between language and socio-cultural

knowledge. Ochs observes that “given that meanings and functions are to a large extent socio-culturally organised, linguistic knowledge is embedded in socio-cultural knowledge” (Ochs et al, 1998: 14). How one learns a language, therefore, from a socio-cultural perspective, is through interaction within a socio-cultural environment. However, through learning language we also acquire a cultural and ideological knowledge of the world, which influences our social being, and, arguably, also affects our perception of what constitutes social reality. Halliday notes that “the culture shapes our behaviour patterns, and a great deal of our behaviour is mediated through language” (Halliday, 1978: 3). Moreover, he observes that “meaning is a social act” (1978: 160) and therefore “The whole linguistic system is value charged” (1978: 160). Furthermore, Bakhtin, holds that value charged language is created and contested by agents in a socially charged arena, and due to this is infected with ideology. He maintains that “language had been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents . . . it has lived a socially charged life” (Danow, 1991: 25).

Human linguistic exchanges resemble commodities which are subtly underpinned by relations of power (1991: 25). Griffith notes that the domination of English has ensued that “It is English speakers from Britain, Ireland, North America and Australia, New Zealand who accidentally find themselves in possession of a sought after commodity” (Griffith, 1999: 10). However, for Marx, a commodity’s “use value” (Marx, 1995: 1) which would “dominate and replace human relationships” (1995: 3), was not accidental, but was determined by the nature of human power relations and social exchange. Similarly, Wittgenstein accounts for the value of language as being determined by rules of human interactions (Wittgenstein, 1998: 73). Wittgenstein demands that we examine how an agent operates with words, rather than “searching for any correlation between these words and an object” (1998: 40). Language is an ideological commodity embedded with a use value that is not fixed, but is specified and determined by the power relations of human linguistic exchanges. Bourdieu argues that power brokers language and that language should be recognised as a form of capital, or linguistic capital, in which the ruling class is able to impose its linguistic and cultural norms as legitimate. He claims that “one must not forget that the relations of communication par excellence—linguistic exchanges—are also relations of symbolic power” (Bourdieu, 1991: 37).

Others contend that it is directly through culture itself by which the status quo reinforce and normalise the arena of power. Gramsci writes that this is through propagating an ideology which normalises the alien and perpetu-

ates “the belief about everything that exists, that it is ‘natural’ that it should exist, that it could not do otherwise than exist” (Gramsci, 1986: 157). For Gramsci, the term cultural hegemony implies that power cannot be assessed by objectifying material conditions, as Marxists would hold. Instead, he writes that cultural hegemony presupposes the consent of the governed. This cultural hegemony can be wielded by one nation over another, such as in the example of France and Algeria. In 1964, visitors to Algeria found that whilst the country had thrown off French military domination it had not been so successful with French culture and language (Burke et al, 1991: 207). Therefore if one is to properly examine the relationship between English and cultural ideology it is necessary to assess the ideological discourses which have bestowed upon English its legitimacy and its ‘symbolic power’, as Bourdieu asserts (1991: 37). This paper will thus proceed with an examination of the discourse of colonialism. Pennycook argues that the English language teaching industry is a by-product of colonialist culture, claiming that “much of ELT echoes with the cultural constructions of colonialism . . . because it was colonialism that produced many of the ways of thinking and behaving that are still part of Western cultures” (Pennycook, 1998a: 19).

3. ELT and Colonialism

An analysis of underlying cultural values in English must firstly observe its historical connections with colonialism and empire. The discourse that underpinned Western colonialism, and helped to distinguish it from the rest of the world, was the intellectual movement of the Enlightenment. This epistemology was based on extreme scepticism, and pursued scientific and experimental methods in the quest for the nature of knowing (Mandrou, 1978: 37). The movement’s leaders viewed themselves as an elite body of intellectuals who were leading the world towards progress, out of a long period of irrationality and superstition which had documented the Dark Ages. The scientific age gave Europeans “reasons for self-satisfaction” (Russell, 1947: 560). However, this enlightened sense of ‘self satisfaction’ created a cultural and ideological demarcation; bestowing an ontological legitimacy upon Western progress whilst also conferring an inferior status on the rest of the world (Pennycook, 1998a: 50). Bourdieu describes legitimacy as “the power of imposing a vision of the social world through principles of di-vision” (Bourdieu, 1991: 221). Moreover, Pennycook argues that colonialism has produced these divisions that legitimise English. He claims that “These cultural products of colonialism . . . are the discourses that map out relationships of self and other” (Pennycook, 1998a: 33).

Crucially, these 'other' parts of the world were also judged to be in need of the West's logical and enlightened guidance. Smith argues that this approach betrays the deep rooted belief that "as the West had an Enlightenment, so must . . . the rest of humanity" (Smith, 1998: 4). This belief is encapsulated in a speech by the explorer Henry Morton Stanley, in which he compared the Roman colonization and subjugation of Britain with the British Empire in Africa. Stanley juxtaposed colonization with emancipation, claiming "God forbid that we should any longer subject Africa to the same dreadful scourge and preclude the light of knowledge . . . from having access to her coasts" (Sherry, 1971: 121). However, Foucault notes that most altruism, such as political philanthropy, actually conceals the process of consolidation and centralisation of power. He claims "Take the example of philanthropy in the early nineteenth century: people appear who make it their business to involve themselves in other people's lives" (Foucault, 1980: 62). More recently, Tony Blair described the problems of the modern world as being tantamount to representing a struggle about values. He argued that "Our values are worth struggling for. They represent humanity's progress throughout the ages" (Blair, 2006: 6). However, Fergusson claims that "when Tony Blair is essentially calling for the imposition of western values — democracy and so on — it is really the language of liberal imperialism." (Pilger, 2003: 160). Furthermore, Phillipson notes that "ELT projects values . . . in analysing ELT and imperialism we are therefore inevitably concerned with values" (Phillipson, 1998a: 75). The British Council website also discusses its mandate to "create a different kind of culture where we all share the same goals and values" (British Council, 2006). It argues that this is the continuation of a programme, established by Sir Reginald Leeper, to enforce "what he termed 'cultural propaganda' in promoting Britain" (2006).

Western colonialist values also presupposed that there were large swathes of terra incognita waiting to be discovered and mapped by 'civilisation'. Furthermore, this ideology is still echoed in the advertising language employed by Cox & Kings, the longest established travel company in the world. The company, which grew hand in hand with the British Empire, still employs words such as "discover" and "explore" (Cox and Kings, 2006) to advertise its holidays to the Middle East and Asia. Similarly, other recent travel guides employ the same language. The Lonely Planet's website contains quotes imploring travellers to grasp the opportunity to "discover the world" (Lonely Planet, 2006). Moreover, a contemporary EFL textbook, 'Headway', under the section title 'Explorers and Travellers', claims that Marco Polo "gave Europeans their first information about China and the Far East" (Soars et al, 2005: 16). Asian English students using this textbook

learn about the West's discovery and interpretation of them, but are not given a comparative account of the East's interpretation of the West. The textbook then juxtaposes a reading exercise about Marco Polo with another exercise featuring a young Western backpacker who is exploring the Far East (2005: 16). This ethnocentric conception of discovery and adventure is therefore brought from the past into the present.

However, this adventure seeking attitude may implicitly influence the motivation of many Westerners working abroad as language teachers. Their motivations for teaching may not be commensurate with the requirements of their learners. Moreover, while they may be English native speakers they may not possess even the most basic pedagogic skills. Griffith notes the "proliferation of cowboy teachers who have no feel for language, no interest in their pupils and no qualms about ripping them off" (Griffith, 1999: 11). However, this is no different to the style of language employed in the British Council's 1983 report, when it affirms the intention of "exploiting English" (Phillipson, 1992: 144). Furthermore, Howatt and Widdowson note that the commercial exploitation of the English language has a "long and honourable history" (Howatt, et al, 2004: 357). Even skilled language teachers may not properly understand the foreign pedagogic systems in which they are employed, and may mistakenly apply Western solutions to distinctly non-Western problems. Tollefson argues that "ESL experts are often hired as consultants to disperse 'solutions' to complex educational problems in countries about which they know very little" (Tollefson, 1991: 97). This is comparable to the ideology displayed in the title of the teaching handbook 'Talk Your Way Around the World' (Griffith, S, 1999), in which the emphasis is placed on 'talking' rather than listening, or learning. However, Phillipson maintains that "ELT is a 'top down exercise'" which ensues a "disconnection of ELT from the social context within which it operates" (Phillipson, 1992: 259). Moreover, Howatt and Widdowson observe that ELT is "influenced by globalization and its socio-economic consequences in the contemporary world" (Howatt et al, 2004: 357).

4. ELT and Globalization

In 2004 Gordon Brown claimed that "the days of Britain having to apologise for its colonial history are over" (Pilger, 2005: 13). However, this statement is arguably premature, because it presupposes that colonialism no longer exists. Others contend that colonialism has not ended, but, conversely, has evolved. Goldsmith holds that "with the development of the global economy we are entering a new era of corporate colonialism that could be more

ruthless than the colonialism that preceded it" (Goldsmith et al, 2001: 19). Many argue that globalization is a continuation of the same principles and discourses of 'self' and 'other' that colonialism created. Mar-Molinero observes that the model of globalization tends to shift from individuals to systems and that "by using an imperialist theoretical framework we can explore more readily who it is that controls and acts in these processes" (Mar-Molinero, 2006: 78).

Brumfit notes that the economic sea-change brought about by globalisation also precipitated a shift in English language teaching. Whilst recognising firstly the significance of the communicative language teaching movement, Brumfit notes that "the second substantial shift is not linguistic at all, but relates to oil, and the economy associated with it" (Brumfit, 2001: 118). Similarly, Phillipson observes that the language of the British Council's 1987/88 report compares English's commodity value to oil. The report identifies that "Britain's real black gold is not North Sea Oil but the English language" (Phillipson, 1992: 48). He also cites the Drogheda Report of 1954, which highlighted that the teaching of English, backed by the work of the British Council, "will be highly beneficial to British Trade" (1992: 146). The power of English therefore reflects socio-economic relations of exchange, and can be analysed at a macro-economic level, as its commercial value is empowered by the economic superiority of the United States and the United Kingdom. Coulmas maintains that this ensures an unequal relationship between countries, in which the opportunities for realizing "the functional potential of English on the Japanese market are far better than those of realizing the functional potential of Japanese on the American market" (Coulmas, 1992: 67). Moreover, previous attempts to reduce the power of English, such as Professor Stickel's multiple European working language goal (Giersberg, 2006: 4), have been met with resistance. Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher tried to 'torpedo' the LINGUA programme of the European community, which attempted to mandate a foreign language education policy for the member states (Coulmas, 1992: 87). Coulmas observed that from Thatcher's point of view "Britain was asked to pay for a programme which . . . benefited her country least" (1992: 87).

Nevertheless, the British Council has claimed on its website that "our purpose is to build mutually beneficial relationships between people in the UK and other countries" (British Council, 2006: 1). However, despite expressing a "strong belief in internationalism" (1), the Council has opened offices in lucrative markets such as China and the Gulf, whilst closing a number of offices in countries judged of little strategic or economic importance. For

example, the closure of the Belarus office prompted Parliamentary criticism. In response, the Minister for Europe, Peter Hain, told the House of Commons that “the decision to close the British Council operation in Minsk followed a strategic review by the council designed to maximise effectiveness world wide” (House of Commons, 2001: 1). This statement underlines the primary interest of the council, which one understands in this context as being the pursuit of economic gain through exploiting the commodity value of English. Moreover, the 1987/88 Annual report of the council observes that the challenge regarding English is to “exploit it to the full” (Phillipson, 1992: 48). The Council outlines its aims to do this by “cultural propaganda”, and cites an observation by the founder of the BBC, Sir John Reith, that “who can say where cultural activity ends and propaganda begins?” (British Council, 2006)

However, critics of a propaganda model of English argue that students and learners often engage with English and Western culture actively and creatively. Crystal maintains that English is open ended, claiming “nobody owns it anymore” (Crystal, 2004: 2). Furthermore, Osgerby cites Liechty’s observations that “many theorists have used the concept of ‘diaspora’ to analyse the cultural impact of population dispersion and travel across borders” (Osgerby 2004: 172). The diaspora model argues that local communities actively engage with commercial commodities such as music, sports, and language, creatively re-embedding them within local cultures and contexts. English can therefore be employed as a tool for protest as well as a tool for exploitation. Chomsky reasons that, “the way to confront an empire is to create a different world” (Chomsky, 2003a: 1). Crystal contends that it is “perfectly possible (as the example of rapping suggests) for a linguistic fashion to be started by a group of second—or foreign language learners” (Crystal, 2004: 173).

Nevertheless, Gorman observes that “not long after rap’s appearance as a powerful music of resistance, it was incorporated into corporate advertising strategies” (Gorman et al, 2003: 257). Therefore, virtually any form of expression can also be co-opted and re-appropriated by the market. Naomi Klien applied this criticism towards global multinational corporations. Osgerby observes that “the grip of big business, Klein argued, had blunted the radical edge of youth subcultures . . . by appropriating the style, attitude and imagery of sub cultural youth” (Osgerby, 2004: 153). Moreover, others claim that the same has happened with iconoclastic images of the 1960s. Gorman notes that “Janis Joplin’s tongue in cheek prayer for a Mercedes was used in ads for Mercedes Benz cars” (Gorman, et al, 2003: 184).

Bourdieu observes that new trends and styles are quickly assimilated into the mainstream, noting that “the paradox seemed to be that . . . as soon as it gets recognised it gets absorbed into the establishment” (Grenfell, 2004: 103). Just as the meaning of language and culture can be contested by agents on the periphery, so the status quo can re-appropriate this challenge. The concept of reification, developed by theorists such as Marx and Lukacs, was employed by Adorno to refer to this process. Adorno observed that “in the open-air prison which the world is becoming . . . everything is one. All phenomena rigidify, become insignias of the absolute rule of that which is” (Adorno, 1995: 296).

This has arguably led to a process of global homogenisation where, Mander argues, people “from the Himalayas to Borneo, are watching nearly identical programmes, mostly produced by Western Corporate interests, all of it expressing Western values and imagery” (Mander, 2001: 50). Integrated marketing strategies ensure that Disney products and imagery promotes McDonalds, which it has a ‘tie-in’ with, whilst Warner Bros is joined with Burger King (Pilger, 1999: 69). Meanwhile, the commercial ELT industry has been criticized for promoting Western corporate interests (Gray, 2010: 729), and for depending on “the capitalizing interests and exploitations of the sponsoring agent” (Litz, 2002: 6). Moreover, recent textbooks such as ‘Headline’ and ‘English File’ have committed acts of product placement, containing articles on Western corporations such as Starbucks (Soars et al, 2005: 58), and McDonalds (Oxenden et al, 2001: 108).

5. ELT Textbooks and Cultural Content

An examination of many recent English textbooks shows them to be heavily influenced by Western cultural themes and bias. The textbook ‘Headway’ devotes pages to Western cultural figures such as Dickens and Austin (Soars, 2005: 29), and features articles on Princess Diana (2005: 39) and London (2005: 119), whilst ‘English File’ focuses on Shakespeare (Oxenden, 2001: 112). Hedge claims that “EFL textbook writers, like everyone else, think and compose chiefly through culture-specific schemas” (Hedge et al, 1997: 56). He explains that the “White House seems to be the favourite topic with American textbook writers. The British Royal family appears to be a popular topic with British EFL writers” (1997: 55). These schemas, or schemes of perception, defined by Fowler as “people’s perceptions and interpretations of language” (Fowler, 1991: 60) ensure that Western culture permeates ELT textbook design and classroom practice. Said argued that, in their English class, “Young Arabs dutifully read Milton, Shakespeare,

Wordsworth, Austen, and Dickens as they might have studied Sanskrit or medieval heraldry" (Said, 1993: 368). However, Byram warns that "students should not be made to feel that a culture is being forced on them through learning a language" (Byram et al, 2002: 5).

ELT textbooks can also be understood as serving to legitimise globalisation. Gray claims that "in paving the ground for the development of markets favourable to the U.K, the timely provision of ELT textbooks was identified as a strategic initial move" (Gray, 2010: 716). Similarly, Flavell maintains that instead the textbook is a "project, under the wing of the Ministry in conjunction either with international sponsors or with big publishing" (Flavell, 1994: 48). He cites the Sri Lankan situation of the 1980s, in which the main course book, called 'English for Me', was "developed with the support of Norwegian aid and the secondary one (English Every Day) underwritten by the British Council/Overseas Development Agency" (1994: 48). Others argue that the entire educational sector is pervaded by the business ideology of powerful multinational companies. Bello claims that brand names such as "Coca-Cola, Pepsi, McDonalds, Burger King and Proctor and Gamble are also directly involved in developing curricula for schools along with advertising promotions to help kids grow up corporate" (Bello, 2001: 133).

Textbooks are an important part of this corporate process, legitimising the brands and products featured within as the inevitable norm. The EFL textbook 'English File' employs market centred language which refers to McDonalds as having "fundamentally changed human behaviour in every country" (Oxenden et al, 2001: 108/9). English students are encouraged to believe in the legitimacy of this, and are tacitly led to consider themselves, for good or ill, as having been "McColonised" (2001: 108). The same textbook also features an exercise on McDonalds, with requires students to employ business English, such as "competitor" "market" "quality" and "value" to assess its virtues as a product (2001: 108). Similarly, the textbook 'Cutting Edge' features a reading exercise focused on the world's most popular brands, such as Coca-Cola, Rolex, Nokia, Samsung, Mercedes and KFC (Cunningham, et al, 2005: 107). On another page, a gap fill exercise requires students to add verb forms to an incomplete passage of text featuring Nike shoes (2005: 109). These activities are featured in a chapter of the textbook titled 'Got to have it!' (2005: 106). In addition, another example of brand advertising is found in the 2005 'Headway Upper Intermediate students' textbook. A chapter contains a reading exercise on 'Friends', which it claims "defined a generation" (Soars et al, 2005: 82/3). It then juxtaposes

this TV series with coffee culture, claiming that “We all wanted a life like theirs . . . We also wanted to drink endless cappuccinos” (2005: 82/83). The textbook therefore teaches students that the show changed people’s drinking habits, and defined the generational zeitgeist. However, ‘Headway’ also features a reading exercise based on an article about Starbucks Coffee (2005: 59). Starbucks is therefore legitimised by its coterminous relationship with ‘Friends’, and comes to be understood as embodying the cultural zeitgeist. Hence, in this example the textbook seems to hold both an ideological and economic agenda, incorporating branded values into the curriculum whilst attempting to coerce learners into accepting their legitimacy.

ELT textbooks can also be seen to legitimise and brand vocational roles in society. Gray holds that, in the neo-liberal climate, individuals are encouraged to brand themselves to stand out, and that textbooks accentuate this process by featuring the world of work as “a privileged means for the full and intense realization of the self” (Gray, 2010: 714). His qualitative analysis of a selection of textbooks highlights the high number of work related units featured. For example, New Headway Upper-Intermediate, 2005, contains 12 chapters, 4 of which feature work as a major theme (Gray, 2010: 721). Gray suggests that this illustrates “a ‘Brand You’ perspective and, in general, a celebratory view of the world of work as a means to personal fulfilment” (2010: 721).

Modern lifestyle choices that compliment an economic view of the world are also depicted in a celebratory fashion by textbooks. An example of this can be located in the textbook ‘Headway’, which features John Travolta’s jet plane in one of its language exercises. The exercise juxtaposes descriptions of this practice, such as “flies daily” and “love of aviation”, with descriptions of Travolta himself as “a regular guy” (Soars et al, 2005, 71). By marrying the words “flies daily” with “regular guy”, this exercise promotes and legitimises the function of the aviation industry, which is a central component of the world economic system. Similarly, both ‘Headway’ and ‘English File’ legitimise and re-enforce the necessity and importance of mobile phone usage. ‘Headway’ uses the term “texting to the rescue” (2005: 113) whilst English File employs the phrase “Saved by her Mobile” (Oxenden et al, 2001: 123). Furthermore, on another page, an exercise teaching the second conditional employs the phrase “If we had a mobile phone we could call for help” (2001: 44). The language employed in the text helps naturalise the existence of the mobile phone as a commodity, and also as an essential lifestyle function. The irony is that it predicates this function as essential, whilst claiming that the device represents freedom and emancipation for

the consumer. Tollefson claims that whilst most texts in ESL equate global processes with choice and emancipation, they actually ignore the economic, political and social problems that underlie students' educational needs. He argues that "The result is that ESL classes, like modernization processes generally, operate with an illusion of progress that may help to sustain unequal social relationships" (Tollefson, 1991: 101).

6. ELT and Cultural Education

As this study has already discovered, many ELT textbooks are culturally and ideologically saturated with Western brand imagery and vocational stereotypes. Litz observes how "recent authors have criticized textbooks for their inherent social and cultural biases . . . and stereotyping" (Litz, 2002: 6). Hullah describes the layout of past textbooks as being "puerile and childish" whilst claiming that recent textbooks "promote entertainment instead of education . . . such as oversimplifying the way content is presented to learners at university level" (Hullah, 2009: 1). However, individual teachers in the field are often in no position to combat this, having no choice at all in the textbook they may use (Flavell, 1994: 48). Moreover, teachers are often forced by constraints of time or curriculum into teaching cultural values at a simplistic level. Hullah writes that "This pervasive dumbing down, this tragic misguided infantilisation is, in my mind, the single most alarming aspect of the direction in which English Education is moving" (Hullah, 2009: 1). Brumfit notes that "simplification results in a reliance on generalization; generalization can easily degenerate into stereotyping" (Brumfit, 2001: 35). Similarly, Byram argues that learners should be "encouraged to avoid cultural stereotyping, which involves a learner perceiving an agent through the embodiment of a single, national, identity" (Byram, et al, 2002: 5). In light of this cultural stereotyping, some practitioners argue that we should, whenever possible, avoid teaching culture altogether. Torikai recently suggested that "If English is to be taught as a tool of communication, then the teacher should at least make a conscious effort not to teach American or British culture without some really good reason . . . (and that this) is the only way to overcome the hegemony of the English language" (Torikai, 2011: 1). However, others question the approach of teaching English purely as a tool of communication. Pennycook stresses the folly of current perceptions in teaching practice, such as those which hold that the adaptation of English into "a tool for one's own use is simply a matter of writing about the local content and sprinkling a few local words here and there" (Pennycook, 1998a: 193). He observes that "such resistance and change is hard work, that . . . make attempts to change this relationship

between language and discourse an uphill task" (1998a: 192).

Furthermore, others maintain that culture cannot be so easily avoided in the language classroom. Kramersch observes that "culture is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least" (Kramersch, 1993: 1). According to Kramersch, true communicative competence entails teaching culture, and that lack of cultural competence exposes the limitations of students' communicative competence (1993: 1). Furthermore, Buttjes contends that language teaching cannot be separated from culture teaching, and in the table below (Figure 1) makes two important observations regarding this:

Figure 1: Buttjes: Language teaching is culture teaching.

1. language codes cannot be taught in isolation because processes of sociocultural transmission are bound to be at work on many levels, e.g. the contents of language exercises, the cultural discourse of textbooks (Kramersch, 1988) and the teacher's attitudes towards the target culture;
2. in their role of "secondary care givers" language teachers need to go beyond monitoring linguistic production in the classroom and become aware of the complex and numerous processes of intercultural mediation that any foreign language learner undergoes . . . (Buttjes, 1990: pp. 55-56)

Others seek to develop a pedagogical approach which reflects these observations, and affords teachers more scope for introducing culture into the English classroom at a more critical level. Pennycook cites examples of pedagogic attempts in Malaysia and Singapore to publish poems and native literature in English (Pennycook, 1998b: 31). He argues that this is significant, as it communicates an important aspect of Malaysian cultural identity through English. He maintains that "a critical pedagogy of English in the world is an attempt to enable students to write (speak, read, listen) back" (1998b: 31). 'Writing back' would enable marginalised English users to enter the mainstream and represent themselves. In doing so, they would make a much broader impact on the centre than if they were restricted to their regional boundaries.

Lado argues that another way of raising cultural awareness for teachers is to conduct simple comparisons between L2 culture and learners' cultures (Lado, 1986: 1). Similarly, Byram stresses the need for an intercultural competence pedagogy that encompasses a critical and comparative cultural

awareness. He writes that “this enables them to anticipate cross-cultural communication problems because they are conscious of culture specific meanings of the cultural identities of their interlocutors” (Byram, 1997: 60). In the table below (Figure 2) Byram outlines five critical and comparative skills that need to be taught:

Figure 2: Byram, Gribkova and Starkey: What skills do students need to be taught?

<p>Intercultural attitudes (savoir etre): curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own.</p>
<p>Knowledge (savoirs): of social groups and their products and practices in one’s own and in one’s interlocutor’s country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.</p>
<p>Skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre): ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one’s own.</p>
<p>Skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire): ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practises and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.</p>
<p>Critical cultural awareness (savoir s’engager): an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries. (Byram, M, Gribkova, B & Starkey, H, 2002: pp. 7-9)</p>

Byram’s pedagogy involves English students undertaking a critical and comparative approach to all cultures studied, including their own. Moreover, students are encouraged to avoid stereotyping, and instead view all cultures as containing complex people of different social identities (Byram et al, 2002: 5). Byram also advocates teachers addressing themes and culture in English textbooks with an intercultural approach. He maintains that “themes e.g. food, homes, school, tourism, leisure can receive a similarly critical perspective” (2002: 16). He continues “the theme of sport can be examined from many perspectives, including . . . gender, age, religion, racism” (2002: 16). This type of critical language teaching pedagogy aims to equip learners with a valuable set of conceptual thinking tools, from which they can engage with English in a far more dynamic fashion. Bryam asserts that “studying this intercultural approach would also avoid students perceiving the West or themselves through the prism of corporate

branding and vocational stereotypes" (2002: 5).

7. Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

This study has argued that English possesses cultural values which are ideologically charged; these values being subtly underpinned and determined by relations of power. Some, such as Pennycook and Philipson, have argued that to teach English as a foreign language is to tacitly teach the values of the dominant group. However, Canagarajah, cited in Gray, suggests students do on occasion recognise the ideological nature of certain content, and seek to challenge it (Gray, 2010: 730). Gray observes that "clearly there is a need for more detailed research into how such content is perceived" (2010: 730). Such research would afford the development of a critical pedagogy that allows language learners to become more critical of the culture often found in ELT materials. Byram's critical and cultural comparative approach may be the best way to proceed in designing materials which better reflect a critical approach to language learning, and which forgo brand product placement and oversimplified stereotypes. Holliday, cited in Wu Man Fat, advocates the use of ongoing teacher action research to develop cultural-sensitive teaching methodology (Wu Man Fat, 2004: 5). Students' reactions to this approach could then be quantifiably measured and assessed, adding to an ongoing action research project. The Council of Europe has developed a European Language Portfolio, in which students can include self assessment of intercultural competence (Byram et al, 2002: 24). Byram argues that assessment of intercultural competence is "significant both as a means of recording what has been experienced and learnt and as a means of making learners become more conscious of their learning" (2002: 24). Therefore, to maximise learners' potential for critical thinking and creativity we need to equip foreign students of English with the skills necessary to engage with it more dynamically and substantively.

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