One of the central issues when learning a language as widespread and as ideologically marked as English is: "How can I become a speaker and writer of English, yet at the same time not loose what makes me a quintessential speaker of Hungarian?" English has become the password to an international community of ELT educators who share a common belief in the value of communication, collaboration, and personal initiative, but it has also become the entrance ticket to a global community of free entrepreneurs, corporate producers, marketing strategists, in competition with one another for the heart and soul of the English speaking consumer. How can these values coexist with the more traditionally Hungarian values of historical continuity, cultural loyalty, and local social cohesion? Bakhtin's central question is more relevant than ever for ELT educators: "What is it that binds individuals into groups and at the same time enables individuals to exist as selves? (Holquist, 1990, p.57) Or "How can I know if it is I or another who is talking? (Holquist, 1990, p.13)

Unlike other subjects in the school curriculum, language has this unique characteristic that it cannot be used correctly and appropriately if one does not obey the rules of usage and the conventions of use of the English speaking community, but it cannot be used properly if one does not make it one's own, give it one's voice, so to speak, in one's own unique, that is, proper, situation (Widdowson 1994). Language is both culture and voice. In our first language, the difference between the two is not readily visible, since we grow into our own voice by growing into our native culture. But the acquisition of a foreign language makes the gap apparent. Every time I board an underground train in the UK, I am reminded of the gap between the platform I stand on, and the carriage I am about to step into. "Mind the gap" could be the motto of the language learner about to board the train to
Teaching English as culture means showing the students how grammar and vocabulary express, construct and are a metaphor for the social and cultural reality of an English-speaking world (Halliday, 1978; Kramsch, 1998), and how idiomatic expressions say something about the general mindsets and beliefs of native speakers of English (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). But teaching English as culture and voice entails showing them how the choices made by individual users of English, be they native or non-native, construct relationships among utterances, and between utterances and their recipients (Kramsch 1995, 2000). For texts that are both written and visual, students need to understand how the many semiotic systems reinforce one another for the creation of meaning (Kress 1885; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). I wish to pursue these reflections on concrete examples of teaching practice that could lead us to identifying some principles of a critical pedagogy of English. I will draw on my experience teaching German in the United States and training English teachers abroad.

**Constructing cultural 'objects of knowledge'**

We first need to show students how texts 'mean.' For this we might follow Fairclough's text-oriented discourse analysis system (Fairclough 1992) as a convenient handle on how to teach authentic documents, focusing on these documents in turn as texts, discursive practices, and social practices.

The document, issued by a Task Force of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL Newsletter, 1993), is a professional 'statement of mission' intended to pave the way for the establishment of national standards for foreign language learning and teaching in the US (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996) (see overleaf).

Teaching this document as a text, we can discuss with the students the following features.
- semiotic structure of the text (16 point compass, gothic looking W of the We Believe, different size fonts, rectangular shapes, square bullets, short sentences, symmetrical boxes and blank spaces)
Task Force members agreed that their work must begin with a clear statement of "beliefs," an understanding of what we believe about foreign language learning. The following DRAFT STATEMENT was developed as a first attempt at establishing a profession-wide consensus on what we believe about our discipline:

**WE BELIEVE**

All students benefit from development of (second/foreign) language ability, and they

- should have the opportunity to develop skills in the language each year.
- will achieve success at different levels dependent on a variety of factors.
- learn in a variety of ways and settings.
- learn at varied rates and in various ways.

**Successful (foreign/second) language instruction should form a part of the core curriculum and if**

- is success oriented.
- is student-centered.
- is interactive.
- promotes communication.
- is not competitive but supportive of other elements of the school curriculum.
- makes use of the most effective strategies and technology.
- includes development of basic skills.
- includes higher order thinking skills.
- should be available to all students.
- should be tied to the rest of the school experience.
- appeals to a variety of learning styles and varied intelligences.
- can be assessed in a variety of ways.

**Foreign/second language ability is a vital component in the development of an individual, and it enables people to**

- communicate with other cultures and settings.
- look beyond their normal "borders."
- increase awareness of self and others.
- more easily take a place in the global community and the global marketplace.
- develop insight into the structure and function of the native language and culture.

The task force is seeking your input on this statement. Please send all comments, suggestions, revisions, additions, and/or deletions to Standards Project, c/o ACTFL, 8 Executive Plaza, Tonkies NY 10701.
- grammar: short main clauses subsumed under one common subject located in the black rectangle; preponderance of declarative statements in the indicative and of modal verbs; no dependent clauses.
- vocabulary: simple vocabulary, repetition of words indicating inclusion, diversity, success, opportunity.
- Cohesion: what holds the text together, i.e., visual and verbal parallelisms, repetitions
  Teaching this document as discursive practice, we can discuss its features as a conversation between the ACTFL Task Force and the language teaching profession.
- illocutionary force: the utterances are all declaratives, there are no interrogatives, nor are there direct imperatives. As one big speech act or ‘statement of mission,’ the text has a missionary zeal to it that precludes, doubt, argument or contestation; it makes the world as it should be by stating it as it is.
- coherence: what gives meaning to the text in the mind of the reader. The American foreign language teacher addressed in this document cannot but recognize here the efforts of a professional organization intent on advertising and promoting its usefulness to the larger American public and the political powers that be.
- intertextuality: the reason why American readers would resonate to such a document is that it echoes many other familiar texts: the US constitution and the Bill of Rights, computer generated documents from successful companies or institutions, user-friendly advertisements and, in general, a utilitarian kind of discourse that dominates US American public life (Scollon & Scollon, 1995).
  Teaching this document as social practice, we might want to evoke the foundational myths surrounding the birth of the United States as a nation (“all men are created equal,” e pluribus unum), and its symbols (the compass showing the People the way). We might want to show the students that words and phrases like success, effective strategies, higher order thinking skills, opportunity, competitive, supportive, awareness of self, global community, global marketplace, have become metaphors for a capitalistic economy based on free market competition and individual achievement, and that the meaning of such phrases goes far beyond their dictionary definitions. The accumulation of such metaphors gives a sense of the ideology underlying an authentic document like this one, that is meant to renew the language teaching profession’s sense of purpose, gain it political clout, and impress funding sources.
To show the pervasiveness of this kind of Utilitarian discourse, and to gain even greater appreciation for the efforts made by ACTFL to promote foreign languages in the US, we may want to juxtapose this document to the advertisement for the OMNIPO\textsuperscript{T}® cellular phone that appeared regularly in the New York Times during the year 1999 (see opposite page).

Here, the decidedly ‘monologic’ discourse of marketing is realized through the blunt imperative: “Don’t” placed in central position on the page, enjoining customers not to bother with learning foreign languages and dealing with the frustrating encounters with foreign telephone operators, but, instead, to rely on an English-speaking American technology to solve communication problems across non-English speaking societies and cultures. Through the juxtaposition of the two documents, the clash between the two diverging interest groups- foreign language teachers and OMNIPO\textsuperscript{T}® corporate managers- is made all the more dramatic as the foreign language teachers use the Utilitarian discourse of the corporate managers to make their point, yet with the opposite message.

Exploiting diversity, change and contrast within and among national cultures

The two documents have served to highlight both the homogeneity of the dominant discourses and the diversity of purposes within one and the same national culture. When learners of a foreign language appropriate for themselves the language of another cultural group, the diversity of discourse and purpose increases. This diversity can be made visible through recast exercises based on the same authentic text. Building on some of my previous work (Kramsch 1993, 1995, 2000), I give below several examples of English speakers learning German in undergraduate classrooms in the US and China.

Recasting a story in another genre

The authentic text, a short story by Peter Bichsel (1964) “Die Beamten” (The civil servants) gives a tongue in cheek account of a day in the life of a civil servant in a German speaking country. It pokes fun at the conformism, pusillanimity, sense of duty, but also at the petty power wielded by bureaucrats in 20\textsuperscript{th} century German, Austria and Switzerland.
The best way to deal with foreign hotel phones, foreign operators, foreign public phones and foreign dialing codes.

Don’t.

The most frustrating part of foreign travel just disappeared. Because now, thanks to Omnipoint digital wireless, you can make and receive calls almost anywhere in the world as easily as you do at home.

No more leaving a string of phone numbers for where you’re going to be. No more dialing country access codes or dealing with operators you don’t understand.

In short, no more dealing with a phone system that’s foreign to you. Instead, you’re dealing with the same, familiar wireless network you use in the U.S., with the very same phone number. People who call you may never even know you’re gone.

What’s more, you’ll find using Omnipoint is often less expensive than calling cards, pay phones and hotel phones. And as a monthly customer you can use it in over 3,500 cities in the United States, Canada and 48 countries around the world.

To buy the Ericsson 1888 World, the phone that works around the world with one phone number, call 1 800 BUY-OMNI. To rent an overseas handset designed to work with your worldwide Omnipoint phone number, call anytime toll free 1 877 OMNI-2-GO.

Omnipoint
100% Digital. 0% Hassle.

1 800 BUY-OMNI
www.omnipoint.com
The civil servants

At twelve o’clock they come out of the gate, each holding the door open for the next one, all in their coats and hats and always at the same time, always at twelve o’clock. They wish one another a happy lunch hour, they greet one another, they all wear hats.

And now they walk quickly, for the street seems to them suspicious. They move towards home and are afraid that they have not closed their desks. They think of the next payday, of the state lottery, of the sports scoters, of the coat for the wife, and while they are thinking they move their feet and now and then one of them thinks how odd it is that their feet are moving.

During lunch, they are afraid of the way home, for it seems to them suspicious and they don’t love their work, but it must be done, because people are standing behind the window, because people have to come and because people have to ask. Then nothing is suspicious to them any more, and the information they have makes them happy and they deliver it sparingly. They have stamps and forms in their desks, and they have people before the windows. And there are civil servants who like children and civil servants who like radish salad, and some like fishing after work, and when they smoke, they generally prefer the more fragrant tobaccos to the tart ones, and there are also civil servants who don’t wear hats.

And at twelve o’clock, they all come out of the gate.

In order to make visible the particular features of this text and its cultural characteristics, low intermediate American students of German were asked to recast the text in the form of a diary entry by one of the civil servants. Below are some of the students' texts, in English translation:

1. I don’t like my work… I am tired especially when so many people stand in line and ask questions. I sit at the desk so long… I like to think of my free time. I am very happy when I smoke and go fishing. But I also think of my wife, my children. They need clothes and they must eat! I should not write in my diary. I should not think of vacation! I must work… always work.

2. All my days are the same. Today I came out of the gate at twelve o’clock. I ate with my co-employees. We all leave in our coats and hats, one after the other. I don’t like that, because it is boring. All employees
are the same. I want to be a little different. Although I like radish salad and I go fishing after work, I want to be independent. But to-morrow I come again out of the gate at twelve o’clock.

3. Every day I get up at 5 o’clock. I take a shower, eat breakfast and cook for my children. We go to the children’s daycare. I drive again to work. It is eight o’clock. Too many people! I am crazy! They are crazy! But I must work again. Now it is five o’clock. I must pick up the children. Dinner. Sleep. Today was like all days. Boring. And Tomorrow another day.

4. I am a civil servant and it is my first day at work. The people at my work are very serious, but I am not so serious. This is hard for me, because I would like to do well. Nobody knows that I feel that way. The whole day I thought that maybe this is not for me. But I also think that the job is very important, because I need the money. I am nervous. Maybe the work will get better.

(all emphases mine).

What is striking in these recasts, is the way each American student projects his/her working experience in the Bichsel, text. The first thing we notice is the absence of the sense of duty, professional pride, or use of petty power that characterized the 19th and 20th century German civil servants, who were tenured for life in service of the state. By contrast, work for these American students is an instrumental activity, one of many jobs, that enables them to ‘make money’ for subsistence, but is otherwise just tiring, boring, subserving. The students seem to have attributed to the protagonists the very point of the view of the narrator. Of course, one could say that this is an artifact of the assignment itself, that asked them to recast a third person narrative into a first person diary entry. But we also hear in these diary entries the voice of the American undergraduate who invariably holds a 15-20 hour “job” in addition to his/her studies, and who translates the experience of the German Beamter into his/her own American experience. This is the opportunity in class to explain the philosophical difference between a Beruf (a profession) and a Job (part-time or full-time work).

One suspects that the civil servants are depicted by Bichsel in 1964 represents a species that no longer exists in quite that form in the year 2000, because it was linked to a view of the nation-state and its powerful bureaucracy that has changed in the age of corporate market capitalism. It is thus instructive to juxtapose these American diary entries with similar ones elicited from
Austrian teachers of German as a second language in Graz in 1997. Here are some of their entries, in the English translations:

1. Again no time to read the newspaper! I'm angry with the new form, everything will be more complicated. Always more work, but they have again cut the bonuses. Met Mueller during the coffee break. We'll be going perhaps together on Friday in the Steiermark.

2. Tuesday, 14.9.1997, 8:45 pm. Today I'm tired, more tired than usual. The amount of customers has almost killed me, no time during the whole day to read the newspaper! And the nerve of two of them to ask me what our new from B-28d3 is actually good for! I ask you! This kills me, really. I am still angry when I think of it.

3. A lot of work today because of the strike on Monday. So I didn’t even manage to come back home punctually at noon. Maria was angry because lunch was overcooked. Bad temper.

4. Tuesday, a good day, not too much police traffic, radish salad for lunch- and I spoke with Schimanksi about the new forms. Good. Lost again at the lottery, no new hat in the near future.

In these contemporary entries by German native speakers, the pusillanimity and petty pride of the German Beamter has almost disappeared. All that is left is the monotony of a boring clerical occupation and the small world of the bureaucrat. The same exercise done with Chinese teachers of German in Xian (China) in the year 2000 shows that Chinese users of German nowadays do not necessarily identify with the historical figure of the German Beamter, but rather, like the Austrians, view bureaucratic work as just a boring, albeit necessary, job.

**Contrasting written and visual texts**

Beyond social and historical diversity, a critical foreign language pedagogy attempts to highlight how various media construct various meanings. The idea of the following exercise came from my observation of an intermediate German class at UC Berkeley, in which the instructor discussed with his class a short story by Wondratschek “Die Mittagspause” (The Lunchbreak). Here is the beginning of the story in its English translation.
Lunchbreak
She sits at the street café. She immediately crosses her legs. She has little time. She leafs through a fashion magazine. Her parents know that she is beautiful. They don’t look upon it favorably.
For example. She has friends. However, she doesn’t say this is my best friend when she introduces a friend at home.
For example. The men laugh and look over to her and imagine how her face would look like without sunglasses.
The street café is overcrowded. She knows exactly what she wants. At the next table there is a girl with legs, too.
She hates lipstick. She orders a coffee. Sometimes she thinks of films and thinks of love films. Everything must be fast…

Despite the story’s easy and repetitive vocabulary, and its extremely short sentences, the students were unable to say anything meaningful about the text. Their responses to the teacher’s prompts were monosyllabic renditions of the words of the texts; they didn’t seem to have any idea of what the text as a whole might mean, beyond its paraphrasable content. Could it be that their linguistic skills were not good enough to talk about the text? The teacher then projected on the wall the following painting by Conrad Felix Mueller (Bildnis eines Maedchens [portrait of a young girl] 1915) that was reproduced in black and white in the students’ textbooks above the Wondratschek text (see opposite page).

He then asked the class: “What is this painting about?” All of a sudden the students had plenty to say, for instance: “The girl looks sad, shy, young, uncertain, undecisive. She is longing for something. The colors of her cheeks are the same as that of the wall. The chair behind her is rectangular, she is round. The spikes of her collar look like a dog’s collar etc.” The students displayed a sensitivity to the visual medium that was quite extraordinary, and they certainly did not lack ways of expressing it. The instructor then asked the students to write down their answer to the following question: “How does this painting express in colours, shapes, volumes, vectors, what the text expresses in words, clauses, punctuation marks, paragraphs? The following are some of their responses (in English translation):
1. In the picture the red colour hides her to a certain extent, in the same manner as it says in the text that she hides behind her sunglasses.

2. In the picture, the girl is pervasive, in the story this is expressed through words like “she could be very late. She could fall in love. She has lots of time to think about catastrophes.” In the picture colors are used to express this feeling… With the background mostly red, her eyes are very obvious, no one can see the direction of eyes leading off the page. This gives the idea of pensiveness.

3. The color of the girl’s skin blends into the color of the background representing the girl’s internal conflict. She wants to break free of the routine, yet she finds herself alone. Everything on the table and the background is represented with rectangular shapes, indicating the routine the girl is tied to. The more rounded shape of the girl is about being flexible against the routine, having a dream/fantasy.

4. There are no real action verbs in this story. She is a static character. There is no sense of movement in the image either. In the text, she claims she feels conspicuous in the café, but no one speaks to her or interacts with her – except to take a chair from her table. She has
Become part of the setting. This is clear in the image as well: she blends into the red of the background. Bother her hand and her face have become a part of the background.

As we can see, the instructor managed to draw on the students’ visual interpretive skills to help them read a literary text as art, not just as retrievable information.

Here again, it is instructive to try this exercise on learners of German from other cultural backgrounds, in order to bring us to the fore the specificity of the American students’ readings. Here are some responses for Chinese teachers of German in Mainland China.

- The girl’s white dress represents her inner world, the red wallpaper represents the outer world, like in the text some sentences represent what she feels and thinks, others depict the setting.
- The white of the dress and the round forms of the girl represent simplicity and indefiniteness. This is expressed in the text through the accumulation of short, simple main clauses, often without a verb.

The symbolism here is different and so is the interpretative focus, due to a variety of factors including the author’s difference in age, gender, professional training, educational tradition and the like.

At this point, I would like to pause and make two crucial points regarding the pedagogy proposed here. By eliciting students’ texts based on original authentic documents, whether visual or written, the purpose is not to establish the latter as superior to the former, or as the former trying to approximate the latter. Because teachers are used to upholding the native speaker norm and to measuring student performance against that norm, the temptation would be great to judge the students’ productions above as deficient approximations of some native cultural norm. This would be disastrous. As I describe in Kramsch (2000), students’ texts are authors’ texts in their own right. The exercise is meant to validate them as authors, not to show their deficiencies as non-native speakers.

Nor is the purpose of this exercise to directly map cultural stereotypes onto any individual’s text. It would be bad practice, indeed it would be harmful, to identify a student’s text as the direct product of this student’s biography, psyche, temperament, social background, or cultural affiliation. We may not speculate to why students wrote their texts the way they did. All we can
Do is show them the choices that others made – both native and non-native speakers, ask them to explain or rationalize their own stylistic choices, and respect their interpretations.

**Acquiring a voice**

Ultimately, we want the students to find their own style in language. This is not an easy task, considering that we also have to make them able to use the English language in ways that are recognizable, acceptable, and legitimized by native speakers. As Bourdieu (1991) writes:

If one wishes to produce discourse successfully within a particular field, one must observe the forms and formalities of that field (p.20)... “The competence adequate to produce sentences that are likely to be understood may be quite inadequate to produce sentences that are likely to be *listened to*, likely to be recognized as *acceptable* in all the situations in which there is occasion to speak... Social acceptability is not reducible to mere grammaticality (p.55).” But, Bourdieu (1991) points out, the linguistic markets of fields of linguistic production by native speakers are far from homogeneous. Advertising managers like the producer of the OMNIPOTENT © ad use the English language quite differently from politicians, poets, or recent working class immigrants. The more linguistic capital speakers possess, the more they are able to exploit the system of differences [among native speakers] to their advantage and thereby secure a profit of distinction.

Our responsibility as language teachers is to help students not only become acceptable and listened to users of English by adopting the culturally sanctioned genres, styles, and rhetorical conventions of the English speaking world, but how to gain a profit of distinction by using English in ways that are unique to their multilingual and multicultural sensibilities (Kramsch 1999; Kramsch & Lam 1999). The following examples come from an assignment given by Leanne Hinton in ‘American Cultures’ class to undergraduate students, many of whom came from Asian-American backgrounds (Hinton 1999). The assignment was for them to write a 2-3 page linguistic autobiography in English. Many of these autobiographies, written in a language that was not necessarily the language they spoke at home, reveal a type of discourse characteristic of minorities in search of their ethnic and American identities.

1. I am Korean-American. Not American or even American-Korean, but simply Korean-American. I have black hair, brown eyes, and a yellowish complexion. No matter what I did to my outside appearance, my inherent
outer characteristics did not allow me to be purely American like Caucasians. I tried to hide some of the differences in my appearance and culture and tried to be American-Korean, but as I got older, I realized I could not ignore my heritage.

2. Do I want to live the rest of my life feeling unattached from my first spoken language? To the culture that passed down in my family for generations? This is not a sign of insecurity, but instead of a reality faced by an Asian-American in a white, male-dominated society.

3. Being Korean is part of my identity... By coming here, [my parents] had risked the losing of my won cultural identity and theirs as well.

4. My great struggle will be to find the balance between these two conflicting halves of my self.

5. This feeling of being an alien raises the question “who am I?” (my emphases throughout)

In all these testimonies, the discourse of ‘cultural heritage,’ ‘cultural identity,’ ‘alienation,’ and ‘ethnic purity’ has been picked up from the current dominant discourse of minority identity in the US. It is, in fact, ironical that while these students regret not being ‘purely American,’ or having allowed themselves to forget their ‘roots,’ their discourse itself is quintessentially American.

There are exceptions, however. The most noticeable of the 250 autobiographies that form Hinton’s corpus is the attempt by a 20 year-old Vietnamese student to express in English his unique position as an English speaker of Vietnamese tongue.

As for English, I do speak the language but I don’t think I’ll ever talk it. English is the language that flows from the mind to the tongue and then to the pages of books. It is like a box of Plato blocks which allow you to make anything. But a Plato house cannot shelter human lives and a Plato robot cannot feel!

I only talk Vietnamese. I talk it with all my senses. Vietnamese does not stop on my tongue, but it flows with the warm, soothing lotus tea down my throat like a river, giving like to the landscape in her path. It rises to my mind along with the vivid images of my grandmother’s house and of my grandmother. It enters my ears in the poetry of “The Tale of Kieu,” singing in the voice of my Northern Vietnamese grandmother. It appears before my eyes in the faces of my aunt and cousins as they smile with such palpable
Joy. And it saturates my every nerve with healing warmth—like effect of a piece of sugared ginger in a cold night. And that is how I only talk Vietnamese.

This testimony can serve to remind us of what we are in the business of teaching when we teach English: not only is it our responsibility to teach the correct usage and the appropriate uses of English, but we need to give students the stylistic tools necessary to find their own voice in this language that is inevitably both theirs and someone else’s.

**Conclusion**

It is not easy to appropriate for oneself the English language without becoming hostage to a specific English discourse. As Bakhtin (1981) would say, our mouths are filled with the words of others. Learners are constrained, not by the English grammar, nor the English vocabulary, but by the patterns of native speaker discourse they have been exposed to. If they are to acquire the profit of distinction that the English language can bring the, they have to mind the gap between the potentialities of the code and its actual incarnations in discourse, between ‘speaking’ and ‘talking.’ They have to avoid the decontextualized focus on the text, but also the exclusive attention to the context. Between text and context, they have to learn to cherish that third place that the Malaysian-American poet Shirley Geok-Lim calls “walking between water and land”-

*No Man’s Groove*

Crossing the China Sea, we see
Other sailors, knee-deep in padi,
Transformed by the land’s rolling green.
We cannot enter their dream.

The sea brings us all to jungle,
Native, unclaimed, rooted, and tangled
On Salt like one giant tree.

We spring straight from sea-wave. We see
But do not see grey netted plaints
Shutting out the sun. Where sea and plant
Twine, mammoth croakers crawl on tidal zone.
Some will live in the giant’s shade, bend
To the rapidly rolling horizon.
I choose to walk between water and land.

Notes:

1 This paper was given as a plenary at the IATEFL-Hungary Conference in Budapest on October 7, 2000. I wish to thank the organizers of the conference for inviting me and the US State Department for making my participation at this conference possible.

2 I borrow this reference from Seidlhofer (2000).

References


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