

Plurilingualism, pluridialectism, pluriformity

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Abstract

Of course we want to promote co-operation between communities, people, and nations. The crucial question is 'how'? An essential first step is to understand exactly what a 'culturally diverse society' means, in linguistic terms. Just how much of a language is 'culturally distinctive'? How does this distinctiveness actually affect the task of English teaching and learning? And how are English teachers and learners to become aware of it? At a theoretical level, we need a more general notion of pluriformity, which includes pluridialectism as well as plurilingualism. At a practical level, we need an online dictionary of cultural linguistic practice.

Of course we want to promote co-operation between communities, people, and nations. The crucial question is 'how'? Cooperation presupposes understanding, and the problem with the word 'understanding' is that it is not a simple word to understand, because it has several levels of interpretation. The basic level is semantic: if I say 'I understand English', it means I understand the meaning of the words and sentences. But if someone says, in an argument, 'Yes, I understand what you're saying', this is no longer a semantic observation. It means that although they have understood the semantic meaning, there are some pragmatic problems about acting on it. For example, in a financial negotiation, if an offer is made by Mr A to Mr B, to which Mr B replies with 'I understand what you're saying', then Mr A will deduce that Mr B is not happy about the offer.

In addition to semantic and pragmatic notions of understanding, there is also a social or cultural layer, as when a man says 'I shall never understand women', or a Brit says 'I just don't understand Americans'. Now we are talking about some general concept of

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behaviour or belief. And the chief problem facing us all, to my mind, when we address the question of how to promote cooperation between communities, peoples, and nations, is the gap that exists between semantic and cultural understanding. We can teach our students to understand the words and expressions, but have we taught their cultural signification?

The problem exists both within a language and between languages. Here is an example of a within-language gap. A few years ago, I encountered the following sentence in a South African English-language newspaper: 'It is interesting to recall that some *verkrampste* Nationalists, who pose now as super Afrikaners, were once *bittereinder bloedsappe*.' I had to replace the unfamiliar words by glosses, using a Dictionary of South African English, to get an intelligible sentence: 'It is interesting to recall that some bigoted Nationalists, who pose now as super Afrikaners, were once die-hard members of the United Party'. I now understood the semantics of the sentence, but I still did not really understand it, for I did not yet know anything about its pragmatic or cultural application. At a pragmatic level, just how forceful are such words as *verkrampste* and *bittereinder*? I had no idea if these were emotionally neutral or extremely rude. If I met such a person and called him a *bittereinder bloedsappe*, would he be delighted or angry? Can the words be used for both men and women? I had no sense of the pragmatic force of these words. Nor did I have a cultural sense, because I do not know what the United Party was, in its politics then or now. Whereabouts on the political spectrum is it? How does it relate to the names of other political parties? Here, the encounter with the English of a community other than your own does not automatically mean understanding: rather, it shows us just how much we do *not* understand.

Here is an example of a between-language gap. Last month I was lecturing in Leiden, in the Netherlands. The country was in the grip of exceptionally cold weather. The canals were frozen and people were skating on them. Indeed, in Amsterdam the following weekend my wife and I walked along the canal at Prinzengracht, while our 6-year-old grandson did some speed skating. Everyone in the city seemed to be on the ice. The previous time the canals had frozen over like this, it seems, was 1997. So it was not surprising that after the lecture the dinner-time talk — four Dutch colleagues, my wife and me, with a conversation entirely in English — at one point turned to the ice skating. Which bits of the ice were safe? Which weren't? Under the bridges was dangerous, for it was warmer there. Our knowledge of ice-skating was increasing by the minute. It was a lively and jocular chat, and the exceptional weather formed a major part of it. Then one of them said something that I didn't quite catch, and the four Dutch people suddenly became very downcast and there was a short silence. It was as if someone had mentioned a death in the family. I had no idea how to react. Somebody commented about it being such a shame, about the — I now know how to spell it — *Elfstedentocht*. One of the four noticed my confusion. 'The 11-cities tour was cancelled', he explained, adding 'because of the ice'. Ah, so that was it, I thought. Some sort of cultural tourist event taking in 11 cities had been called off because the roads were too dangerous. I could understand that, as the roads were so slippery that I'd had to buy some special boots a few days earlier to keep myself upright. But why were my colleagues so upset about it? 'Were you going on it?' I asked. They all laughed. I had evidently made a joke, but I'd no idea why. 'Not at our age!' said one of them. I couldn't understand that answer, and didn't like to ask if it was a

tour just for youngsters. Then I got even more confused, for someone said that it was the south of the country that was the problem because the ice was too thin. But why was thin ice a problem? That would mean the travelling would be getting back to normal. I was rapidly losing track of this conversation, as the four Dutch debated the rights and wrongs of the cancellation. It might still be held...? No, it was impossible. It would all depend on the weather... And eventually the talk moved on to something else.

What I'd missed, of course, was the simplest of facts —and cultural linguistic differences often reduce to very simple points— which I discovered when I later looked up *Elfstedentocht* on the Internet. It firstly referred to a *race*, not a tour (*tocht* in Dutch has quite a wide range of uses) and moreover an *ice* race, along the canals between the eleven cities. It is an intensive experience, only for the fittest and youngest - hence the irony of my remark. But the semantics of the word was only a part of it. The cultural significance of the word I had still to learn. I discovered it in the website of the *Global Post*. (I will read the whole piece, so that you get a full grasp of the issues involved.)

It's hard to overestimate the grip that the *Elfstedentocht* has on the Dutch psyche.

For sports fans in the Netherlands the epic 200-kilometer (125 mile) skating race is like the World Series, Super Bowl and Stanley Cup combined.

Its mythical status is enhanced by the fact that it can only be held in exceptional winters when the canals are covered by 15 cm (6 inches) of ice along the length of the course.

The last *Elfstedentocht* was back in 1997 and concern over global warming had led some gloomy skate fans to wonder whether the race has a future. On Wednesday, officials considered holding the race, but deferred, stating that the ice was not yet thick enough. By Friday, people were skating on many stretches of the course, but officials were skeptical that the race would be held soon, citing still-dangerous conditions.

Warmer temperatures are expected over the weekend, but the icy weather could return next week.

If the *Elfstedentocht*, or "11 cities tour," goes ahead, organizers expect up to 2 million spectators —one in eight of the Dutch population— could line the route. The race has only been held 15 times since the first in 1909, and winners become instant national heroes. The legendary 1963 contest was held in a raging blizzard. Just 136 finished out of 10,000 starters.

'It's hard to overestimate the grip that the *Elfstedentocht* has on the Dutch psyche.' A stronger cultural affirmation is difficult to imagine. The fact that it was an ice race was so obvious, to the Dutch people at the table, that they took it completely for granted, disregarding the fact that for me, coming from Wales, the significance of the thickness of ice on canals would totally escape me.

The South African and the Dutch illustrations have one thing in common: they both involve an expression from another language becoming part of an English-language

interchange. But there is an important difference. In the first example, everyone in the intended readership of the South African newspaper would have understood the allusions; only people from outside the country or unfamiliar with South African politics would not. The Afrikaans expressions are part of what we would call South African English. In the second example, everyone around the table was speaking what we would call Standard English, or Standard International English, or English as a Lingua Franca, or some such. The problem was not the use of the Dutch word, for when it was translated for my benefit my misunderstanding remained. It was not a semantic problem, for '11 cities tour' is an acceptable translation of the Dutch, as the newspaper article illustrates. It was my lack of awareness of the cultural background that caused the problem. Nor could I easily have prepared for it, as it seems that this culture-conditioned event becomes a hot talking point only once every decade or so.

If cooperation requires understanding, and understanding requires awareness of cultural difference, then we need to place our linguistic analyses, and our language teaching, systematically within a cultural frame of reference. It needs to be part of an applied sociolinguistics. The operative word is 'systematically' - as opposed to anecdotally. Everyone can supply examples of the kind I have just illustrated (for some further illustrations, see Crystal 2010). Local misunderstandings based on cultural differences are common in everyday conversation with domestic subject-matter among people with different language backgrounds who interact through the medium of English. Again, the operative word is 'domestic' - opposed to professional, specialized, technical, and suchlike. The more specialized the interaction —in classrooms, boardrooms, clinics, and labs— the less likely local cultural differences will interfere. It is outside these settings where the problems are most likely to be encountered. Or, of course, within these settings, when the participants leave the formal agenda and chat informally for a while. The notion of English as a lingua franca has various realizations depending on the setting in which it is used, and interactions need to be evaluated sociolinguistically in order to determine their status. This, to my mind, is the biggest challenge that those who study English as a lingua franca need to anticipate.

Just how much of the lexicon of a language is culturally specific in this way? How many words, idioms, and expressions have a cultural baggage which means that, in everyday conversation, they are likely to mislead or be misunderstood? We can get a quick sense of the scale of the issue by reflecting on the wide range of vocabulary involved, such as the names of indigenous plants or animals, home-produced food and drink, local customs and practices, traditional myths and legends, contemporary politics and religion, popular sports and games. We obtain an immediate impression of the extent to which cultural identity permeates a language when we scan the political pages of an English-language newspaper and are unable to interpret what is going on, or read an English menu in a local restaurant and have to ask what half the names on the menu mean. Note that the problem affects everyone who is unfamiliar with the culture - regardless of whether they are native or non-native speakers of English. This is nothing to do with being a native speaker of English. Most of us at this conference would have been thrown by my Dutch encounter, whatever our language background. When it comes to cultural linguistic differences, we are all equally at a loss.

These differences always operate simultaneously in two directions, as participants in a conversation alternate in their role as listener. It is perfectly possible that, when I was talking to my Dutch colleagues, I was saying some things which they did not fully understand, but which they did not challenge - perhaps out of a sense of politeness, or because they did not think it was important. Here are some examples of the kind of thing a speaker steeped in the culture behind British English might say, without thinking twice about it. Consider the cultural background you would have to explain to a student in order to make sense of the following snatches of conversation:

It's just not cricket, treating her like that.

The job isn't all beer and skittles, you know.

[after a very bad pun] You're not a writer for Xmas crackers, by any chance?

[after leaving a hotel] That made Fawley Towers seem like paradise.

[after someone has complained about something] Oh, come on, disgusted of Tunbridge Wells!

His book refreshed the parts other books couldn't reach.

It was like Clapham Junction in Oxford Street today.

To drive or not to drive - that's the question.

In each case, we are dealing with an utterance where learners understand the pronunciation, the orthography, the individual words, and the sentence construction - but still do not understand what is meant. The cultural history needs to be explained. Once it is, everything falls into place. It isn't rocket science. The explanations (as with my ice skating example) are usually quite simple. But without them, one is at a loss.

We shall never know how much of a conversation is misunderstood in this way - and of course 'talking at cross purposes' is always a risk, in any interaction, even between speakers who share the same culture, as the many popular books on gender relationships affirm - but if we are promoting cooperation we need as teachers to take steps to minimize the potential problem.

Notice that we are talking about understanding, not assimilation. All I need to do is understand what my Dutch colleagues are talking about to participate fully in the conversation. I could never share their feelings about the Elfstedentocht. I can be dispassionate about that race in a way that they cannot be. Similarly, they can be dispassionate about cricket. Only a few cultural phenomena transcend cultural barriers - football comes to mind, as does Shakespeare. Otherwise we engage with other cultures at a distance, without identifying with them. To think it is otherwise is the fallacy underlying the notion of linguistic imperialism.

It is difficult to quantify the extent to which cultural allusions of this kind operate within a language. Quite clearly most of the sentences we use don't have any cultural baggage, and that is the impression of a language we are given in the traditional phrase book, where we see dozens of culturally neutral utterances (*Can you tell me the way to the*

station?, What time is it?, It's very cloudy today...). And most of the words in a bilingual dictionary seem to translate with reasonable equivalence. My question is: what proportion of words don't? The figure varies greatly, depending on the cultural distance between the languages being compared. With closely related languages, the percentage will be low. The topic is beginning to attract research. For example, in 2007, Miguel Vallés published a comparative lexicon of 1,300 core vocabulary words in 33 Romance languages. His impression is that there was exact equivalence in over 95 percent of cases. So, there is only about 5 percent of cultural difference here. But once we leave core vocabulary behind, the figure becomes much higher, and if these languages were compared with less directly related languages, such as Chinese, the items which would need cultural explanation would rise sharply - I suspect to 50 percent or more.

Other factors are involved. The percentage will also depend on just how much encyclopedic lexicon is brought into the equation - such as names of personalities, place-names, titles of publications and television programmes, and brand names. If we take a narrowly linguistic conception of semantics, excluding proper nouns on the grounds that they tell us nothing about a language's semantic system (as British dictionaries traditionally do), then our figures for culturally distinctive lexicon will be relatively low. But if we broaden this conception to allow in encyclopedic items (as American dictionaries do), the figure shoots up dramatically. And the figure will rise still further when we take into account the fact that the word is not the only semantic unit to express cultural vision. A wide range of idiomatic expressions need also to be taken into account, such as idioms from cricket (e.g. *He's batting on a sticky wicket*). Any published collection of idioms will try to explain their origins (*kick the bucket, by hook or by crook*), and we immediately find ourselves immersed in English social history. Proverbs are another area of cultural allusion: the same concept is expressed in a variety of ways, as can be sensed in translation:

You cannot jump over two ditches at the same time (Netherlands)

No one can paddle two canoes at the same time (South Africa)

No one can blow and swallow at the same time (Germany)

Metaphors and similes often make allusions which are culturally specific: *batten down the hatches, having a card up your sleeve, as flat as a pancake, as mad as a march hare, as nutty as a fruitcake*. Quotations, slogans, humour... as we say of all of these, and especially the last, 'they don't travel'.

But whether the figure is 5 or 50 percent, the learner has a problem, as several of the salient items will be of relatively high frequency of occurrence in a language. And, as far as the English language is concerned, the problem is increasing, because the spread of English as a global language has led to the emergence of the 'new Englishes', whose distinctiveness is primarily signalled through a local lexicon, much of which is culturally conditioned by the languages of the community where English is being used. I am making no distinction between 'second' and 'foreign' language, when I say this. I am not talking only of Australian English, Singaporean English, Nigerian English, and so on, where there is a long history of native-speaker contact, but of Italian English, Dutch

English, Spanish English, Basque English, - any territory where a community exists who, from time to time, will use English as a lingua franca, and with whom people from other countries will interact. At an international conference, people with all kinds of linguistic backgrounds will be talking to each other through the medium of English. When the talk is professional and formal, cultural problems will be minimal. But when the talk turns to everyday matters and becomes informal, it is not long before cultural differences intrude.

The irony is that the misunderstandings often go unnoticed or are ignored, because the subject-matter is trivial. Only occasionally do they lead to a real breakdown in communication. It can take people a while to even realize that there is a problem. They too readily assume that foreigners will know what they are talking about. They tend to underestimate the cultural knowledge of their non-native listeners and readers, whatever the language and whatever the setting. Because the words and phrases are so familiar and routine, they are usually not aware that they are saying or writing something which foreigners will not understand. They take things for granted.

For the most part this behaviour has no serious conversational consequences. If someone says in passing 'I saw a traffic accident in Bloomsbury this morning', and I have no idea where that is, I will not interrupt the speaker to ask exactly where Bloomsbury is, because that is not important. The accident is the topic of discourse, and the location is of negligible consequence. I will ask about the accident. But if somebody were to say 'I thought I'd avoid X-location, on my way here', then the cultural factor becomes foregrounded, and it would be wise to know about it. Why did the speaker avoid this location? If X is Victoria in rush hour, that suggests one interpretation. If X is a sleazy street in Soho, that is another. If X is a street with poor lighting in the East End, that is a third. And so on.

As English becomes a local alternative language, these differences increase. Every English-speaking location in the world has usages like this: place-names which connote chaos or danger or low-quality standards. Or of course the opposite: place-names which connote leisure or good food or high-quality standards. 'My watch is more Portobello Road than Bond Street'. Should you be impressed? 'John lives in Park Lane.' Should you be impressed? What are the equivalents of such place-names in other English-speaking countries? Cumulatively, these names are a significant part of what makes the English used there distinctive, expressive of local identity, and a means of creating solidarity. From this point of view, notions such as 'Spanish English' and 'Basque English' take on a fresh relevance, going well beyond traditional conceptions of English spoken with a Spanish or Basque accent, or English displaying interference from Spanish or Basque grammar. Spanish English, for example, I define as the kind of English I need to know about when I go to Spain, otherwise I will be unable to converse efficiently with them through the medium of English. When a group of people in a country (such as students, teachers, or businessmen) switch into English, for whatever reason, the subject-matter of their conversation inevitably incorporates aspects of their local environment. They talk about the local shops, streets, suburbs, bus-routes, institutions, businesses, radio personalities, television programmes, newspapers and journalists, political parties and politicians (including their nicknames), minority groups (including insulting expressions), and a great

deal more. They make jokes, quote proverbs, bring up childhood linguistic memories (such as nursery rhymes), and recall lyrics of popular songs. All this local knowledge is taken for granted, and may be used in sentences without gloss. Visitors who hear such sentences, or read them in local newspapers, need to have them explained. Conventional dictionaries will not help, for they do not include such localisms, especially if the expressions are encyclopedic in character (referring to local people, places, institutions, and suchlike).

So how can a teacher help? The first step, I think, is to draw attention to the parallel between the different kinds of encounter with linguistic diversity that I have been referring to in this talk. Diversity, it should now be clear, does not mean only plurilingualism. It also means pluridialectism, where 'dialect' means not only regional dialect, but also social dialect and occupational dialect. A more inclusive term would be 'variety' or 'register' - a term that is commonly encountered in sociolinguistics and stylistics, and which might usefully be neologized in the present context as plurivarietism. One of the problems with the term plurilingualism, from the perspective of ELT, is that it seems a distant, not entirely relevant, and possibly threatening perspective. We know we need to respect linguistic diversity and identity, if we want to ensure a positive relationship with the people and communities we are teaching, but the question is: how do we bridge the gap between an ELT vision of the world and a plurilingual vision? My answer is to focus on the similarities between the issue of cultural understanding that we encounter when we are teaching and learning varieties of English, and the same issue that we encounter when we are teaching and learning other languages. We need a term that transcends language, dialect, and variety, which draws attention to the relationships between them, and for today I propose to use pluriformity.

Let me conclude by illustrating the way pluriformity manifests itself in these various areas - first, in relation to mother-tongue teaching and learning. Making students aware of variety differences is a major goal of mother-tongue education. The point is repeatedly made that it is extremely handicapping to be in control of only one variety. Teenagers are often stereotyped and criticised for an apparent inability to switch varieties. Just a few weeks ago, in the *Independent* (17 February 2012), Terence Blacker wrote an opinion piece headed: 'Say what you like, the world still judges us by the way we speak'. Here is a brief extract: -

There is, in adult life, a division between the formal and the personal. Language, if one wants to advance in a career, has to be adapted accordingly. When an application for employment is written as if to a friend - 'OMG this job is well interesting' - it is unlikely to lead to an interview. If it does, greeting the panel with a 'Yo', 'Hey' or 'How ya doin'?' will make a less favourable impression than a grey, dutiful 'How do you do?' This bias against the street may seem unfair and old-fashioned, but it is an unavoidable truth that we live in a middle-class world. Most professional life involves impersonating someone more grown-up and better behaved than one actually is.

A great deal of school time these days is devoted to developing students' sense of style and appropriateness in language use. It is not a question of replacing the street style

by the professional style (as would be the case in a prescriptive approach to the mother-tongue), but of developing an appreciation of the value of both, and of the restrictions governing their use. In this respect, the mother-tongue student is no different from the second-language learner. All of us, as teachers, sense the importance of appropriateness when we focus on such issues as formal vs informal English, literary English, business English, and all the topics that go under the heading of English for special purposes.

These are examples of linguistic diversity affecting understanding within a single regional variety of language - in my case, British English. Let me now broaden the perspective to include other major regional varieties. Here is an example, which I reported a few years ago (Crystal 1999), of a breakdown in understanding at the level of international English.

Some time ago, I was attending an international seminar at a European university. Around the table were representatives of some 20 countries. There were two people from the UK, two from the US, and one from Australia, with the others all from countries where English was either a second (official) language or a foreign language. The lingua franca of the meeting was English, and everyone seemed to be using the language competently - even the native speakers.

We were well into the discussion period following a paper which had generated a lively buzz of comment and counter-comment. Someone then made a telling remark. There was a silence round the table, which was broken by one of the US delegates observing: 'That came from out in left field'. There was another silence, and I could see some of the delegates turning to their neighbors in a surreptitious way, as one does when one does not understand what on earth is going on, and wants to check that one is not alone. But they were not pondering the telling remark. They were asking each other what 'from out in left field' meant. My neighbour asked me: as a native speaker, he felt confident I would know. I did not know. Baseball at that time was a closed book to me - and still is, very largely.

One of the braver of the delegates spoke up: 'out where?', he asked. It took the US delegate by surprise, as plainly he'd never had that idiom questioned before; but he managed to explain that it was a figure of speech from baseball, a ball coming from an unusual direction, and what he had meant was that the remark was surprising, unexpected. There were nods of relief from around the table. Then one of the UK delegates chipped in: 'You played that with a straight bat', he said. 'Huh?', said the American. 'Oh, I say, that's not cricket', I added, paradoxically. 'Isn't it?', asked a delegate from Asia, now totally confused.

This kind of issue goes well beyond the distinction between British and American English, and could be illustrated from any two international varieties.

Let me now broaden the perspective still further, to include the influence of other languages on these varieties of English. Here the primary phenomenon is code-switching - the use of more than one language in a single discourse, or even a single sentence. In its minimal presence, it takes the form of a single word or phrase from one language dropped into an utterance which is otherwise in a different language. In a more developed form, longer stretches of different languages alternate reflecting a host of pragmatic and cultural

factors, such as attitude towards the subject-matter, the expression of identity, and concern about rapport.

The phenomenon is frequent and universal, and is slowly ridding itself of the bad press with which code-switching was once associated, and reflected in such labels as Tex-Mex or Spanglish. And when I say universal, I don't just mean among bilinguals. Even monolinguals practise a kind of code-switching, without realising it, when they unconsciously introduce a foreign expression into their speech - in English we regularly hear people talking about a *tour de force* or a *pièce de resistance* or —to go Spanish— saying *pronto*, *mañana*, or *olé*. Some speakers make a habit of it. The following is only a slightly exaggerated version of someone I know:

Annus mirabilis for me this year. My magnum opus got published, so I thought it was time for la dolce vita, bit of joie de vivre, so me and the au pair went out for a tête-à-tête conversation sotto voce al fresco in the local restaurant, where there's a nice maître d. - nouvelle cuisine, good premier cru from the sommelier. lovely hors d'oeuvre on the table d'hôte, I ate à la carte, spécialité de la maison, my usual modus operandi. Ah, c'est la vie.

What language is he speaking here? Is this what English as a lingua franca is really like? Vive la différence! Que sera sera.

These would be considered as loan words or loan expressions — borrowings— used by people who would consider themselves to be monolingual. The notion of code-switching is usually illustrated with reference to bilinguals. But it should be clear that, in relation to the cultural impact of the language, the two notions are related. If I know no French, I will pick up just a few of the French expressions that have entered English. The more French I know, the more I will incorporate French expressions into my speech, especially when I know I am talking to other French-aware people, and become culturally aware. And if I am bilingual, I will begin to code-switch as occasion demands without thinking twice about it. Note the questions of cultural identity which this raises. What sort of people speak in this way? In what sort of setting? And note the risks for the learner, especially if some of the expressions are socially sensitive - a reference to a minority group, for example. Knowing what is and is not politically correct in language is a major part of cultural awareness. It is so easy to overhear a usage and decide to use it ourselves, not realizing that it is culturally circumscribed in some way.

The perspectives I have been outlining illustrate a progression from monolingualism to plurilingualism — from intranational varieties of English to international varieties and then to varieties influenced by contact with other languages— and in each case we need to acknowledge the relevance of a cultural frame of reference. I am suggesting that the cultural linguistic issues involved when we approach ELT from a plurilingual perspective are the same as those we experience when we approach it from a bilingual or monolingual perspective. Linguistic variation is one of the driving principles of our faculté de langage, or language organ. What we need to do is turn this theoretical position into practice.

We already do this kind of teaching to a certain extent. Indeed, it would be difficult to think of a teaching course that lacked any sort of cultural content. Cultural information is routinely incorporated into the practice texts in teaching materials. An exercise on the present tense, shall we say, may be illustrated by a visit to a street market in the Portobello Road, and the reader will then unconsciously pick up the relevant associations for that name. But this is fortuitous. It couldn't possibly be a systematic guide. And the cultural information has not been evaluated in its own terms or graded in any way.

Before we can grade and evaluate we need descriptions, and that means, in the first instance, the integration of linguistic and cultural studies. The corpus approach, so beloved of contemporary English language applied linguists, will be of little help here. It is not easy to identify pragmatic factors in a corpus. By pragmatics, I mean the study of the choices we make when we use language, of the intentions behind those choices, and of the effects which those choices convey. What a corpus does is collect what was said. It does not readily explain why something was said or what effect the speech had on the listener. The kind of cross-purposes in communication illustrated in my talk could not be identified from a corpus. Imagine if we had a transcript of the dialogue I had with my Dutch friends. How could one possibly deduce from the interaction the nature of my confusion? While sometimes cross-purposes are evidenced by the way the participants deal with them, in my case my confusion resulted in silence - and silence is not a particularly useful feature of a corpus!

Rather more useful will be the production of regional cultural dictionaries or glossaries. It is the kind of thing that has already been attempted in such books as the *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* (1992) or David Grote's *British English for American Readers* (1992). The exercise now needs to be repeated and extended to include all English-speaking areas. A group of people get together from a speech community and, in a brainstorming way, identify the features of their language that seem to reflect the kind of cultural preoccupations I have been discussing. Having explored this in workshops in a few countries, using local newspapers, websites, radio and TV guides, and so on, I can affirm that it takes only an hour to accumulate a useful initial list. We need to make sure that the list reflects the awareness of *all* the participants - which means not just the cultural knowledge of the (adult) teacher but that of the student (of whatever age) too. And the approach also needs a collaborative dimension: a culturally unaware English speaker from outside the speech community needs to interact with those within that community through the medium of English. It cannot be done entirely from within.

The task goes well beyond what is practicable in a traditional dictionary format. The end product looks more like an encyclopedia than a dictionary, for it is dealing with explanations as well as descriptions. Only an online site would be able to cope with the scale of the enterprise, given that we are talking about all parts of the English-speaking world, and a phenomenon where the issues are so subject to change. So this is my proposal: that somehow, somewhere, someone creates a website identifying the cultural linguistic practices of the English-speaking world, to which groups from different countries would make contributions, and where a forum facility would allow the kind of intercultural commentary which is essential. If I were 30 years younger I would do it myself, for I

believe it could be one of the most practicable ways of promoting co-operation between communities, people, and nations. But, in the absence of a youth-enhancing drug, I hope others will take up the challenge.

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