Culture, identity, language (learning)

Continued from 'Critical and "alternative" models of culture

- Parvaneh's assignment example
- Blocks and threads

The ideas expressed here are discussed further in Holliday (2021, in press)

Opposing, polarised positions

Relate to the two basic models of the intercultural

- **Positivist, essentialist, structural-functionalist**, methodological nationalism
    - Language = national or civilisational culture - L2=C2
        - Learning English mean losing own culture (Atay & Ece 2009)
    - **Native-Speakerism**
        - The belief that only so-labelled 'native speakers' possess the (critical, self-directed, individualist, autonomous, Western) 'culture' of English and are therefore the best people to teach it (Holliday 2005, 2015, 2018)
        - Linguistic imperialism (Phillipson 1992)
- Seamless varicultural flows between **constructed cultures**
    - English is located everywhere - i.e., not belonging to one place and then found problematically everywhere else (Saraceni 2009).
    - English is **hybrid** (Schneider 2016)
        - Hybridity as the normal original state (Bhabha 1994: 56; Hall 1996: 619)
        - Not imperfect and 'in-between'
    - Precolonial multilingual environments (Canagarajah 2018)
    - 'Languages' are political constructions (Li 2018)
        - **Translanguagung**
    - We are so-labelled 'native speakers' of whatever repertoire of languages we are competent in (Rajagopalan 2012)

        'A knotty question: what language do I claim to be a 'native-speaker' of? ... leaves open the possibility that there is no single real native speaker who completely represents any real linguistic community; ultimately, every speaker represents only himself or herself (the "idiolect").' (Amritavalli 2012: 54)

Stamping identity on English

Ethnographic research - what students do with new language out of sight of their teachers

- Sri Lankan secondary school students write their own references to local and Western cultural realities into the margins of their American textbook, and recast characters in so-called authentic American texts as Tamil film stars (Canagarajah 1993; 1999: 88-90)
- University students in Kuwait engage in sophisticated play with English among their friends (Kamal 2015)

- Secondary and primary school students across China say they want to communicate with the world about identity (Gong & Holliday 2013)

- UK inner-London secondary school students from a variety of language backgrounds play with each other's languages and expressions (Rampton 2007)

- Mexican university students talk about how they stamp their identity on English by using it to express post-colonial sentiments (Clemente & Higgins 2008)

- Students have the right to learn any sort of English they like no matter how difficult - critique of simplified English as a lingua franca (Kuo 2006)

Multiple cultural realities

Literary fiction, media and personal experience

- 'Did you come out well this morning?' (Adichie 2007: 423)

- 'Your place will be empty'; the English we speak with Syrian friends

- Syrian university student returning from the US changing to Syrian English

- Dubbed Netflix dramas and movies

    - Talking about similar things with similar issues, with different forms of expression, in different cultural environments

Linguaculture and discourses

> When I as a Dane move around the world, I tend to build on my Danish linguaculture, when I speak English, French or German. I therefore contribute to the flow of Danish linguaculture across languages. (Risager 2022: 118)

> We need at least two different concepts in the interface between language and culture: linguaculture ... and discourse (always expressed in a language, but potentially moving across languages). (Risager 2020: 114)

- Discourses - sexist, racist, corporate

    - 'Students as customers'

So what should we teach?

- Idealised, branded images of 'British culture' (Gray 2010)

- How English can be used in 'local' cultural environments (Bates & Higgins 1986)

- English attached to no particular culture

- English that encouraged cultural travel and exercises intellectual curiosity - opposing 'Western positivism that denies students' intelligence (Ghahremani-Ghajar & Mirhosseini 2010)

> Turtles are patient and curious, they take their time in water and land, they never worry about where to stay or where to rest because they walk with their homes on their backs! I feel our memories are like their homes on their backs - the memories we carry to wherever we go. The turtle in our stories travels to different places, she talks to different people, she tells us about other people's stories, and she tells her own

<u>stories that are usually my/our stories too!</u> (Ghahremani-Ghajar 2009: 1)

- In ways that '**communicate**' with the existing competence and experience of our students (Breen & Candlin 1980; Kumaravadivelu 1993)

    - What is authentic, meaningful to our students' worlds

> I think it is probably better to consider authenticity not as a quality residing in instances of language but as a quality which is bestowed upon them, created by the response of the receiver. Authenticity in this view is a function of the interaction between the reader/hearer and the text which incorporates the intentions of the writer/speaker. We do not recognise authenticity as something there waiting to be noticed, we realise it in the act of interpretation. (Widdowson 1979: 165)

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