

# Foreign Language Teaching Methodology

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## RAISING AWARENESS OF SOME CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC STEREOTYPES WITH FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDENTS IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

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***Summary** - The article shows how using some examples of cultural and linguistic stereotypes relating to the Anglo-Saxon community can raise this awareness and actually be a positive learning experience with foreign language students in tertiary education. By engaging students in various tasks and activities (brainstorming, reading particular texts relating to the topic, short discussions, listening activities, writing short structured texts, etc.), they not only work on their language skills but also their communication skills and above all raise their awareness of what is meant by stereotype and generalization, thus enriching their intercultural communicative competence. The article provides detailed procedures for carrying out such tasks in ESP<sup>1</sup> classes with students in the tertiary level.*

***Key words:** communicative competence, cultural awareness, generalization, linguistic competence, revision, stereotype, TEFL<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> ESP = English for Specific Purposes

<sup>2</sup> TEFL = Teaching English as a Foreign Language

## INTRODUCTION

An integral part of foreign language learning is the development of an ability to communicate with speakers of another language. However, for successful communication to take place, learners of a foreign language need to develop an understanding of the way of life, the beliefs, values and behavior of the target culture (Byram, Planet, 2000). Therefore, the competence that is aimed for in learning a foreign language is not limited to linguistic competence but implies acquiring an intercultural communicative competence, or “cultural awareness”. A culturally aware learner shows an understanding not only of the culture of the language being studied but also of his or her own culture, or as Byram and Planet (2000) put it, it is the acquisition of alternative perspectives and a critical reflection on oneself and the society in which one lives.

## STEREOTYPE AND GENERALIZATION

The awareness of stereotyping and generalization in the Anglo-Saxon community can be raised through the process of revision at the linguistic and cultural level. In tertiary education, revision of language skills at the linguistic level provides opportunities for students to develop faculties of analysis and critical reflection on the cultural level. Revision literally means to “see again,” to look at something from a fresh, critical perspective. It is an ongoing process of *rethinking the paper*: reconsidering your arguments, reviewing your evidence, refining your purpose, reorganizing your presentation, reviving stale prose. But to move away from the distorted image of a culture, in this case, the Anglophone one, the students should develop faculties by which they will know how to recognize generalizations and stereotypes and avoid prejudice. Generalizations such as for example *Germans generally drink a lot of beer* allow for individuality and are non-judgmental. Stereotypes, on the other hand, do not allow for individuality, and often encourage critical or negative judgment, e.g. *The English have bad food*. One way of raising students’ cultural awareness is to make them aware that, as Valdes (2001) points out, no one can know everything about one’s own culture and that even generalities, as long as they are not false, may help if one avoids the pitfall of stereotyping and does not expect all members of a culture to fit the generality.

Having prejudice, according to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, means having a preconceived judgment or opinion, or an adverse opinion or leaning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge. There is also a tendency that an irrational attitude of hostility be directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics

## REVISION

In the remainder of this article we will present two consecutive teaching units developed for 1<sup>st</sup> year university students of journalism who are linguistically at the intermediate/advanced level in English as a foreign language. By using the process of revision as a FLT<sup>3</sup> strategy, students are given an opportunity to develop knowledge and skills to function effectively as lifelong learners in a changing, complex, pluralistic society. It is essential that students reinforce personal and social values and skills by recognizing how stereotypical views can lead to prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory practices. As mentioned above, the main topic, i.e., the awareness of stereotyping and generalization in the Anglo-Saxon community was presented at two levels: linguistic and cultural. At the linguistic level the aim was to revise punctuation (nationalities written in capital letters and vocabulary (adjectives, opposites using different prefixes and suffixes, word transformation). At the cultural level focusing on the Anglo-Saxon world, we chose two extracts from the well-known books written by George Mikes, the Hungarian-born Englishman, »Boomerang: Australia Rediscovered«, and «How to be an Alien». In the first book the author gives a humorous and ironic picture of Australia and its people, while the latter one, as the author stated, was meant «chiefly for xenophobes and Anglophobes».

### LESSON 1. (90 MIN)

#### STEREOTYPES

##### Objectives:

- Learners will be able to use correct punctuation (capital letters), word formation (affixes), collocations and constant linguistic patterns, idioms and phrases
- Learners will develop reading /speaking techniques using various aspects of the elements of culture and civilization in English speaking communities
- Learners will be able to reflect on their experiences of other cultures and re-evaluate their own experiences
- Learners will engage in using skimming and scanning techniques
- Learners will engage in guided and independent writing of short structured texts

##### Materials:

- blackboard
- copies of texts for each learner

##### Activities:

1. Brainstorm some human characteristics with students and write them on the board; e.g.

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<sup>3</sup> FLT = Foreign language teaching

*passionate, intelligent, scientifically-minded, tough, precise, efficient, cowardly, warm-blooded, mean, poor, inventive, hard-working, sly, polite good-humoured, sportsmanlike, boastful, wealthy, quick-tempered, drunken, musical, money-making cheerful, proud*

2. Students match the nationalities with their qualities using their knowledge of the world (stereotypes). The outcome should resemble the table below.

Nationality	Qualities	Additional qualities
Chinese	sly, polite	
English	good-humoured, sportsmanlike	
American	boastful, wealthy	
Russian	scientifically-minded, tough	
German	precise, efficient	
Italian	cowardly, warm-blooded	
Scottish	mean, poor	
Irish	quick-tempered, drunken	
Jewish	musical, money-making	
Japanese	inventive, hard-working	
French	passionate, intelligent	
Spanish	cheerful, proud	

3. In groups of four, students choose one nationality and add at least three more adjectives, either positive or negative. A representative chosen by the group presents the group's view on a certain nationality justifying their choice.

4. Have a short class discussion on their prejudices about nationalities in general.

5. Students are paired off. Have each student in a pair get a different extract. Students skim and scan the text. Students compare and contrast their findings.

6. Students explore common and different human qualities in English and Australian societies which are based on their formality and informality by using KWL<sup>4</sup> chart and thus revising vocabulary.

<sup>4</sup> K = What I know; W = What I want to know; L = What I have learned

7. Students are engaged in a final discussion entitled: How to encourage diversities in Croatian culture.

8. Homework (HW): Students write a letter to an acquaintance about Australian informality or English formality.

## **LESSON 2. (90 MIN.)**

### **PREJUDICES ON ACCENTS AND DIALECTS IN THE ANGLO-SAXON CULTURE**

Language revision (analysis) is continued through the context of culture, which covers the relationship between language, culture and thought with a perspective on various linguistic and cultural systems with special emphasis on Anglo-American people. At the cultural level for this teaching unit we chose two articles from the book «Language Made Plain» by Anthony Burgess (1964). The first article talks about prejudices on languages in general (German – ugly language, aggressively guttural; Chinese – regarded in the West a huge joke; Italian – beautiful, full of blue skies, vino, sexy tenors; French- naughty, immoral) and the author's amusement by his own prejudices related to Americanisms in British English.

#### **Objectives:**

- Learners will be able to use appropriate style and check for accuracy  
Style and accuracy
- Learners will be able to differentiate parts of the language structure
- Learners will become aware of the implication of linguistic and cultural differences.
- Learners will be encouraged to reinforce their personal and social values

#### **Materials:**

- Blackboard
- Images of people (photos of various facial expressions)
- Copies of text
- Cassette player and cassette

#### **Activities:**

1. Start by writing COMMUNICATION on the blackboard and have students brainstorm ways of communication – *How do we communicate?*

2. Using picture images of people's facial and bodily expressions (see appendix) have students imagine what these people are about to talk to them, what they are going to say and how students will reply.

3. Students think of examples of verbal and non-verbal communication, we focus on verbal communication: *language*. Students predict the possible vocabulary connected with communication (working on synonyms).

In pairs: ask your partner where can you hear the «best English spoken» and where can you hear «the best accent of your language» spoken.

4. Students discuss the following within groups: *Since language is a system of communication used within a particular social group how can we judge a language objectively because of the emotions and associations that we create? When we think we are making such judgment, are we not just making a statement about our prejudices?*

The second article deals with prejudices within the national group (British English (BrE) – prejudices tend to be very mixed and because they operate mainly on an unconscious level they are not easily recognizable. Before handing out the sheets, clarify the distinction between accents and dialects.

5. Students read the second passage and discuss the following statements:

- a) Although a rural accent may sound attractive, it may also be looked down on.
- b) Languages shouldn't be described as either «beautiful or ugly».
- c) British people's accents may not just tell a listener what region they come from, but also the social class they belong to.
- d) East Midland English was once a regional dialect used by the elite in England.
- e) People who use Standard English may have more power than people who use regional dialects.

6. Students highlight key words from the passage and find their similar meanings. In two columns students write their *pet hates and loves* among the words from the passage. Justify.

7. Students work in groups and discuss their reactions to the passage:

- Compare the author's comments on British attitudes with the attitudes of people in your own country to other languages. Do they share similar prejudices?
- Which of his comments on British attitudes to accents and dialects are comparable to the attitudes of people in your own country?

8. Listening<sup>5</sup>: Students listen to an American, an Irishwoman and an Englishman discussing accents. Students decide whether the following statements are true or false according to what the speakers say:

1. There is more uniformity of accents in the USA than in Britain.
2. American people have a good ear for different accents.
3. Americans seem to think that British and Australian people speak alike.
4. British people can distinguish various American accents.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Jones, L.(1993) *Progress to Proficiency CUP* (chapter 3, pgs.50-53, 62)

5. There are more regional accents in the USA and Canada than in Britain
6. Hardly any people in Britain speak with a standard RP<sup>6</sup> accent.
7. Americans often dislike hearing a British accent.
8. People in some regions of Britain are suspicious of someone with an RP accent.
9. Pupils in schools in England were once encouraged to lose their accents.
10. In the USA, Southerners used to make fun of someone with a Northern accent.

9. Transfer to Croatian Language: Students work in pairs and discuss the following:

- a) What are the main regional accents and dialects that most people in your country can recognize? Do people in the capital regard the speakers of any of these as «funny» or «uneducated»?
- b) Do the people in the regions where different languages or dialects are used feel they have less power than the people in the capital? Do they have TV and radio programs in their own language or dialect?
- c) Do middle-class people talk differently to working-class people? Are there any regional accents which are considered to be less «educated or less socially acceptable than others? What is claimed to be the «best accent» in your language?

## CONCLUSION

Through these two lessons, students are encouraged to distinguish between, generalization, cultural and linguistic stereotype, and prejudices and in this way develop their cultural awareness. In addition to the activities, the aim is to prompt students to think below the surface level by asking questions such as:

*Why did you write the things you did?*

*Where did your ideas about the different countries come from?*

*Have your ideas about people from different countries changed if you have visited any...if so, why?* (Tomalin, Stempleski, 2003)

By discussing possible answers to these questions, students can realize how misleading cultural stereotypes may be as well as rethink negative cultural stereotypes. At the same time, by revising some linguistic forms students further improve their language skills (vocabulary, punctuation, reading, speaking) by doing various language activities dealing with the topic.

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<sup>6</sup> RP = received pronunciation.

We cannot help but be influenced by our most basic stereotypical expectations and preconceptions of the world however subconscious this process may be. It is therefore essential that students are shown some of the mechanisms which would raise their awareness of preconceptions of the world. In this way, students become more competent in respecting cultural perspectives that differ from their own and understanding society more completely.

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