

# What is culture? A Brief Look at the Development of “Culture” and its Understanding in Language Teaching

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## ABSTRACT

「文化」の定義は、人、時間、状況によってさまざまである。言語教授の見地から「文化」を理解することが望まれている (e.g. Atkinson, 1999: 2013) 教師が授業で扱う「文化」は、論文や研究からの概念ではなく一般的に思い浮かぶ「文化」である。新たな視点で「文化」を理解するとしたら、どのように「文化」を捉えるか。ここでは、異なった文化理解、特に応用言語学の観点から「文化」と教授法について説明する。

Keywords: culture (文化), intercultural communication (異文化コミュニケーション), small cultures, language teaching (語学教育)

## Introduction.

“American academics are waging culture wars. (Not many dead). Politicians urge cultural revolution. Apparently a seismic cultural change is needed to resolve the problems of poverty, drug abuse, crime, illegitimacy, and industrial competitiveness. There is talk of cultural differences between the sexes and the generations, between football teams, or between advertising agencies. When a merger between two companies fails, it is explained that their cultures were not compatible. The beauty of it is that everyone understands.” (Kuper, 1999. p1)

This paper will look at what is understood as culture, particularly what is understood as culture in field of applied linguistics and how this relates to classroom practice. When looking at attempts to define culture, it becomes early on that culture is a nebulous term and that scholars of various disciplines use culture widely (Japanese culture, business culture, educational culture, cyber culture etc.) but have struggled to pin it down in a way that is satisfactory to all. Indeed, it is even said that “the word “culture” often brings up more problems than it solves” (Scollon & Scollon, 1995. pp138). When researching culture you sometimes find that writers often attempt to identify culture through anecdotes giving the reader a clear *feeling* of what culture is but not increasing confidence in actually *knowing* what it is. The connected problems of a lack of clarity and culture being a “hyper-referential word” has lead some to suggest that culture as a term should be avoided and replaced (Kuper, 1999). Though several alternatives to culture have been offered – identity, hybridity, knowledge, etc.,- culture is still a concept that is very much used, considered and understood, if still somewhat differently. However, that being said, there are some characteristics which seem consistent through out various attempts at definition and which can possibly be said to be key elements or constituents of culture.

### **In the beginning.**

One of the problems at identifying culture is that culture seems to mean different things to different people at different times. Indeed, Monaghan & Just (2000) claim that there are probably as many definitions of culture as there are anthropologists. It is from the discipline of anthropology that most definitions of culture spring and these definitions have been influential in shaping the definitions offered by scholars of other disciplines. The pivotal definition of culture is often regarded as coming from British anthropologist Edward Tyler (Avruch, 1998: Monaghan & Just, 2000) Prior to Tyler, ideas of culture were largely understood to be the artistic or intellectual products of a people, what is also known as big C culture or upper case culture (Bennett, 1998) or *a culture* rather than just *culture* (Kuper, 1999). The leaders of society were the people in possession of culture as it was these “men of culture” who cultivated society through their work. Culture is derived from the Latin *cultura* meaning ‘cultivation’ and this idea of culture was very much connected to its linguistic roots albeit with society replacing crops. Under this notion of culture, Roman or British culture, for example, may be placed higher than Celtic or Aboriginal culture, for

example, due to the formers’ capacity to produce lasting cultural artefacts, complex cities, tomes of knowledge and scientific theory. In such a definition, culture is synonymous with civilization and since the ancient era has been cited as a justification for domination.

Taylor’s work, *Primitive Culture* (1903) made this purely aesthetic idea of culture obsolete. Although culture is still strongly connected with ideas of civilization, in the opening of his book Tyler gives the following definition of culture which may not sound too distant to what may be widely understood as culture by many people today:

“Culture or civilization, taken in its broad ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” (Tylor, 1903. p1)

From this definition we can see that Tylor introduces three very important aspects to the notion of culture. Firstly, Tylor sees culture as much more than simply the intellectual and artistic output of a society by adding behaviour and the beliefs and morals that drive them as aspects of culture. Secondly, Tylor suggests that culture is acquired in some way by being a member of a society rather than being something that is manufactured by a specific group people. Thirdly, Tylor seems to predict the years of debate and dissatisfaction with definitions of culture by acknowledging that culture is a “complex whole” which includes a huge array of interacting and overlapping aspects of human existence.

Although Tylor’s definition may represent a turning point and stand as a foundation upon which later scholars would build, it was not without problems. In some respects, Tylor’s idea of culture was very much a product of the Victorian era. Although Tylor suggested that all ‘cultures’ had the same potential to evolve, they were effectively ranked and seen as subject to scientific law by being placed on a development continuum from “savagery” on to “barbarism” and “civilization” (Tylor, 1903).

Tylor’s attempt at establishing a scientific foundation for culture was not welcomed by all in the field. Franz Boas (1940) rejected the judgements found within the work of Tylor and those before him and their view that cultures can be compared and ranked. Boas saw culture as the peculiar way a group of people think and act rather than being something

which evolves from primitive to advanced along a continuum. In the introduction to the work of another prominent anthropologist he writes,

“It is felt more and more that hardly any trait of culture can be understood when taken out of its general setting....We must understand the individual as living in his culture, and the culture as lived by individuals.” (Boas in Benedict, 1934, ppxx).

In this regard, Boas was perhaps the first to view culture as something that describes a people rather than evaluates them. Boas saw a society's culture as being unique and to be taken on its own merits rather than compared to others and judged. Boas put forward the idea of “kulturbrille”, the invisible lenses which we all wear and through which we view and interpret the world (Monaghan and Just, 2000). The “kulturbrille” we wear are determined by how we learned to see the world. The simple things in life such as eating or socializing are all a result of how we learned to view and interact with the world around us and can therefore be no worse or better than any other. Boas' definition of culture was groundbreaking, not only because it removed the assigning of value to different cultures, but also because it focused predominantly on the idea of culture as something that we wear or carry with us and which shapes our behaviour, ideas and responses. The physical products of culture were given a much less important position.

With the growth of anthropology in the twentieth century there has been no shortage of suggestions, tweaks, additions, and realignments of the definition of culture. In 1952, Kroeber & Kluckhohn (in Kluckhohn, 1962) conducted a review of hundreds of definitions and statements of culture. From analyzing these concepts of culture they found that the major variability was not as wide as expected but centred on which elements were stressed and how explicitly comprehensive a definition was. Having viewed these definitions, they offered their own:

"Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action." (Kluckhohn, 1962:73)

Despite the reduced importance of the physical products of culture compared with early definitions, we can still see a place in the culture concept for the cultural artefact; albeit as evidence of the underlying cultural forces that created it. What is new to the idea of culture here is that culture is given a strong temporal significance as something that is a result of the past and something which shapes the future. In this sense, culture can be seen as fluid, changing over time but with changes connected to what was before.

The review of culture definitions by Kroeber & Kluckhohn is timely because it coincides with the beginning of the field of applied linguistics (Kramersch, 2011).

Although some work such as Kaplan (1966) points to the fact that some applied linguists were already researching the language-culture connection, Kramersch (2011) suggests that research relating to culture as a concept connected to language teaching was taken up in earnest from the 1970s. However, having looked at the early development of the concept of culture and before examining its further development and understanding to those engaged in the fields connected to language teaching, it is worth taking time to identify some commonly accepted aspects of culture beyond those offered by Kroeber & Kluckhohn. When considering elements of culture, it is worth bearing in mind that they are not universally agreed upon, but rather constitute popular and enduring notions of culture.

### **Culture is only available in grey.**

Perhaps the first point that should be made, and one that is often made explicitly in all attempts at definition is that there is no black and white certainty in culture. In my previous life as an historian I clearly remember my history professor telling me that there is no truth in history, there is only interpretation. Culture would appear to be the same. In its popular form, culture is an interpretation of difference and is, therefore, identified in opposition to something. In this sense, Kuper (1999, p19) seems correct to say that culture is “a fiction written by the ethnographer.” Though we may feel culture is real, our understanding of culture- how we divide culture, classify culture or identify culture as a place that can be visited, a phenomenon that can be experienced or a process that can be witnessed – we can never hope to capture the complex reality of culture. As such, most ideas of culture are just that, ideas.

## **Culture should be described but not judged.**

Cultures may be different, but any assessment of culture should avoid judgements as cultures can only be understood in its own context. Cultures can differ in complexity, such as rather simple hunter gather cultures or a complex information culture (Triandis, 2001), but levels of complexity do not have to contain value judgements.

## **Culture is a social construct which influences behaviour and interpretation.**

We all possess culture, so how do we get it? There is a general consensus that it is social construction. How this learning takes place and what is actually learned has differed slightly over time. Tylor's (1903) view was that explicit education is key; by a society becoming more educated and intellectually advanced, culture will develop along a predetermined line of advancement upon which all cultures currently find themselves. More recent views highlight the unconscious side of learning culture as much as, if not more, than the conscious side (Boas, 1940; Triandis, 2001). When we travel overseas or enter a meeting with people of a different profession, for example, the things that strike us as odd or the discoveries we have about our own preferences and behaviour all point to unconscious learning. Explicit culture learning takes place also though this often comes in the forms of adherence to a behavioural norm rather than understanding of a value. For example, I always instruct my children to say "hello" to their teacher, classmates and other parents when we cross paths around school and in town. Saying "hello" with a smile is the norm and it is what I am explicitly instructing my children to do, yet implicit in it is the value of friendliness, politeness and acknowledging someone. The value that is often implicit may or may not be consciously understood.

## **Culture changes.**

Observation of any culture will show that culture is not static and is subject to change. Cultural change is partly historically bound as new ideas, inventions, practices and priorities arise and these are often influenced by the existing culture, or may be a reaction against it. Cultural change does not have to come from within as the new ideas, practices and inventions may be forced introduced from outside (Herskovits, 1945). This point is

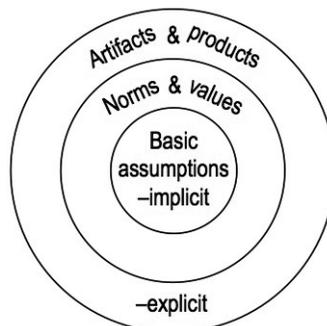
particularly worth noting given the increasingly global and interconnected world in which we live.

Although culture is always changing, it may be the case that the different elements within a culture do not change at the same speed. The core values of a culture which may or may not exist at an unconscious level, such as respect for elders, are subject to a much slower pace of change than certain surface practices and more visible manifestations of culture such as fashion or etiquette (Hofstede, 2001).

Whether it comes from inside or outside, or is quick or slow, change does happen and often produces what could be termed cultural knock-on effects. Changes to values may result in behavioural shifts and changes to practices established upon those values, alternatively, new inventions such as the smartphone may change attitudes to time, availability and information and alter the existing learned behaviour accordingly. Looking at cultural change from this perspective also illustrates the interconnectedness of elements within a culture and between different cultures.

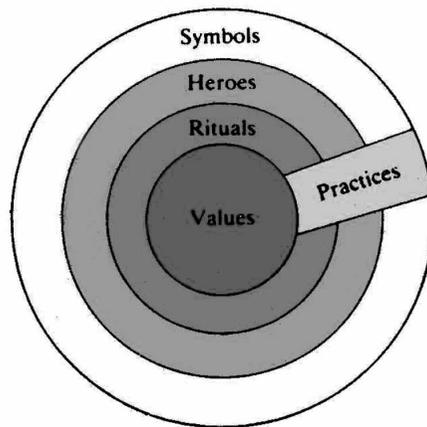
### **Culture is present in different layers.**

Culture is understood to be much more than just surface differences. Most of culture can not be seen. The analogy of the cultural iceberg by Hall (1976) was an early illustration of this aspect of culture. The observable elements such as artefacts and observable behaviour are found only in the visible tip of the iceberg. The beliefs and values of a culture, the vast majority of culture, are largely buried beneath the surface.



**Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1998.**

The idea of layers is similarly expressed in the model of culture offered by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) and Hofstede (2001). These models of culture, however, offer a more causal explanation of the different layers beyond simple what is and is not visible. The easily identifiable artefacts of culture are seen as a reflection of the norms and values of a society, which is in turn a result of the basic assumptions at the very core of existence; “Because different groups of people have developed in different geographic regions, they have also formed different sets of logical assumptions (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998).



### **Culture is both universal and specific.**

Culture is seen by many (Murdock, 1945: Triandis, 1994: Monaghan & Just, 2000: Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998) as having universal criteria within which great cultural difference can develop. This notion is highlighted by Murdock (1945)

“The following is a partial list of items, arranged in alphabetical order to emphasise their variety, which occur, so far as the author’s knowledge goes, in every culture known to history or ethnography: age-grading, athletic sports, bodily adornment, calendar, cleanliness training, community organization, cooking, cooperative labor, cosmology, courtship, dancing, decorative art, divination, division of labor, dream interpretation, education, eschatology, ethics, ethnobotany, etiquette, faith healing, family, feasting, fire making, folklore, food taboos, inheritance rules, joking, kin-

groups, kinship nomenclature, language, law, luck superstition, magic, marriage, mealtimes, medicine, modesty concerning natural functions, mourning, music, mythology, numerals, obstetrics, penal sanctions, personal names, population policy, postnatal care, pregnancy uses, property rights, propitiation of supernatural beings, puberty customs, religious ritual, residence rules, sexual restrictions, soul concepts, status differentiation, surgery, tool making, trade, visiting, weaning, and weather control.” (Murdock, 1945. p124.)

In this epic, but not exhaustive list Murdock quite clearly makes the point that culture, as well as being a divider of people, can actually be seen as a unifier. People may do things differently but the difference is contained within universal aspects of culture that are constrained by the realities of human existence (Triandis, 1994; Monaghan & Just, 2000).

Psychologist Triandis (1994) terms the universal aspects and specific differences within culture as “etics” and “emics” and offers a further example;

“...all humans experience social distance from out-groups (an etic factor). That is, they feel closer to their family and kin and to those whom they see as similar to them than those whom they see as different. But the basis of social distance is often an emic attribute: In some cultures, it is based only on tribe or race; in others it is based on combinations of religion, social class, and nationality...” pg 20

These examples highlight the universal and specific elements of culture, but they also hint at the limits of difference within culture. Cultural difference cannot be infinite as cultural differences are bound by the limits of the world around us and our own physical and cognitive limitations.

The etic-emic distinction is also implicit in the work of other scholars who try to offer criteria in which to classify certain cultures. Perhaps the most well-known and frequently cited, certainly in the field of business, are the cultural dimensions offered by social psychologist Gert Hofstede. Hofstede (1991), examining employees of IBM across 50 countries, identified five main dimensions of culture:

Similar classifications can be seen in the seven dimensions of culture offered by management theorists

**High Power Distance versus Low Power Distance.**

The level at which inequality is present or a fact of life. In HPD cultures, authority is questioned less than in LPD cultures, privileges of power are common, signs of status of clearer and contact is usually initiated by superiors.

**Individualism versus collectivism.**

Whether a person's concern is more focused on himself/herself or the group falls under the individualism-collectivism divide. Members of cultures said to have high individualism are more likely to voice their opinions, emphasise individual initiative and achievement, and classify themselves by their own characteristics rather than group membership.

**High Uncertainty Avoidance versus Low Uncertainty Avoidance.**

Uncertainty avoidance attempts to capture the tolerance (or lack of it) for ambiguity and formal rules. HUA cultures tend to take less risks, follow rules more rigidly and fear failure more than LUA cultures.

**Masculinity versus femininity.**

Masculine societies are seen as separating gender roles more clearly and robustly than feminine societies.

**Long term orientation versus short term orientation.**

LTO cultures place a greater importance on the future than STO cultures. Additionally, what constitutes "the future" is something much longer and further away than STO cultures which look much more to the here and now and view the future as something more immediate.

Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998), eleven dimensions offered by psychologist Trandis (2001), and earlier in the work of Edward T Hall (1959) who described different certain national and ethnic cultures as being either monochronic or polychronic in their attitudes to time, or high-context or low-context in their communication preferences. All these attempts at classification, which curiously only choose but a select few of the categories available and highlighted by Murdock earlier, look to capture cultural difference (emics) but are framed by the universal categories of culture (etics).

**Social groups are central to culture.**

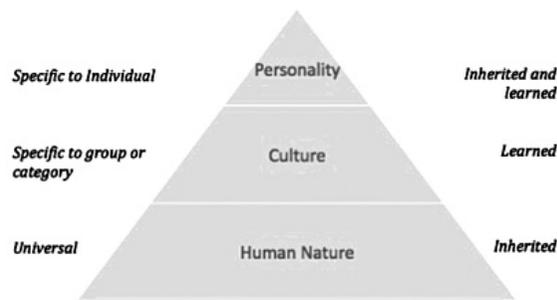
If culture is socially learned behaviour as mentioned before, then it must be associated in some way with social groups. A social group consists of at least two people and so culture

requires at least two people. As we have seen from the examples of Hofstede, Trompennars & Hampde-Turner, and Hall above, the social group for them is largely at the national level and therefore glosses over the fact that many different and often competing cultures are at work within the huge national entity. Despite, Hofstede justifying the focus on the national level, he did acknowledge that people were members of different cultural groups at the same time although the national level of culture is seen as the most enduring and powerful (Hofstede, 2001). Although discussions of culture in the literature as well as in classrooms, bars, and peoples’ homes, may use the national / ethnic level of culture to illustrate key points, most academics would seem to agree that smaller social groups (gender, profession, regional, hobbies, etc) also constitute cultures.

### **Culture differs from nature and personality.**

As we have seen, most definitions of culture state what it is. However, Hofstede produced a simple model of culture which also clearly shows what culture is not.

“Three Levels of Uniqueness in Human Mental Programming”



Hofstede, Geert, 1991: *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, McGraw-Hill, p.6

Hofstede separates culture from human nature and personality. Personality sits at the top of pyramid as the aspects of an individual that influence behaviour such as the learning provided by experience or damage done through injury or disease.

Human nature is the universal biological elements of existence which we all share. All humans feel fear and pain or require sustenance, shelter and rest. Culture differs from universal traits as it represents the divergent ways people, as part of a group, learn to satisfy these needs and express these feelings, it is not the biological needs or impulses

themselves. All though Hofstede here identifies only human nature, culture (what is shaped) has also been contrast with nature (what is born and grows organically) as a way of understanding the phenomenon (Kramersch, 1998).

### **Culture in applied linguistics.**

From the work of Tylor and Boas the basic premise of culture as being ‘the way we do things’, our systems of beliefs, values and attitudes that have been socially learned has become widely accepted. However, Tylor and Boas’ ideas of culture, as groundbreaking as they were, were still all encompassing and required a great deal of clarification. With the rise of the social sciences in the twentieth century, each discipline refined the idea of culture in line with their own field and, as Kramersch (2011) points out, applied linguistics was no exception.

However, the strong connection between language and culture was identified long before applied linguistics came into being with Boas (1940) as far back as 1898 proclaiming that “the history of language reflects the history of culture”. Perhaps the most famous of the anthropologist linguists of the first half of the twentieth century were Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity offered a clear, if debatable, connection between language and culture. The hypothesis gave rise to the theory of linguistic determinism which claimed that the peculiarities of the language a person speaks determines the way a speaker understands the world.

The idea of language influencing culture was expanded by Hall (1959) to include, not only the signs of language, but also the process of language use. Hall, suggested that “Culture is communication and communication is culture” (Hall, 1959, pp186). This two way process of language use and culture is well supported (Scollon & Scollon, 1995). In this understanding, communication as the transfer of meaning will usually conform to learned patterns and ways of expressing meaning (culture). Additionally, communication influences and is representative of culture as culture cannot exist without communication. Culture cannot be evidenced without communication, and communication needs a system of meaning supplied by culture.

Kramersch (2011) suggests that in the early days of applied linguistics, researchers were interested in communication, particularly how culture influenced discourse, rather than differences in particular language items or the specific meanings associated with them highlighted in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. In the early days of applied linguistics culture was understood as the contextual pressures that impact discourse and were focused around the tradition, history and ideology of discourse groups (Lado, 1959; Kramersch, 2011). As such, the idea of culture in applied linguistics was limited and seen mostly in national or ethnic terms and interested primarily in the variety of language used.

From the 1970s, increased academic interest in fields such as discourse and conversation analysis, cross-cultural pragmatics and intercultural communication brought culture to a position of great importance in applied linguistics (Kramersch, 2011). Kramersch suggests that from this time until the 1990s a new understanding of culture came to the fore:

“Culture was to be found not in the institutional monuments and artifacts, nor in artistic products, but in the meaning that speakers and listeners, writers and readers gave them through the discourse of verbal exchanges, newspaper articles, or political speeches.”

In this sense, culture is seen in a similar way to Boas over half a century earlier. With little attention paid to the artefacts and physical products of culture (although it could be said that a text in any form is an artefact), language here is a manifestation of culture, a kind of reverse linguistic version of *kulturbrille*. Just as *kulturbrille* are the culture glasses through which people interpret the world, language is the conduit through which they express, implicitly or explicitly, culture.

Kramersch continues;

“To understand culture, one had to understand both the universal and the culture-specific-constraints on language in use in discourse: for example, how social actors initiate and end conversations, how they manage or avoid topics, how they relate text to content.” (Kramersch, 2011 pp306)

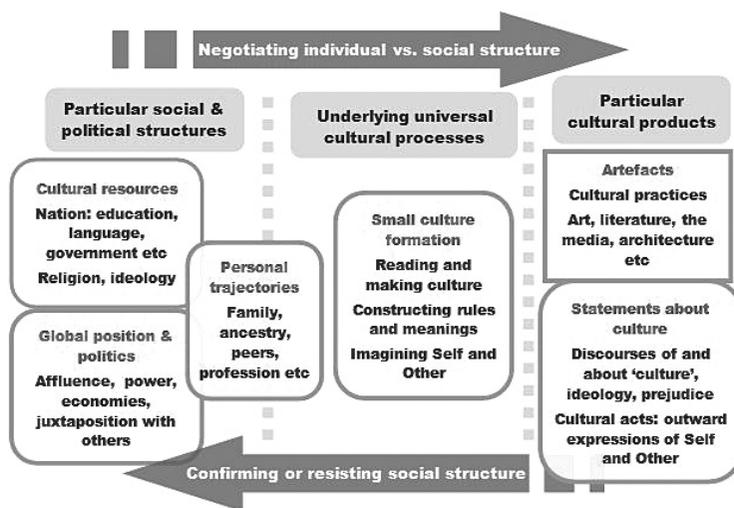
Again, we see that the idea of culture in applied linguistics is not so far removed from the notion of culture in other fields as the universal-specific or etic-emic distinction is clear

to see, albeit applied exclusively to manifestations of communication.

Focus on issues of communication and at the expense of other cultural artefacts and forms of behaviour is perhaps the greatest difference between applied linguistics and other fields, though one which is hardly surprising. Applied linguistics is less concerned with rituals and ceremonies and more concerned with turn taking, discourse organization or apologizing norms across cultures. Despite this, however, we can see that the general understanding of what culture is, the shared way a group has learned to make sense and interact with the world, is largely consistent with other fields.

These areas of research are still of great interest to many in the field (Scollon & Scollon, 1995), yet different avenues of research have opened up which have impacted on considerations of culture in applied linguistics. The increasing awareness of world Englishes and the role of English as a lingua franca (Jenkins, 2007) have led to a reconsidering of the fundamental unit of culture. As language is seen as being closely connected to culture, learning a culture inevitably means assuming some culture connected to the language being learned. This has given rise to the idea that second/foreign language learners become bi-cultural (Kanno, 2011), develop a hybrid culture (Bhaba, 1994) or operate in a ‘third culture’ which exists as an anomaly between the native culture and the culture associated with the language being learned/ used Kramsch (1993). The problems experienced with Japanese returnees (Kanno, 2011) or indeed anyone who has lived for an extended period in a foreign culture and finds themselves in a cultural limbo of not feeling quite at home in either culture would support such ideas. However, these ideas are largely based on a notion of culture where the nation is the primary unit of division and this understanding of culture is being increasingly cautioned against for its potential to lead students to essentializing culture and stereotyping others (Baker, 2011; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Holliday, 2011).

One of the leading and most prolific applied linguists engaged in the culture debate, Adrian Holliday, suggests that, instead of viewing culture from a top-down perspective with nation or ethnicity as the primary unit of comparison, we should instead be considering a bottom-up view of culture. This bottom-up view of culture he proposes is based on his grammar of culture (Holliday, 2011, 2013), which in turn, which in turn developed from the notion of small cultures (Holliday, 1999).



Holliday's (2013) grammar of culture.

The small cultures theory sees culture as action in a similar way to Street (1993) who suggested that culture is better understood as a verb. The idea of small cultures, which occupies the central area of Holliday's (2013) grammar, is that culture exists where ever there is cohesive behaviour (Holliday, 1999). In a simplified sense, culture is the social processes that emerge as a result of this cohesive behaviour whenever people come together. This small culture notion is also seen by Holliday as being 'small' in regards to the imposition it makes on reality (Holliday, 1999). Large monolithic nation based cultures cut up reality along national borders and place diverse groups under a single cultural banner. Small culture does not assign characteristics to group members as a starting point, but only once they have emerged through interaction.

There is undoubtedly merit in the work of Holliday, Kramsch and many others who have contributed to our understanding of culture. Despite this, as a language teacher who agrees that culture should be an integral part of language education, I remain unsure as to how this better understanding translates into classroom practice. It would appear that I am not alone. The large number of textbooks featuring explicit cultural content indicates that there is a desire among teachers for culture in their classes. However, particularly among textbooks in Japan, a large number are simply cross-cultural works contrasting a homogenous essentialized national entity with a homogeneous essentialized Japan. In most

cases, this national other is the United States (e.g., Genzel & Cummings, 1994), something which is consistent with the image of the foreigner ‘other’ in the mind of most students in Japan (Bradley, 2013). Rivers (2010) interestingly suggests that such representations create and perpetuate such beliefs of the other, rather than simply exploit them for linguistic gain.

Indeed, the many textbooks that pass my desk for inspection usually display a concept of culture more inline with that of Tylor (1903) than Holliday (2011, 2013) or Kramersch (1993), no doubt in the belief that these notions of culture are the most likely to be recognised by students and get them to engage with the language.

The lack of development in culture pedagogy has not been missed by all. Atkinson (1999) made a call for a better understanding and definition of culture in TESOL, a call he reiterated again recently (Atkinson & Sohn, 2013). Atkinson’s call for TESOL to move away from the top-down, or received view of culture as he called it, seems to have been largely missed by the large publishing houses and the materials they create. It has not been missed, however, by some actively engaged in teaching. Baker (2012a, 2012b), for example, suggests an approach of intercultural awareness. In such an approach cultural content in class should revolve around a greater understanding and investigation of the students’ own national culture. By understanding the cultural divisions, diversity and change within their own national culture Baker (2012a, 2012b) suggests that students will come to view the national unit in less essentialist terms and, when they move to an examination of a foreign culture, transfer this understanding of diversity, division and change onto other national cultural groupings.

### **Light at the end of the tunnel?**

The goals of an intercultural awareness approach are laudable and it is clear that they are possible in the foreign language classroom. Although such an approach does not encompass all the developments in the concept of culture (i.e. the small culture concept), it is compatible with most of the more recent developments and recognises culture as fluid, changing and recognises the national unit as largely imagined. Additionally, an intercultural approach is consistent with the more recent understanding of the role of English as a lingua franca.

Ultimately, the value of such an approach and the fact that it is clearly something that is possible in the classroom seems to have alerted other teachers to it. At the 2013 JALT conference held in Kobe I attended a number of presentations showing how teachers have been making their own courses and materials in an attempt to guide their students’ to a greater understanding of the divisions and diversity within their own national culture. Although these exciting intercultural approaches have not yet manifest themselves in the materials of publishing houses to any great degree, the increasing number of teachers considering such options suggests that they may well be soon.

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