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Occasional Papers
No. 8

**How Much Language? How
Much Culture?**

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PALA: The Poetics and Linguistics Association

1994

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the relationships that exist between language and culture and suggest ways in which such a relationship can be put to use in the foreign language classroom through the study of literature. It begins by problematising the terms 'culture' and 'language' by suggesting that such terms have no obvious referent. The paper proposes that we should instead *think* in terms of overlapping cultural communities and of overlapping speech communities. Membership of a speech community implies a shared set of cultural values that are typically mediated through language, while membership of a cultural community implies a shared set of cultural values that may not be mediated through language. Literary value may be seen as the possession of a cultural community that is not necessarily mediated through a particular speech community. However, in studying a literary text we are studying the production of a particular speech community and our study should concentrate on the particular values it communicates by a careful stylistic analysis of its features. Such study gives us only partial insight into the culture of a nation-state or a language community. The values embodied in the text can then be related to other aspects of the language community, and particular issues of literary values can be addressed.

1. Introduction

This paper was prompted by my attempts to teach British literary texts to mixed groups of native and non-native speakers of English. My original intention was to try to establish the extent to which lack of cultural knowledge might hinder or distort non-native speaker interpretations of

such texts. I therefore decided to apply a questionnaire which would probe the different kinds of background knowledge involved in interpretation by native and non-native speakers. In this context, my use of the term 'interpretation' refers solely to such issues as how characters are conceived and presented, and the causal relations that link one episode with another. I specifically wanted to avoid issues of literary evaluation as far as possible, while recognizing that interpretation and evaluation are not easy to separate. The results of such a study could then be used as contributory evidence in support, or refutation, of a strong version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis concerning the relation between language and culture. If culture, like nature, 'is codified in the patterns of our language' (Whorf, 1956, 213-4) then non-native speaker interpretations could be assumed to approximate to native speaker interpretation as such readers became more proficient in the language. Equally, students who were weak in English were likely to have corresponding difficulties in interpretation. Such a clear correlation seemed not to obtain with my students at least to the extent that those who achieved the highest scores in their English language courses were not always those who most successfully followed, and seemed to understand, what was happening in the literary texts, suggesting an interesting area of research. One way of resolving this apparent paradox would be to suggest that evident ability in English for Academic Purposes indicated the possession of a specific aspect of cultural knowledge made manifest through the appropriate manipulation of a specific selection of linguistic signs while effective reading of literary texts indicated the possession of some other aspect of cultural knowledge which relied on an overlapping but different set of linguistic signs. Although such a hypothesis seems highly plausible, it leaves aside the problems of what we typically mean when we use the terms 'culture' and 'language' and avoids exploring the interrelationships that may exist between different aspects of cultural knowledge and different linguistic choices.

Initial discussions with my anthropological colleagues suggested that my proposed questionnaire would be extremely difficult to construct. They pointed out that 'cultural knowledge' was an extremely slippery term. Self-reflection suggested that I had little clear idea of what might be encompassed by the term 'English culture', although I believed that, in principle, I should be able to identify certain forms of behaviour that were peculiarly, though not exclusively, 'English'. If I extended the term to encompass 'British culture', however, the isolable features which were supposed to be held in common between all, or even a majority of, people living in the British Isles, receded still further. Further, it seemed that adequate definitions of 'language' were also difficult to establish, and that success in EAP courses was not exactly equivalent to 'knowing the English/language'. The likelihood of conducting empirical research into the area was therefore forestalled by an uncertainty as to what exactly was to be investigated. The purpose of this paper, then, is partly to problematise the two major terms in the rifle, and partly to suggest how issues of 'language' and 'culture' may be addressed in the literature classroom in an illuminating way at least until we have clearer definitions.

In this respect it is interesting to see how 'culture' acts as a head noun in popular usage. It is not uncommon to come across references to 'Black

culture', 'Islamic culture', 'Arab culture', 'European culture', 'British culture', 'Working-class culture' and 'Gay culture' among others. It has been argued that our interpretation of adjectives 'is determined not only by general criteria, but also by family-resemblance to clusters of paradigmatic cases' (Lahav, 1993, 81), and the paradigmatic case which guides our interpretation of such noun phrases is likely to be that of a small group of people hound together by a common language, a religion, a common set of artifacts and a set of symbolic activities (e.g., music, dance, etc.) which express, or are assumed to express, shared meanings. A prominent cultural anthropologist has offered us the following definition of a cultural group:

it denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men (sic) communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.

(Geertz, 1973, 89)

However, applying this definition to the groupings I have given above is highly problematic. Apart from skin colour and, to a lesser extent, a common experience of historical exploitation, the various 'black' nations have little, if anything, in common and the assertion that there may be a 'Black culture' can be deeply mystifying, linking Papua New Guineans quite illegitimately with Africans and Americans and even, as it is sometimes extended, with Indians and Chinese. More, the assertion of cultural identity ignores almost everything referred to in Geertz's definition. The idea of an '*Islamic* culture' is also highly questionable if we take the case of the largest Islamic state in the world. Indonesia, shares neither language (except that of the Quran), music, nor many other symbolic forms with the paradigmatic Islamic states of the Middle East. The idea of an 'Arab culture' seems more tenable, given a common language - though even that needs a degree of qualification when one considers dialectal variation - and a set of similar musical forms. However, within the 'Arab' world there are radical divergences over appropriate forms of political governance and a variety of ways of expressing religious belief. 'European culture', in so far as it exists, lacks one of the supposedly essential binding elements of a culture, a common language. In consequence, it can be difficult to decide which nations (or linguistic groups) should be included. 'British culture' suffers a similar fate, while 'working- class' culture could be argued to cover groups of people engaged in quite distinctive occupations which engender very different value systems. 'Gay culture' suffers from similar problems as 'Black culture', although it substitutes sexual orientation for skin colour. Nevertheless, the fact that these terms exist suggests that we have a need to classify people in groups and that in the act of nominalisation we delude ourselves into thinking that such prototypical classifications refer to relatively static entities in the real world.

Similar problems occur with notions of language. When we talk about 'English' it is not always easy to identify the referent. Crystal (1988,2) suggests that there are 700 million speakers of English in the world, of whom 300 million are native speakers. These figures conceal differences in the functional range of non-native Englishes while also ignoring the varieties that exist between native speakers. Even if we were to introduce the idea of mutual intelligibility into our definition of 'English', we would still have to specify the functions and domains in which such intelligibility was required. Kachru's (1982, 1986, 1992) work in asserting the existence of 'Englishes' goes some way to resolving the problem at a descriptive level, but leaves potential teachers of 'English' in a most uncomfortable position. As the notion of a homogeneous language dissolves before their eyes, so they have to select from among varieties that are used by different people for different purposes.

However, the situation is not quite as dire as it may seem. There is some evidence that speakers of English, however it is defined, have a notion of a 'core' variety which they typically move towards when confronted by unfamiliar situations (Bell, 1991; Stalker, 1989; Ungerer, 1991). Further, it would seem that this core variety emerges under the pragmatic pressures of particular communicative events. Cores will themselves be subject to some variation depending on the participants involved in the exchange, but it has been argued (Giles & Coupland, 1991, 73-4) that in asymmetrical encounters speakers typically accommodate their contributions so as to match more nearly the grammatical, lexical and phonological features associated with the more prestigious speakers in the exchange. Where cores develop as a result of a continuing need to communicate across dialect boundaries they tend to become codified and have many of the properties that are supposed to exist in 'Standard' English. In this case, their major form of variation will be geographical since they take their centre of gravity from local national agencies. In an earlier paper (Bex 1993), I have described core English as having some of the discursual features of a genre in that it has a set of conventional linguistic forms which fulfill particular social functions. I also suggest that this core can serve as a valuable initial target for the foreign learner, while also acting as the point of departure for exploring variation within the language community in greater detail. This paper develops that idea by suggesting that literary texts may be used, among other things, to exemplify such variation.

One of the key ideas underlying this proposal is that variation is the natural state of a language. In the case of English, it is not that the core represents a solid state from which other varieties diverge. Rather variation converges towards a core when the situation demands it. This leaves the definition of 'a' language in a problematic state. One way of dealing with this would be to invoke

the notion of 'speech communities'. My choice of the term here differs radically from that suggested by Labor (1972, 120-1; see also Romaine, 1982) in that it refers to any group who share a common set of grammatical, lexical, phonological or discourse forms which are perceived to have special meanings for that group. Logically, this kind of speech community need consist of no more than two people, although its smallest form is likely to be some kind of family unit. Such a unit already possesses (historically) a language to which children are exposed, although it may also develop certain familiar forms for internal use which are used as acts of identity. Families, however, also interact with other groups, both locally and nationally, which also possess language and, to the extent to which they wish to be identified with, or distinguished from, such groups they conform to the linguistic practices of such groups. As children grow up, so they may move away and join other groups, carrying with them their own language habits while adapting to those of the new group.

Language is therefore motivated by social interaction (Kress, 1993) which may be conflictual or supportive, and individuals can influence language change in so far as their own interests conform to the interests of the various networks to which they belong (Milroy, 1992). Individuals tend to belong to a number of speech communities each one of which has particular interests, and speech communities overlap with each other in so far as their members have membership of other, different groups (Saville-Troike, 1989, 20-25). One of the defining characteristics of a language, using this model, is the extent to which the usages (particularly syntax and lexis) of the different speech communities are sufficiently mutually comprehensible to form a 'language community' (cf. Joseph, 1987, 2-3). This runs counter to more formalist definitions of language since it distinguishes between mutually incomprehensible language communities such as English and German while being indifferent to such dialects as may exist where languages are in contact (e.g.. Swiss German and High German). It also recognises the rights of individual speakers to identify which language they are speaking since their choice of identification is also an act of social identity. Thus, monolingual speakers in Algeria might choose to identify themselves as speakers of Algerian, of Maghrebi Arabic, or of Arabic depending on the import behind the question and who is asking it. The first reply indicates identity with a nation-state, the second with a geographical area which shares a number of dialectal forms and a similar historical background, and the third with a more dispersed community but one that may wish to assert a common front to the rest of the world. What such speakers are extremely unlikely to do - and they would probably be met with blank incomprehension if they made the attempt ~ would be to assert that they spoke English. Thus, although these hypothetical Algerians might belong to a relatively restricted speech community, they are also members, and see themselves as members, of a larger language community.

2.

This necessarily brief excursus is a convenient prelude to my attempt to draw language and culture together. I have suggested that 'culture' may be a sign without a referent, and this position gains some support from social anthropologists. Weiner (in Ingold (ed.), 1992, 25) doubts 'whether there is anything as reified or identifiable as culture or a culture, or language or a language', while Sweet (1993, 42-3) draws attention to Bloch's view that anthropologists have overstated language's role as 'the vehicle or medium of culture' and that 'study of the storage and transmission of cultural knowledge should attend more to what he calls "non-linguistic" procedures.' He would have us study cultural knowledge 'without the dangerous intermediary of language'.

Nevertheless, the view that language and culture are intimately linked is widely attested. The Greeks distinguished foreigners as speakers of 'barbaric' tongues, while Papua New Guineans use the Tok Pisin words 'wantok' as a way of identifying members of the same tribe and 'tokples' as the village from which they come. One way of saving this intuition is to suggest that we inhabit overlapping cultural communities that are analogous to, but not coterminous with, overlapping speech communities. A cultural community would be defined to the extent that its members shared a range of symbols and symbolic behaviors that were recognised as having similar 'meanings'. A shared language would obviously be one kind of symbol that might serve to identify such a cultural community and it might prove the most important, but it would not be the only one since cultural communities could exist which lacked a common language. This seems to be borne out by my own experience both as a musician and as a tourist. Multinational and multilingual choirs and orchestras, for example, share the symbolic meanings of the music they are performing and react in similar ways to the symbolic gestures of the conductor. Similarly, in my travels, I tend to feel myself culturally more comfortable in Europe even where I do not speak the language than in the United States where I do. Among other possible explanations for this I would include the fact that I share various politeness rituals and visual experiences (e.g., architectures) with Europeans which are different from those that obtain in the U.S.A. and that these are activated cognitively in the form of schemata to which I respond appropriately.

This formulation has interesting consequences both for the study of language and the study of literature. For language study, it suggests that a simple equation between the speakers of 'a' language and their putative culture has to be abandoned. Rather, it would seem that specific linguistic choices represent the values of the specific speech communities. However, because such speech communities share both common and antagonistic values with the larger language community, their linguistic choices will indicate the

relationships which obtain between the speech community and the language community. A legitimate area of language study for the foreign student, then, is understanding how propositional meanings and illocutionary force do not exhaust the potential meanings of an utterance. Social 'meanings' are also conveyed through particular lexical and grammatical choices.

For literary study, the same principle applies. Each literary text is imbued with the values of the speech community that its language represents. However, there is a further complication in that by identifying a text as 'literary' we are also suggesting that it contains those other values that are attached to the term 'literature'. Thus to invite pupils to read and appreciate Shakespeare is to ask more than that they should grapple with the language in order to understand one aspect of Elizabethan culture and, by extension, British culture more thoroughly. It is also asking them to join the cultural *community* that values Dante, Cervantes, Moliere, Goethe and Tolstoi. Not surprisingly, that can be a daunting experience for some foreign language learners.

It would seem appropriate, then, first to establish how specific literary texts are situated in their language communities **as language** before moving on to questions of literary merit. This in turn means situating the study of the language of the text in the context of what the students know about English already. The variety of English usually selected as target language, at least in Europe, tends to be that which is most adequately codified. All too often referred to as 'standard' English, it is frequently assumed to be the most common variety used in the British Isles. In fact, it is much more like the core variety that I describe above. It has been argued that this core variety is most typically used in polite service encounters and in a rather larger, but still limited, range of written contexts (Bex, 1994). It therefore represents a very small segment of the language that is actually used by native English speakers. Students who have exposed to this variety alone will find themselves at a considerable disadvantage in attuning themselves to the different social meanings that are implicit in particular choices of lexis, syntax and accent that they are likely to meet. To give a simple example, the expression 'There you go, love' spoken by man to man is typically used as a closing move when some transaction has been completed. It is informal and friendly, although its surface form suggests that it has some features of an imperative. The final vocative hints at a greater degree of intimacy than the interlocutors may actually have, although if spoken with a particular accent, it serves as little more than an identity marker of 'Northerness'. As a form of address, though, it is slightly more than an assertion of identity since it also assumes that the interlocutor is a member of the same speech community. Addressees are placed in the position of responding appropriately with a 'Thank you' or 'Ta' and thereby becoming a member, however temporarily, of this Northern speech community, or of reacting aggressively with an expression such as 'Don't you call me "love", mate',

indicating that they belong to some other, probably Southern speech community, which has different social values. All of this can be confusing for foreign students, and many of mine have commented how uneasy they feel when obliged to expand their linguistic communications beyond the realms of academia. Indeed, many of them take the third option which is to remain silent. Language teaching which is to be educative has to take this into account and offer students as wide a range of the varieties that are actually used in English-speaking societies as is possible.

One way in which this might be achieved is through the teaching of literature. Literature can often serve as a mediating linguistic construct between the demands of language and the demands of culture. However, literary texts are not simply reflections of the target speech communities at large since, as I have argued above, they also represent a generic set of texts in their own right which have the functional role of probing the imagination of their readers and carrying particular social and cultural values (Bex, 1992; van Peer, 1991). I am not suggesting, then, that literature should be introduced into the foreign language classroom simply to illustrate some form of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, although this would certainly have its place, but also for its specifically aesthetic properties. In this way, the pupils are being invited into the cultural communities which value literature at the same time as being exposed to the speech communities from which the particular literary text emanates. Networks and relationships are therefore being established which will link both culture and language.

It follows from this that the choice of literary text has to be as carefully considered as does the method of teaching. Clearly, the first criterion has to be accessibility whether this is viewed as linguistic accessibility or cultural accessibility. I have hinted above that it may not be entirely appropriate to concentrate on the established 'canon', at least in the early stages. Partly, this is because it exposes students to a set of texts which are accorded a particular cultural value over and above their literary merit, and therefore forecloses on any discussion as to why such texts may have achieved their status and what values they may represent. My inclination would be to select contemporary texts, and texts which offer a variety of different 'voices'. The method of teaching would vary depending on the immediate aims, but given that one of the primary purposes must be to sensitize students as to how language is used to achieve particular meanings, stylistic analysis is obviously going to be of more value than simple exposition. A useful teaching model has been outlined by Breen and Short (1988), although it might have to be adapted for some non-native speakers of English in that they are less likely to have immediate intuitions as to the ways in which particular linguistic choices 'mean' in the speech communities and their associated cultures. The extent to which students would need to be given explicit cultural knowledge would also vary depending on the text and the

level of the group, but by and large it is preferable that they should infer as much as possible from a close study of the language (Bex, 1988).

3.

What I have in mind can best be illustrated by referring in detail to two pieces of literature that I have used in my own classes. The first of these is Sillitoe's *Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* and the second Tony Harrison's *'Them and [uz]'* (see Appendix). I have chosen these not because I believe they represent the full range of possible voices within current English, indeed the authors are both white males, but because they seem to be relatively accessible to my students.

Sillitoe is particularly interesting because he has created a narrator who is supposed to be an uneducated working-class youth. As such, the narrator lacks advanced literary skills and the story is offered to us as though it were being told orally. Students can therefore be encouraged to identify the voice both in terms of mode and social position. Subsequently, they can be invited to reflect on the purely 'literary' aspects of distancing the author from the narrator in this kind of way, and compare this technique with examples drawn from their own literatures. In particular, they may like to consider the degree of success to which Sillitoe has managed to create 'the illusion of real experience' (Leech and Short, 1981, 152), and the value of this literary device.

The first task for the students is to establish what kind of person is being represented and how that representation has been constructed. Particular features of interest are likely to include the use of pronominals, certain noun phrases and an interesting degree of lexical repetition. More complicated kinds of analysis would be required to demonstrate whether the voice was intended to be read as though it were a spoken monologue, and it may subsequently appear that we are actually being presented with the representation of a comparatively uneducated written style. All these features will then combine in such a way as to 'position' the narrator socially in an adversarial role in which 'they' are outwitted by a social inferior.

Pronominal use is particularly interesting because the frequent repetition of 'I', 'you' and 'they' suggests a discourse situation in which the speaker is in direct contact with an audience, and that they are discussing a situation which is known to both parties. All these pronouns are introduced within the first four lines, and even by the end of the second paragraph we have been given no clear identification of the speakers nor a precise referent for 'you', 'they' or 'them'. These features are associated with face-to-face conversation, and may be said to create the illusion of a 'speaking voice'. However, this is undercut by the length of the passage. Oral

narratives are rarely quite so long, so there is a strong presumption that the narrator is actually engaged in constructing a written narrative, but one in which the control of deictic pronouns is most uncertain. Other forms which suggest a failure to control the conventions of written discourse include the constant use of grammatical contractions: *didn't* (3),¹ *I've* (5), *didn't* (8), *you're* (13), *I'll* (13), *aren't* (14), *I'm* (15), *I'm* (17), *you've* (18), *I'm* (18), *they're* (19), *I'm* (19), *we'd* (20) and *'that's'* (21). Many of these features have been observed in the written discourse of young and/or unsophisticated writers (Augst, 1992; Perera, 1984, 247ff.) and are likely to be highly salient to non-native speakers. They can therefore be used as obvious clues when discussing what kind of narrator has been constructed by Sillitoe.

The overwhelming impression at first reading, then, is of a narrator who is relatively egocentric (cf., the frequent use of the first person pronoun), informal (cf., the frequent use of contractions) and probably relatively uneducated (cf., the inability to control deictic pronouns). However, these intuitions need to be confirmed and broadened through a consideration of other, perhaps less obvious, features of the narrator's style. The first of these which might be drawn to the attention of the readers is the high degree of lexical repetition: *'long-distance cross-country runner'* appears in line 1, and is then repeated in lines 9 and 10. Other forms of 'run' occur in lines 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, and 16. Further examples of lexical repetition would include *'daft'* in lines 14 and 15; *'cunning'* in lines 17 and 19 (twice), *'eye-to-eye'* (20, 21) and *'stands'* (21, 22). These last examples are also interesting in that the way they are used establishes an equal balance between the speaker and 'them' and asserts its permanence. However, they also suggest that the narrator is not possessed of a large vocabulary, something which is confirmed by his frequent use of 'stock phrases': e.g., such expressions as *'fair lick'* (7), *'though I do say so myself'* (7-8), *'I'm telling you straight'* (18-19), *'get on like a house on fire'* (20), *'see eye to eye'* (20, 21) and *'that's how it stands and how it will always stand'* (21-22). Again, on their own such examples might seem insignificant. When combined with the other features already identified, they tend to confirm and make explicit the ways in which are able to confirm our initial characterisation of the narrator.

So far I have concentrated on those features which tend to establish the narrator as someone who has a rather limited vocabulary and an equally unsure mastery of the written style. Such features suggest that he is relatively uneducated without giving obvious clues as to his social class (although one may be inclined to associate level of education with class). Further linguistic elements which both confirm this impression and suggest that he is intended to be representative of a particular class are contained in the use of certain 'non-core' grammatical constructions. These would include the use of *'them fields and woods'* (11) and *'them bastards'* (13-14). These can both be taken

as markers of uneducated speech associated with a particular social/cultural milieu. However, the first of these is the interesting use of *'how fast I run'* (7). In the written form, this typically operates as a simple present. Here, it is linked to a narrative past referring to the *'bakery job'*, and we would normally expect the form *'ran'*. However, it is clear that the speaker is referring both to an attribute that he possessed in the past (i.e., his ability to run fast) and one that he continues to possess. It could be said that the choice of present tense (particularly when seen in conjunction with his frequent use of 'I') is motivated by a desire to place himself in the best light possible. Thus we receive further confirmation that the narrator is egocentric while also establishing that he is both uneducated and probably a member of a lower social stratum within British society.

Certain features of discourse style also contribute to this impression. The most noticeable is the use of direct address to the readers which serves to draw them into a degree of intimacy with the narrator and would include such constructions as *'to tell you the truth'* (4), *'even though I do say so myself'* (7-8), *'I'm telling you straight'* (18-19). This feeling of intimacy is compounded by the presence of irrelevant detail which has a similar function (Tannen, 1989, 149), as in *'and still am'* (3). The second is the way the narrator insists on offering potential counter-arguments to the points he wants to make before he makes them by using such opening gambits as *'You might think ...'* (9), or the way in which he offers rhetorical interjections such as *'but you're wrong, and I'll tell you why'* (13). Although these are clearly intended to bring the reader on to 'his side', they also indicate that the narrator is unfamiliar with the rhetorical devices appropriate to more formal prose, an impression which is confirmed by his use of *'them bastards over us aren't as daft as they most of the time look'* (13-14). This clause captures all the points that I have been making in that the adverbial phrase which intervenes between the subject and verb of the second clause produces a grammatical word order more likely to occur in a non-written dialectal variety of English; the specific demonstrative pronoun is a feature of 'uneducated' English; and the choice of lexis is informal. That such features will be perceived to be non-core by non-native readers seems highly probable. The role of the teacher, then, will be to sensitise the students to the ways in which such features operate within English-speaking societies.

I have deliberately avoided discussing specific features of vocabulary, although I would anticipate that *'Borstal'* (1, 10, 12) and *'slum-gullion'* (13) would be difficult for foreign students, as would certain slang words, e.g., *'job'* (8). My British informants also claim that the term *'cops'* (8) serves to give the text an old-fashioned air, and insist that a modern equivalent of the narrator would use some other term such as *'pigs'*. However, these are minor elements when seen against the kind of micro-analysis that I have indulged in above. My argument is that the 'placing' of the

narrator can be managed quite successfully by paying attention to a number of details that are salient in the text, and that are available for discussion in the classroom. Clearly, it would be inappropriate to draw attention to all the features that I have discussed, and the depth of the analysis would depend on the purposes for which the text was being used. But a number of things emerge which are relevant to my opening comments.

The first of these is that the cultural values expressed by the narrator are, by and large, mediated through specific choices of lexis and discourse style. They do not need to be discussed before the text is read since they are present in it. However, these cultural values are not necessarily those of the British community at large, and a discussion of the ways in which the narrator is situated in relation to the rest of the community can be usefully explored by analysing the ways in which his language differs from the language used by other texts with which the students are familiar. In this way, the notion of a homogeneous 'British' culture can be usefully challenged as can the notion of a homogeneous 'English' language. It may be that students will wish to identify particular features of the struggle between the narrator and his oppressors that seem peculiarly British, and these could form a useful basis for discussion but such analyses would better follow an investigation of how the narrator feels he is situated in the larger society and how that is realised through language. These issues can lead on to a discussion of more literary questions which would include judgements as to how successful Sillitoe has been in rendering the experiences of the narrator. A particular point worth investigating would be the use of the narrative T. It has been argued that Sillitoe's use is ambiguous in that **it** is not entirely clear whether we are invited to imagine ourselves as listening to the story or whether we should assume that it has been written down. If the latter, we have to consider what kind of reader is being implied by such a technique. Further questions might involve discussions as to the extent to which 'uneducated' narratives can be made interesting. I have commented on the high degree of lexical repetition that takes place in the opening section, and it is a legitimate question as to whether this distracts from the intrinsic interest of the narrative or contributes to it. It could be argued that the degree of intimacy which Sillitoe establishes between the narrator and the reader through the use of informal lexis and excessive detail encourages us to feel sympathy with him since we are only invited to see things from the narrator's point of view. Finally, we can place It in the tradition of novel writing both generally and particularly according to style. In proceeding from questions of language to questions of literature, we are exploring the two constructs that I referred to earlier in the paper: overlapping speech communities and overlapping cultural communities and investigating the extent to which they interact.

The Harrison poem presents slightly different problems. This

seems to dramatise both social and cultural conflict at a personal level. There are good grounds for suggesting that Harrison is referring directly to his personal experience as a child, and one of the literary questions that might be considered is the extent to which the various voices - the school teacher, the little boy, the 'bard' and the educated man - have been successfully integrated into the poem. However, the initial problem is to establish how the different voices have been created, and what kinds of values they are taken to represent. The first two lines are particularly interesting in this respect in that they select from a vocabulary that spans 'cultural heritage', poetic language and vernacular that borders on slang. The conflicts that are subsequently explored are therefore immediately present. The choice of Greek to open the poem tends to give students problems, but its very unfamiliarity serves to place the reader in a similar position to the young Tony Harrison in his school, thereby demonstrating that for many children schooling is offered in an 'unknown' language: they would be more familiar with the vulgar '*gob*'. The tension between these two positions is dramatised in other interesting ways, most noticeably in the unusual typography of '4', the presence of 's' at the beginning of line 10 and the use of phonetic symbols. These are all relevant to a discussion of the language of the text since they draw attention to the orthographic conventions that are typically used to render written English.

It would be nugatory to investigate this poem in the same kind of detail that I gave to Sillitoe since most of its meanings seem to be easily recoverable simply because Harrison sets up his oppositions relatively starkly. However, it is worth considering Harrison's use of '*barbarian*' (1.4) and '*Flat cap*' (1.13). These have quite specific cultural references that may not be immediately apparent to foreign students in that the first allies the young Harrison directly to those whom the Greeks rejected on account of their language while the second connects a feature of accent with a symbol of regional identity. The poem, then, resonates with different *voices* each one of which refers to a particular way in which 'culture' and language have been both characterised and connected within Britain. However, this claim is subtly undermined in interesting ways. Keats is identified as 'Cockney' while Harrison demonstrates that he can write poetry which spans both working-class speech and Greek. To that extent, Harrison seems to be confirming my *perception* that 'culture' is a slippery term and that it is misleading to associate it with a particular style of speech. However, this poem does not resolve the oppositions it dramatises. On the contrary, it seems at the end to capitulate resentfully to the easy equivalence of culture and a particular speech community. If students should wish to explore these issues further it would be appropriate to refer them to his later poem " " which is much more explicit in its exploration of the different values that are codified in different speech patterns.

4. Conclusion

My analyses of these texts, then, suggest that the interrelation between linguistic choice and cultural community is far more complex than some people (e.g. Alptekin & Alptekin, 1984; Alptekin, 1993) would seem to believe. H. Douglas Brown (1986, 33) has suggested that 'Second language learning is often second culture learning'. It may be thought that studying the literature of the second language involves second culture learning to an even greater extent since literature is often regarded as one of the peaks of a language's cultural achievement. The values that a society attaches to literature obviously render literary texts problematic, but this paper suggests that notions such as 'culture' and 'language' need careful definition before such claims can be meaningfully tested in the classroom. The idea that 'a' language can embody 'a' culture is highly suspect. Neither term refers to a homogeneous object. In the case of English, the language is better characterised as the possession of a network of overlapping speech communities. The linguistic symbols manipulated by such speech communities are mutually comprehensible internally and have a high degree of intelligibility for other speech communities which speak English. Such speech communities will also possess cultural norms which are other than those held by different speech communities, and these are likely to be expressed through particular accents, dialects, discourse styles or lexical choices. Members of such speech communities may also belong to other cultural communities which share other forms of symbolic representation. Speech communities and cultural communities are not, therefore, isomorphic. One kind of cultural community may consist of people who value literature highly. However, the value they place on literature is not necessarily confined to the literature of a particular speech community or even language community (cf. Tony Harrison). Similarly, the literature of a particular speech community may express the values of that community rather than of the speakers of the language as a whole.

In studying literature in the foreign language classroom, therefore, we are studying the particular linguistic expression of a particular set of cultural values and it is misleading to suggest to the students that we are studying 'English-speaking culture'. These values are mediated through specific linguistic choices, and most of them can be recovered by a stylistic analysis of the text in question which compares it with other texts familiar to the students. Occasionally, certain features will require further elucidation but this should not lead us into assuming that we can somehow paraphrase the text so as to supply the cultural background since paraphrase necessarily constructs other linguistic forms (van Peer, 1993). Once students have understood the particular situation occupied by the text, it will become appropriate to place the text in the wider set of cultural values suggested by the term 'literature' and to investigate questions that might be deemed to be in the sphere of literary criticism. I have suggested how this can occur by

a study of texts by Sillitoe and Tony Harrison, and I have chosen such texts deliberately because the kinds of cultural and social conflicts that are represented in their work are not so easily recoverable from historically distant authors, nor from authors who write from within a tradition commonly referred to as 'high' culture and which characteristically believes itself to represent culture pure and simple.

Notes

1. N.b., all figures in brackets refer to the line numbers in the text. 9.

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APPENDIX 1

The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner

1 As soon as I got to Borstal they made me a long-distance
2 cross-country
3 runner. I suppose they thought I was just the build for it
4 because I was long
5 and skinny for my age (and still am) and in any case I didn't
6 mind it much,
7 to tell you the truth, because running had always been made
8 much of in our
9 family, especially running away from the police. I've always
10 been a good
11 runner, quick and with a big stride as well, the only trouble
12 being that no
13 matter how fast I run, and I did a very fair lick even though I
14 do say so
15 myself, it didn't stop me getting caught by the cops after that
16 bakery job.

17 You might think it a bit rare, having long-distance cross-
18 country
19 runners in Borstal, thinking that the first thing a long-distance
20 cross-country
21 runner would do when they set him loose at them fields and
22 woods would be
23 to run as far away from the place as he could get on a bellyful
24 of Borstal
25 slum-gullion - but you're wrong, and I'll tell you why. The
26 thing is that them
27 bastards over us aren't as daft as they most of the time look,
28 and for another
29 thing I'm no so daft as I would look if I tried to make a break
30 for it on my
31 long-distance running because to abscond and then get
32 caught is nothing but
33 a mug's game, and I'm not falling for it. Cunning is what
34 counts in this life,
35 and even that you've got to use it in the slyest way you can;
36 I'm telling you
37 straight: they're cunning, and I'm cunning. If only 'them' and
38 'us' had the
39 same ideas we'd get on like a house on fire, but they don't
40 see eye to eye with
41 us and we don't see eye to eye with them, so that's how it
42 stands and how it

22 will always stand.

Alan Sillitoe

APPENDIX 2

Them and [uz]

for Professors Richard Hoggart & Leon Cortez

α 1, α 1, ay, ay ... stuttrer Demosthenes
gob full of pebbles outshouting seas-

4 words only of mi 'art aches and ... 'Mine's broken,
you barbarian, T.W.!' He was nicely spoken.
'Can't have our glorious heritage done to death!'

I played the Drunken Porter in Macbeth.

'Poetry's the speech of kings. You're one of those
Shakespeare gives the comic bits to: prose!
All poetry (even Cockney Keats?) you see
's been dubbed by [ʌ s] into RP,
Received Pronunciation, please believe (ʌ s)
your speech is in the hands of the Receivers.'

We say '(ʌ s) not [uz], T.W.!' That shut my trap.
I doffed my flat a's (as in 'Flat cap')
my mouth all stuffed with glottals, great
lumps to hawk up and spit out ... E-nun-ci-ate!

Tony Harrison

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