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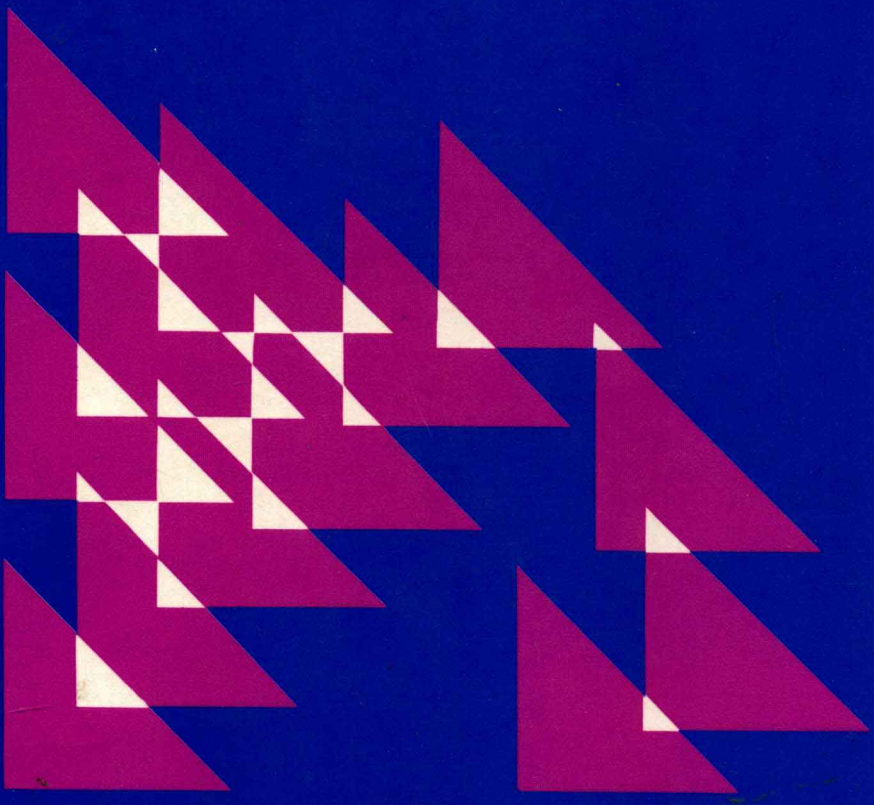
Michael Byram and
Veronica Esarte-Sarries



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A Book for Teachers

Michael Byram and
Veronica Esarte-Sarries

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For
pupils and teachers
of
'Hillside' and 'Newfarm'

Preface

This present volume is one of four books — all published by Multilingual Matters — which contribute independently to a general theme: the relationship between language and culture in foreign language teaching. *Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Education* (by Michael Byram) comprises a series of essays on the philosophy of language teaching and suggests some theoretical avenues for exploration in the search for greater clarity on fundamental issues. It includes, too, a chapter which draws on the empirical research carried out at the University of Durham.

Mediating Language and Cultures (edited by Dieter Buttjes and Michael Byram) is also related to the empirical research project in that it arose out of an international symposium held in Durham. It seeks to provide a European context for the development of language and culture teaching by including surveys of language and culture teaching in several European countries, theoretical articles, reports of empirical research, accounts of teacher training programmes, and discussions of the role of language and culture teaching in multicultural societies and across national frontiers.

Investigating Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Teaching (by Michael Byram and Veronica Esarte-Sarries) and *Cultural Studies and Language Learning* (by Michael Byram, Veronica Esarte-Sarries and Susan Taylor) both report the Durham Project at greater length. The latter gives a full scientific account of the project's attempt to study 'the effect of language teaching on young people's perceptions of other cultures' — to use the project's official Economic and Social Research Council title. The aim in fact was to investigate the widely-held assumption that language teaching has positive effects on learners' attitudes towards and understanding of foreign peoples and cultures. The first of the two books, this present volume, has a different purpose. It aims to bridge the gap between research and teaching, between research and curriculum development which is in the hands of teachers. It presents the findings in a quickly accessible form and describes a small-scale experiment in teacher training and curriculum development arising from them. It is intended above all for

teachers and hopes to draw them into the re-consideration of the purposes and processes of foreign language teaching in general education, to which all four books contribute in their different ways.

Durham
April 1989

Acknowledgements

Although only two authors' names appear on this book, many more people have been involved, and the first thing we would like to do is to acknowledge and express our thanks for that involvement:

— above all to the pupils, teachers and officials who gave permission or participated in the research; a project of this size is inevitably a demand on people's time and goodwill and we always received plenty of both; for obvious reasons, they cannot be named but in their anonymity we thank them,

— to those who worked with us, taking an interest beyond what their duty required: Mr George English and Mrs Mabel Williams, for help with data collection and analysis; Mrs Jean Robson for transcribing interviews with patience and care; above all, Mrs Doreen Wilson, project secretary, for her willingness to join in with whatever work was necessary,

— to Patricia Allatt, our co-researcher for one year and subsequently our consultant; without Pat the research would never have begun and her continuing advice after she left us was invaluable,

— and especially to Susan Taylor who worked on the project for two years; her focus was the observation of the teaching of culture in the classroom and her work is represented particularly in the companion volume, although in the final analysis we all contributed to each other's work throughout the three years.

The Economic and Social Research Council funded the research, and the project was based at the School of Education, University of Durham. (ESRC reference no. C00232 177.)

The award of a Social Science Research Fellowship for 1988–89 to one of the authors — Michael Byram — by the Nuffield Foundation enabled us to complete this and the companion volume more quickly than would otherwise have been possible. That author would also like to express thanks to the Provost and Fellows of King's College, Cambridge for their hospitality during part of the period of the Fellowship.

Contents

1 Introducing 'Cultural Studies' in Foreign Language Teaching

Preamble

This is a book about a research project in foreign language teaching. Books about research are usually written by researchers for other researchers in order to disseminate findings and demonstrate the validity and reliability of those findings. Such a book will be written as a companion to this volume. This volume, however, is intended to be different, because research in education is in some respects different from other research.

Research in education — at least of the kind involved here — is different in the relationship between researchers and 'subjects' or 'informants'. Unlike much other social science research, in education the 'subjects' are both the source and focus of investigation, and the recipients of the findings just like other researchers. The 'subjects' in question are of course teachers in schools who are subsequently treated as fellow-researchers in so far as they are offered the findings. Yet it is evident to teachers themselves, and to the researchers who are also teachers in other parts of their professional lives, that teachers as recipients of research findings are not usually in a position to read the kind of research report which was mentioned above. They do not have the time — either to read a lengthy research report or to acquire the capacity to evaluate its claims of validity and reliability. In most cases their education has provided them with insights into the tools of literary criticism but not those of the social sciences. None the less, this volume is accompanied by another in which those who wish to pursue these questions at greater length will find a full account of the research processes, techniques and analytical procedures. Indications will be given in later chapters of links between the two volumes.

It is for these reasons that the present book has been written. It is not a simplified research report. It is rather like a descant sung to the underlying tune of the report. It relies on and takes up some of the themes of the research but also introduces others which are related but new. Its purpose is threefold. It will present representative findings from the research. It will discuss the significance of the topic and intend to provoke readers to develop their own thoughts and conclusions. And it will illustrate and suggest some implications for teaching which will, we hope, lead readers to their own, better ideas for practice. It is not, therefore, a textbook on theory, nor the kind of teachers' book which accompanies course books and tells teachers how to implement materials in the classroom. It is a book for teachers as recipients of research findings, who might be encouraged by reading it to develop further theory and practice in their own right. This in turn may lead to another opportunity for the researcher to investigate, and so on.[1]

The Significance of 'Cultural Studies'

Foreign language teachers often hear that language teaching should be 'relevant'. In this they are no exception; all teachers hear this implicit criticism as the world about them changes. The question is, however, 'relevant to what?' for the adjective is incomplete without its post-position. Of course the response will be that language teaching should be relevant to the present and anticipated experience of the pupils. And in recent years this notion of anticipated experience has been described in terms of an analysis of the 'needs' of pupils. Needs analysis has made more explicit the relationship between learning and other kinds of experience, usually in the future 'after school', but in more subtle and thoughtful analyses present experience inside and outside school has been taken into account.

None the less, it is not needs analysis in itself which has raised the demand for 'relevance'. For, in a stable and unchanging world, needs analyses would be simply a useful tool for rendering the implicit explicit. The demand for relevance arises rather out of change. For the demand that language learning be *relevant* to other experience is more than a demand that it be *related* to other experience. The demand for relevance indicates that an established relationship is losing its meaning; behind the demand for relevance is a demand for new relationships to be forged between language learning and learners' other experience.

In the modern age of language teaching — since the introduction of schooling for all in the late nineteenth century — there has been one major

change in the relationship, and therefore one major call for a review of its relevance. That change is the spread to many European (and North American) countries, and many layers of their societies, of the opportunity for travel: the spread of tourism. In his history of twentieth century Britain (*English History 1914–1945*) A. J. P. Taylor begins by pointing out that before 1914 frontiers were open and passports not needed. Paradoxically the increase in regimentation at frontiers and the requirement of a passport arose as travel became more accessible to more people, for in pre-1914 days the open frontiers were in fact closed to the vast majority of people, for lack of opportunity and inclination. Two European wars have taken generations to foreign countries who, later, travelled in more favourable circumstances, once the psychological barriers had been crossed and the practical and financial hindrances removed.

In the pre-tourism age, the relationship of language learning to other experience was between different areas of educational experience. It was a relationship which in fact only pertained for a few pupils — in grammar and 'public' schools — but this is tangential to the issue. It was a relationship between learning to read and write a language and studying literature, philosophy, science produced by individuals in societies which spoke the language or at least used it for recording its achievements. This applied not only to Latin, Greek and other 'classical' languages, but also to French, German and other 'modern' languages. The need to use the language in direct verbal contact with members of the societies was much reduced either by the lack of opportunity and inclination for travel or by the disappearance of the usage of the language as the vernacular of a society.

The teaching of languages — whether classical or modern — on this pattern was therefore meaningfully related or 'relevant' to other experience. It served its purpose. After the changes in the world which allowed tourism to flourish, this relationship was no longer adequate. It was still meaningful but needed to be supplemented. Generations taught according to the pre-tourism pattern found, especially after the second war, that another relationship was possible: between language learning and experience of verbal contact with people of other societies. The first relationship was still necessary but not sufficient.

The introduction of schooling for all in the late nineteenth century gradually became the introduction of a common education for all in the mid-twentieth century, epitomised in the notion of comprehensive schools at secondary as well as primary level. There are variations on this development from country to country but the idea that all pupils should have the opportunity to learn a foreign language became almost universal.

This coincided of course with the spread of access to tourism, and the requirement that language learning should develop its relationship with other experiences was reinforced by the quantity of learners involved.

The crucial question however is whether this new dimension of the relationship should become central or even the sole dimension: the relationship of language learning to reading literature and other works might be eliminated, at least for some pupils. The problem lies, however, in that last phrase. The notion that there should be different kinds of learning experience for different groups of pupils is incompatible with a definition of education for all which is dependent on the belief that it should be the same education for all. Such a definition can lead to two possibilities for language teachers. They can support a relationship between language learning, reading literature and being a tourist abroad or, more simply, between language learning and tourism only. The third possibility of supporting the complex relationship for some pupils and the simple one for others does not exist. This third possibility only comes into being if the definition of education for all is changed to allow different kinds of education for different groups.

What we have described, then, are the demands for 'relevance' in foreign language teaching within a historical development context and within a philosophical debate about comprehensive education. Whatever the outcome, it is evident that demands for relevance arise from changes in international relations between societies and in social and educational philosophies within societies. In practice, in many 'comprehensive' schools, education for all is not interpreted as the same education for all with respect to language learning. None the less it is also evident that in order to blur the issues the relationship of language learning and tourism has become dominant during the period of compulsory schooling, even if the relationship with literature and other intellectual works has not been totally forgotten. In this sense, therefore, language teaching has become 'relevant': it has changed to embrace the new relationship brought about by change in societies, their economies and their schools.

In the late twentieth century another major change is affecting language teaching and no doubt there will soon be new calls for greater relevance. It is the change brought about by a return — in Western Europe initially — to open frontiers, but this time with greater access for most people. Furthermore the open frontiers are not merely an invitation to more tourism but an encouragement for more migration. Migration began before the opening of frontiers and only for specific groups within specific societies. Since those groups have low social status their migration has had only marginal effects on language teaching: effects on teaching methods as

a consequence of analysis of their needs in their new environment. When, however, higher status groups begin to migrate in greater numbers, the effects will be more significant. There will be demands that language learning be related to the experience of migration, of living in and not merely touring another society speaking another language. Teaching pupils for tourism will be called irrelevant when new needs are perceived. The question will then arise as to whether the new relationship should oust the others or be combined with them.

So far we have referred simply to 'language learning and teaching', but language is inseparable from other phenomena both inside and outside the classroom. Language is the main medium for expressing and embodying other phenomena. It expresses and embodies the values, beliefs and meanings which members of a given society, or part of it, share by virtue of their socialisation into it and their acceptance of and identification with it. The phrase 'capital punishment' for example has particular resonances and collocations in British society some of which are common to all, others only to some. When the phrase is further contextualised it evokes values and beliefs which are part of the network of understandings holding groups of people together. Language also refers to objects peculiar to a given culture — most obviously in proper names — and embodies those objects. The use of a phrase such as 'loaf of bread' evokes a specific cultural object in British usage unless a conscious effort is made to empty it of that reference and introduce a new one.

Language teaching has therefore always and inevitably meant, in fact, 'language and culture teaching'. In the British tradition this has largely been taken for granted and considered unproblematic. Elsewhere — in Germany in particular — there has existed a greater awareness. In Germany, the debate about the relationship between language and *Landeskunde*, has been long and intense and the fact that at various points in the modern history of language teaching *Landeskunde* has been called *Kulturkunde* and *Wesenskunde* is an indication that the relationship is not unproblematic, in Germany or elsewhere.

In the period when language learning was related to the study of literature and other intellectual artefacts in language, teaching had to include reference to those phenomena other than language which were necessary for understanding intellectual products. This was done above all by selection of a language corpus drawn from the products themselves. In the early stages of learning the nature of the selection remained implicit but as the learner advanced it became increasingly evident that the corpus was drawn directly from literary works in particular. Eventually the advanced learner used extracts from literature and philosophy as a means

of language learning, concentrating first on the clarification of the meaning by techniques of translation and later on the significance of the meaning in literary and philosophical context. Where necessary the teacher would supply further information of a historical nature to enable the learner to appreciate the culturally specific values and collocations embodied in the language.

Since the texts to be studied largely emanated from a restricted level of the foreign society and were written in a restricted vocabulary, learners needed to be taught only about a restricted aspect of the foreign society, whether contemporary or historical. The change which introduced the new relationship with tourism required a parallel change in the selection and contextualisation of the corpus of language to be learnt.

Direct experience of another country involves not only the cognitive but also the affective dimension of the personality. The individual needs to be able to accept and cope with ways of thinking and also modes of behaviour which are new. Furthermore, his own mode of behaviour must be at least tolerated by people in the country being visited if a sense of being ill at ease is to be avoided. Language teaching becomes associated with the notion of encouraging tolerance of that which is alien and potentially threatening or unpleasant, and the instilling of behaviour which is acceptable in the foreign country. As the balance shifts towards the dominance of the relevance of language teaching to acquaintance with a foreign country, the introduction of more reference to everyday behaviour of a wider variety of social groupings in the foreign country becomes necessary.

There was, therefore, a need to change the selection of language and the provision of knowledge appropriate to the contextualisation of the language. Whereas in the study of literary language it could be assumed that texts or parts of texts related directly to and indeed embodied the values, beliefs and meanings of a society, no such canonical texts exist for the teaching of language of everyday life as seen by a visitor. Selection had to be intuitive and texts created on that basis. Add to this the increasingly dominant idea that learners should acquire a minimal capacity to use their language for visits already in the beginner stage. This in turn meant that the previous tacit agreement, that the link of language learnt with cultural meanings could be left until an advanced stage of learning, had to be replaced. Learners had to be provided with the link between language and context already in the first stage.

Chosen on intuitive grounds, the language of everyday life was contextualised by placing it in situations from everyday life, usually those