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AID IN LEARNING »SOMETHING ABOUT CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION«

Concerning the current schools TV series

The most recent draft republic programme for secondary schools contains the following statement:

Jezik se ne može učiti izolirano od zemlje gdje se govori i naroda koji ga govori. Zbog toga učenici treba da znaju nešto o kulturi i civilizaciji zemlje čiji jezik uče i o narodu i običajima te zemlje.

This is a laudable aim but not an easy one to achieve. Most teachers will agree with it in theory but only a few will find it simple to put into practice.

How does one go about teaching the culture of a country? To what extent are "culture", "civilization" and "customs" different things? To what extent can we treat them historically and in what ways should they be understood in the contemporary situation? What teaching material is available? These are some of the most obvious questions likely to occur immediately in the mind of the teacher, already harassed by problems of grammatical skills and reading fluency. Understandably enough most teachers will decide that the job is too difficult and something they are poorly equipped to handle. Usually they will be satisfied to include in their programme the texts available in their school books by famous English and American writers or containing information concerning some of the better known names in art, music and architecture. Much may be achieved in this way when these texts are used imaginatively, but however well they are used they are far from being the complete answer.

To teach a culture is not a simple thing, and before we embark upon it we need to have a clear understanding of what we really mean by culture. The use of texts by famous writers and about well-known places or institutions is only one interpretation of "culture". It is culture as understood in the famous definition of Matthew Arnold who said that culture "is acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said." To give a more modern dictionary definition on the same lines culture is "the intellectual and artistic activity of a nation or a country." But another concept of culture is given to us today by sociologists. According to their definition culture is the socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, beliefs, and institutions characteristic of a community or population. The older definition sees culture more in the static, historical sense, as achievements which have already taken place. The later definition

looks at culture more as how the past is embodied in present behaviour and contemporary life. Both these approaches to culture are valid but the second is more dynamic, more difficult, and more challenging. It is an approach we cannot simply shrug off as too difficult. It is expressed in the appearance of streets, shops, houses, the way people behave, what they do with their spare time, the social differences found in different places and among different classes and the way all these things are reflected in language.

This second approach to culture is more susceptible to insight than it is to information. It is partly available to students through the media, especially film and TV. These are extremely important, but they take place (except for the small number of teachers who make use of them in the classroom) out of school and are only seldom connected with language learning. One attempt currently being made to bring culture as understood in the second sense into the classroom is the TV school programme of films *Holiday in London Town* and *The Welfare State*. These films are not the final answer to the problems of presenting "culture and civilization" during the lesson but they are a very considerable beginning.

The series was originally made by the French schools TV for showing in French secondary schools. Zagreb Studio are showing seven films in all: *Breakfast*, *Hop on a bus*, *Let's go to Carnaby Street*, *Sunday morning in Hyde Park*, *A glimpse of the City* — shown either in the winter or at the beginning of the present semester — *Living in Coventry* and *Britain's universities* which will be shown during April and May. The whole series will be repeated next year.¹

The films are relaxed and well observed. The first five present episodes from life in London as it might be experienced by any young couple such as Jane and Peter, the main characters of the films. The atmosphere of unpretentiousness and informality in dress and behaviour which the films have caught is very typical of England of the seventies and is largely the creation of the young postwar generations. Thus in themselves the films are a contribution to getting to know the people, the customs and the atmosphere of London as it would be enjoyed by teenage visitors.

Each film lasts ten minutes and is shown twice during the programme. In between the two showings are ten minute commentaries. These serve two purposes. They provide more factual information about the situation shown in the film and they convey social and cultural information and background. Some commentaries are more concentrated on the first purpose, some on the second and most are a mixture of both. In the commentary on *Hop on a bus*, for example there is extra information in pictures on the parts of London that Jane and Peter visit. The commentary on *A glimpse of the City* contains additional information about Sir Christopher Wren and the Tower of London, both only mentioned in the film. An example of a commentary which largely contains social and cultural background is that following *Breakfast*.

The aim of this commentary is to show how language is directly affected by social and cultural context. The episode shown in the film is that of a girl called Jane arriving in London and being met by her cousin Peter. They go off to have breakfast in a rather odd and not very typical little restaurant near

¹ These programmes are shown morning and afternoon on the first Monday of every month. The text of the programme and the commentary is printed in *Studio*. Full teachers' notes are available from *Republički Zavod za unapređivanje stručnog obrazovanja*, Zagreb, Trg J. Vlahovića 6.

Victoria station. When I and another native speaker of English first saw this film we immediately remarked that the restaurant shown was not the kind of place where we would have breakfast in London. We then discussed what kind of places different people eat in and what kind of food they have, and were naturally led on to talk about how difficult it is to find names for the meals in English. Thus comment on this film turned out to be a discussion of eating habits in Britain, an essential part of any social and cultural background.

The actual way in which the commentary on the film was written is of some interest. A tape recorded conversation was arranged between five native speakers of English. Two of them were fresh from England and three of them had nothing to do with English teaching (one was a geologist, one a nurse and one a biologist). Four of the five were in their twenties and were thus up to date informants. With considerable zest all five discussed eating habits and names of meals in England for over an hour. An edited version of their conversation provided the kernel of the TV dialogue, between the two showings of the film. Part of the dialogue may be given as an example.

Voice 1: Has it ever struck you how difficult it is to give names for the meals in English? Breakfast's O.K.... but what about lunch and dinner and tea and supper?

Voice 2: Yes — I think dinner's the main problem.

1: As far as I can see most families have *breakfast*, *lunch*, and *supper* nowadays as their main meals, with a cup of tea or coffee for *eleven*s in the morning and *tea* at four — very often just a cup of tea.

2: That might be true for a certain sort of family, but when I used to do manual work as a student the people I worked with — and me — used to have *breakfast*, *dinner* in the middle of the day and *tea* in the evening. The dinner at midday was pretty big — meat and three veg. and a pudding. After that a lot of the blokes used to go round to the pub for a dinner-time pint.

1: Yes, and some manual and transport workers take a thermos of tea and sandwiches to eat in the middle of the day but they still call it dinner.

2: Very confusing.

1: It's really a question of what kind of work people do, isn't it. Professional people and office workers have breakfast, lunch and supper. Manual workers have breakfast, dinner and tea.

2: They have breakfast, dinner, and tea in the north of England too.

1: Porridge for breakfast?

2: Not very often — takes too long to make but cereal, eggs and bacon and toast and butter and marmalade. Then there's eleven's ... cake and coffee or tea...

1: ... and called eleven's because people have it at eleven!

2: Yes — then there's dinner in the middle of the day and tea — a cooked tea though — when they get home — this used to be called *high tea* but now people just say tea.

1: Families with children are a bit different again. Breakfast, lunch, usually school lunch, then tea when they come home after school, and perhaps supper when they are looking at the TV or after they've done their homework.

2: Let's say then, there are roughly three ways of eating, and naming meals. If you're a professional or office worker then you have breakfast, lunch and supper. If you're a manual worker then it's breakfast, dinner, and tea at about half past six after work. Parents with children, whether they normally have 'tea' or 'supper' will probably give their children tea — soon after they come home from school.

Now how does it work in America?

1: Well, I didn't know, so I phoned up an American this morning and asked him. And he says that in America — city people call the meals, breakfast, lunch, and supper — but in rural areas it's breakfast, dinner, supper.

The above dialogue takes account of »culture« as understood in the second sense mentioned above. It is an elementary exercise in sociolinguistics, that is, the way in which language is affected by social context. The names of such a simple item as meals are seen to be bound up with all kinds of elements — with tradition, with the country or the part of the country which people come from, with the work they do, the class and age group they belong to. Since the way in which language is spoken and used is not only conditioned by grammatical rules but also by social context. The social approach to language usage should be an important part of English language teaching from the late intermediate stage onwards. It is an approach which has, as yet, been too little taken into consideration in our school text books.

We shall probably be unintelligible in a foreign language unless we have mastered the basic rules of pronunciation and grammar. But really to understand a language, that is, to receive information in it and to be able to convey information, a knowledge of grammatical rules is not enough. We need in addition to be aware of the cultural rules and the social context that regulate the kind of language used, and these cultural and contextual rules operate at quite an early stage of language learning. To quote the text of the TV discussion following *Breakfast* once again:

To understand a language well you've got to know what people do and why they need language. The names of the meals are only a small example of that.

This commentary and others like it is a direct example of how "language cannot be learned in isolation from the country where it is used and the people who use it", and thus these commentaries should be an aid in helping to teach culture and civilization.

Spomenka Banovac

LE CANCRE — PRESENTATION D'UN TEXTE LITTERAIRE AUTHENTIQUE DANS L'ENSEIGNEMENT DE LA DEUXIEME LANGUE

Quand peut-on initier les élèves aux textes littéraires? Quels critères appliquer lorsqu'on choisit un texte? Ces deux questions se posent surtout aux professeurs enseignant le français comme deuxième langue. Car enseigner le français comme deuxième langue signifie étudier surtout la langue, et très peu la littérature. Le débutant dispose de textes écrits tout spécialement pour lui. Ce genre de texte a du bon pour l'étude de la langue, car le texte littéraire authentique peut présenter plus d'inconvénients que d'avantages. Mais il faut lancer les élèves dans les textes littéraires malgré tout. Il suffit de choisir des textes à leur portée.

Malheureusement il n'y a pas assez de textes utilisables à ce niveau et pour un tel apprentissage. Les textes les plus convenables pour les débutants, les plus accessibles aussi, sont, sans doute, si on en trouve, les poésies courtes. Ceci