



## **TESOL: Trojan Horse of Globalisation**

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# TESOL: Trojan Horse of Globalisation

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While it is certainly the case that globalisation has contributed to the spread of the English language, this paper argues that the English language is itself an agent in the spread of globalisation. In this process, TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) plays a major role. It has long been argued that language and culture are inseparable and that in acquiring a language the learner also acquires the culture in which the language is embedded. If the language is acquired by means of formal classroom instruction, then it follows that the language classroom may be seen as a vehicle for cultural transmission. This paper analyses the cultural content in a widely used TESOL textbook. It does this at two levels: (a) An analysis of field, tenor and mode as depicted through the selection of language used in the book together with the accompanying illustrations and (b) An analysis of the teaching methodology recommended or implied by the authors. The analysis reveals a tendency in the textbooks to depict an exclusively attractive view of English-speaking culture without any counterbalancing features and concludes also that the teaching methodology favours a western view of learning. The paper cautions that teachers need to adopt a critical approach to the depiction of culture as well as to the embedded teaching methodology to avoid being cast in the role of unwitting purveyors of both cultural and linguistic imperialism.

## Introduction

A number of writers have remarked on the potential of TESOL for going beyond the teaching of the English language and acting as a tool for the promotion of the culture in which the language is embedded (Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 1994; 1998; Phillipson, 1992). As far back as 1953, at a conference on the teaching of modern languages organised by UNESCO, Closset (1953) maintained that,

The cultural purpose of the study of foreign languages is one that is finding ever-increasing favour. In many countries it is becoming ever more usual for modern language teaching to aim not merely at acquainting pupils with the pronunciation, grammar and syntax of another tongue but at giving them a precise understanding of the life and civilisation of the country whose language they are studying (p. 38).

However, even in 1953, Closset was alert to the fact that this could be a "risky business" (p. 38) because of the effects of exposure of young language learners to beliefs and philosophies underpinning alien cultures. If this seems quaint to us in 2004, it is probably because, due to the effects of electronic media, adolescents are under constant exposure to global influences both in and out of the language classroom.

While few would dispute that language is embedded in culture, in the case of English at least, it is worth considering "which language and which culture"? No language in the history of mankind has spread with the virility of English. So successful has it been that

there are now more speakers of English as a second or foreign language than those for whom English is a first language. As a consequence, for many of these speakers, English takes on a range of functions depending on the context in which it is used. It may be a language of trade and business, a language of instruction, a language of international politics and diplomacy, and even a language of literary expression.

In many of these contexts it is used to communicate not with speakers who are traditionally considered to be native speakers of English (Inner Circle) but with speakers who have come to speak English through a history of English speaking colonisation (Outer Circle) or those for whom English has been acquired as a foreign language (Expanding Circle) (Kachru & Nelson, 1996). It is generally conceded that for each of these groups, the relationship between English and the culture in which it is embedded is significantly different.

For example, the relevance of British culture to a Thai businessman (Expanding Circle) negotiating in English with an Indian trader (Outer Circle) is almost non-existent. It is clear that an understanding of the Indian's culture would be much more useful to the Thai businessman even though they may use English in their negotiations. And the necessity for a link between English and Inner Circle culture is even less apparent in the case of two Expanding Circle speakers (e.g., Thai and Swedish) communicating for whatever purpose.

Where then does this place the teaching of culture in relation to TESOL? Prior to the recognition of the existence of World Englishes, there was a tacit assumption that English was learnt to communicate with speakers from the Inner Circle. The spread of English as the world's lingua franca has cast serious doubt on the legitimacy of that assumption. This has given rise to a range of propositions, some advocating the removal of any specific culture from the teaching of English to the inclusion of the learner's culture, a position which may have much to recommend it, particularly in the case of Outer Circle cultures.

In the context of this uncertainty, what is actually happening in TESOL classrooms throughout the world? To answer this question with any accuracy, would involve considerable ethnographic research which is beyond the scope of this present enquiry. However, given the central role played by commercially produced TESOL textbooks in the teaching of English, it has been decided that a study of a selection of the more widely used texts would give some clues as to how culture is being presented to learners of English throughout the world. This, in itself, is a considerable project, considering the scale of the TESOL market and the consequent involvement of publishers attracted by the potential for enormous profit.

For the purpose of this paper, it has been decided to focus on a course that has been widely used throughout Asia during the last decade (Headway) and which has been recently revised as *New Headway* English Course (Soars & Soars, 2000; Soars, Soars, & Sayer, 2000). The material used in this analysis will be drawn from the Pre-Intermediate level course, pitched at students who have completed beginners level and whose proficiency is approximately 1/1+ in the four macroskills on the ISLPR scale (Wylie & Ingram, 1999). At this level, learners are able to "satisfy everyday transactional needs and limited social needs" (Wylie, 2004). This particular level was chosen since learners at this stage are experiencing some limited degree of autonomy in the language but still need

considerable guided exposure if their proficiency is to continue to grow at an optimal rate. At this level, materials such as the course book are likely to be extremely influential in the learner's linguistic development. This is particularly the case where English is being learned as a foreign, as opposed to a second language (Expanding Circle v Outer and Inner Circle), which is the case for students in Asia where *New Headway* enjoys considerable popularity.

It is the intention of this study to analyse the way the target culture is portrayed in the textbook and the effect that such a portrayal may have on the students who are learning English through courses based on the textbook. It will evaluate this portrayal in terms of the learners who may use the text and the contexts in which they are learning and may use English (i.e. whether the contexts are Inner, Outer, or Expanding Circle).

## Methodology

The analysis will take place at two levels:

- a. An analysis of the portrayal of the culture embedded in the content that acts as the vehicle for the teaching of the language;
- An analysis of the cultural influences embedded in the teaching methodology either implied or explicitly articulated in the textbook.

The cultural content of a sampling of the textbook chapters will be analysed using the Hallidayan conceptual framework of 'field', 'tenor', and 'mode' (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). This approach has been adopted since it allows us to consider the culture depicted in the text from the perspective of the choice made by the authors of participants, objects, and locations and the processes or actions by which they are linked (field). For example, in many of the *New Headway* units, the participants are young British students engaged in activities such as travelling, playing sport, working and studying. The field could be described in these units as various manifestations of British youth culture. Our approach also allows for a consideration of the depiction of interpersonal relationships which determines the choices of 'tenor' available to the learner. For example, the participants depicted in the units may adopt polite, informal language, rather than language which is formal or aggressive. And finally, it holds up to scrutiny the textual choices (mode) provided for the learner. For example, where the written mode is used, the authors may choose the genre of magazine article as the vehicle for communicating information about a particular chosen field (e.g., British youth culture).

In our interpretation of the culture depicted in the textbook, we will go beyond the linguistic evidence and make use also of the book's attractive visual presentation in the form of drawings and photographs. These convey a significant amount of information especially in terms of field and tenor.

The Headway series provides considerable methodological assistance for the teacher in the form of a Teacher's Book which contains detailed advice from the authors about how the chapters in the Student's Book might be taught. We have analysed these strategies in selected chapters and attempted to situate them within a methodological approach (or approaches). We have then attempted to identify the cultural presuppositions on which these approaches are based.

## Analysis

The following units of the Pre-Intermediate *New Headway* English Course (Student's & Teacher's books) (Soars & Soars, 2000; Soars et al., 2000) were analysed:

Unit 4: Let's go shopping! (pp 30–37 students' & pp. 32–38 teacher's)

Unit 9: Going places (pp. 70–77 students' & pp. 73–79 teacher's)

Unit 11: Things that changed the world (pp. 86–93 students' & pp. 87–93 teacher's)

Unit 12: Dreams and reality (pp. 94–101 students' & pp. 94–101 teacher's)

Unit 13: Earning a living (pp. 102–109 students' & pp. 102–110 teacher's)

### Cultural content analysis<sup>1</sup>

An analysis of these units reveals certain cultural features of the context in which the language is situated. These features recur across units, conveying a picture of the culture in which the learners will use English. This culture is exclusively Inner Circle, specifically British and occasionally American. However, the photographs in almost every chapter depict a multicultural society in which people from a range of ethnic backgrounds live together in harmony.

For example, in Unit 4, the photograph (pp. 30–31) depicts a Caucasian and an Indian woman in a bright, pleasant kitchen discussing a shopping list. There are signs that the Indian woman has adapted to Inner Circle culture since the shopping list shows no sign of anything specifically Indian. Furthermore, Sarah, the Indian woman, speaks perfectly standard British English. This is a feature of all the inhabitants of the world of this textbook.

Another feature concerns the tenor of discourse that is found throughout the course. All conversations are polite. For example, on page 36, four conversations between customers and shop assistants are presented, each of which is a model of perfect harmony. Earlier (p. 33), we met one of these shop assistants in the person of the village shopkeeper. His photograph exudes good cheer and contentment and this truly happy man, while not owning a car, has risen above his deprivation and derives simple satisfaction as a purveyor of sweets and ice creams to the village children.

However, as the magazine article on page 35 attests, people who live in this culture are not insular. They are familiar with shopping in Oxford Street, the Champs Elysées, and Fifth Avenue and are hungry to extend their experience to 'the best shopping street in the world', Nowy Swiat, in Warsaw. Such an article speaks to the affluent or at least presupposes an audience of the affluent with considerable disposable income.

The theme of affluence recurs throughout the textbook. For example, in Unit 9 we are introduced to the concept of 'The Gap Year' (p. 70). This is presented as a routine reward for students who have completed their secondary schooling in Britain and need to rest for a year in some exotic overseas destination. This phenomenon has spawned a series of grammatical exercises in which *New Headway* students get to practise the use of the future and the conditional in such sentences as, 'We're travelling around the world before we go to university.' 'After we leave Australia, we're going to the USA.' 'Our parents will be worried if we don't keep in touch.' Given that students travel the world in their Gap Year before attending university, it is not surprising that on completion of

their university studies they are able to consider a range of options (as a vehicle for practising the modal auxiliary, might.) such as Ruth living in a villa in Tuscany and later taking up a career in advertising or working for the BBC (p. 96). Meanwhile, Henry is torn between taking up an invitation from friends to join them in Long Island or falling in love in Paris with a beautiful French girl (p. 97).

Another incidence of the theme of affluence occurs in Chapter 9, where a magazine article titled 'Megalopolis' (p. 75) focuses on the fast growing Chinese city of Shenzhen. Although the city's rapid growth is a sign of affluence, it is unaesthetic affluence. We are told that 'Shenzhen is a shocking place...it gets bigger and bigger until the east meets the west and the countryside in the middle disappears under concrete.' However, the Chinese people 'welcome dramatic change. They don't worry about losing traditional ways of life' (p. 75). By contrast, the British concept of affluence and aesthetics is typified by The Grand Hotel (pp. 76–77). The façade of this building speaks of a respect for tradition, while pictures taken inside (a pool, conference room, elegant lounge with grand piano, gymnasium) demonstrate that the hotel has managed to provide modern luxury while preserving tradition.

In Chapter 11, titled 'Things that changed the world, the student's attention is directed to America, where the following world-changing products are identified: *Coca-Cola*®, *McDonald's*® hamburgers, tobacco, sugar, cotton, and *Wrigley's*® chewing gum. Parts of this unit read like advertisements and no doubt have the effect of an advertisement on the student. On page 92, an old Second World War photograph shows American servicemen handing out chewing gum to English schoolboys. The aim then was to win the hearts and minds of the population in whose country they were stationed. They were unashamedly advertising a superior way of life which was made to appear more attractive and affluent. Today, textbooks such as *New Headway* perform this function.

At a philosophical and spiritual level, the culture comes across as predominantly materialistic. The only time that religion puts in an appearance is in the story of the ghostbusting vicar (p. 99), who has a rather benign view of ghosts and advises that one should simply tell them to go away and leave you alone. It is understandable that, even though the ghosts are likely to be members of the family, they should nevertheless be discouraged, since the culture of the textbook seems to have little sympathy even for living family members. Indeed, the family structure portrayed in *New Headway* is nuclear in the extreme, typified by Craig and his family whom we are able to glimpse through a telephone conversation between Craig and his mother (p. 108). Craig has gone to live in London, where he works for an advertising agency, while his mother lives in the country where she works as a teacher. Craig's father works in Amsterdam. Craig's closest friend is Tessa, who works with Craig in the advertising agency. Life revolves around a career, in which people work long hours and have little time for family life. This seems to be the price that must be paid for the affluence that has been highlighted already in most of the other units.

It is natural that the way people earn a living should be treated as an important feature in a culture which we have seen puts such a strong emphasis on affluence. Indeed, *New Headway* devotes Unit 13 to this topic. At first sight, however, it is surprising to note that the first part of the unit is about Andy, who is sleeping on the streets of London (pp. 102–103). This is hardly the attractive side of British culture that the

textbook has been promoting elsewhere. On closer inspection, however, we note that Andy is no ordinary street person. He used to have his own taxi business which he lost, together with his home and family. Furthermore, he sells magazines to earn money to help rehabilitate himself. So rather than being a derelict, Andy is presented as a rather heroic figure who has fallen on hard times but is in the process of clawing his way back. To counter-balance Andy's story, we are invited to read and talk about the life and work of Steven Spielberg (pp. 104–105) as an example of a member of the culture who has been hugely successful and commands an income of millions of dollars. And finally, three other individuals are introduced who, although they each do different types of work, love what they are doing, although the work typifies the endearing British character trait of eccentricity (pp. 106–107). One ("lively Tom, 69") is employed by a supermarket to roller-skate around fetching things for customers; another makes a living as a beachcomber; while the third satisfies her passion for ballooning by organising mystery balloon tours. So while the dominating characteristic of the culture depicted in *New Headway* is affluence and sophistication, there is still room for individuals who choose to turn their back on the pressure and excitement.

To summarise, the analysis of field, tenor, and mode of *New Headway* reveals an extremely attractive view of the culture in which the language is embedded. This attractiveness is achieved through a selection of aspects of field which emphasise the affluence of the target Inner Circle culture and portray accessibility to this affluence even at quite a young age. Within the culture, consumerism is encouraged and to feed this, people work hard in interesting jobs without being shackled by the restricting influence of a close-knit family. Within this society, a polite and friendly tenor is maintained and the illustrations depict smiling, pleasant participants, most of whom have the attractive appearance usually associated with fashion models. This is understandable since we would argue that the textbook has been designed not just to teach English but also to market "Inner Circle" culture, by means of units where the written mode is largely that of the magazine article into which has been embedded features of the advertisement.

### **Methodological content analysis**

The content of each lesson is based on a clearly identified syntactic area and the lexical items associated with that content. Each lesson unit begins with a clear, general introduction of the aims and objectives of the lesson, the language aspects to be covered in the lesson, and detailed instructions to the teacher in terms of how the lesson is to be taught and activities and exercises organised. An examination of the Teacher's Book also indicated that learning activities comprised filling in exercises- cloze exercises, table filling, exercises based on the audio tape associated with the text, and pair and group work activities.

The pedagogical methods underlying the chosen units in the current study were examined in terms of the following criteria: the explicit instructions and guidelines given to the teacher, teaching/learning activities and exercises in the lesson and the types of language learning processes students are implicitly expected to adopt in engaging with the lesson. It is also clear from the instructions to the teacher that the Pre-Intermediate *New Headway English Course* is designed for use in multilingual and

multicultural classroom contexts.

Discuss the questions as a class. This could lead to an interesting discussion in a multilingual class (Soars et al., 2000, p. 106).

Throughout each unit, explicit instructions have been given to the teacher in terms of how the syntactic area and the content associated with it should be taught and how each learning/teaching activity should be carried out. A detailed examination of these instructions indicated that an average of approximately 27 clear instructions were found within each of these five lesson units. These instructions were then examined in terms of the learning activities they facilitate. Learning activities could be classified into three broad areas: whole class activities in which students work individually or engage with the teacher as a class, group work activities in which students work in groups of three or four and pair work activities and individual work activities leading up to pair work. The average percentages of these activities are (a) 18% whole class activities, (b) 18% group work activities and (c) 64% pair work activities. Thus, more than 80% of teaching/learning is expected to happen through collaboration.

Within collaborative teaching/learning, learners are expected to be peer teachers/assessors, proactive participators and learn independently through discovery and group work. Teachers within such pedagogical approaches are expected to facilitate cooperative learning by being less authoritarian (for a detailed discussion of these roles refer to Hu, 2002; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The roles of the learner and the teacher together with the pedagogy that underlies such roles are quite explicit in the Teacher's Book as exemplified in the following extracts from Unit 4, Let's go shopping!

The Teacher's Book introduces the language aims of the unit as follows:

Vocabulary is introduced around the topic of things we buy in a brainstorming activity before the main listening texts...Prices and the functional language of shopping are chosen to fit the theme of the unit. These are practised in a variety of everyday shopping situations (p. 32).

The lesson then begins with a starter activity and this is followed by another lead-in for a listening exercise. In the lead-in activity the teacher creates a shopping list on the board by eliciting its items from the students. The students then listen to a conversation and the instructions to the activity read as follows:

Ask them to listen and read the second time, and to look at Vicky's questions. Then put students in pairs to discuss the questions in the Grammar Spot (p. 33).

The following instructions are given as to how the Grammar Spot should be taught:

Ask students to work in pairs to find seven count nouns and four uncount nouns in the conversation...The aim of this activity is for students to discover for themselves from context the sometimes confusing rules of use involved with count and uncount nouns. This exercise is not easy. Be prepared to give lots of help (p. 33).

Canagarajah (1999) maintains that there are two distinct methodological/pedagogical approaches preferred by the students belonging to the Inner and Outer Circle cultures. Students in the Outer Circle tend to prefer product-oriented, deductive, formal and teacher-centred pedagogies while those in the Inner Circle show a preference for process-oriented, inductive, student-centred and task-based methods. The instructions cited above highlight the dominant pedagogy of the book; teaching is clearly task-based, inductive and learning is through discussion, negotiation and discovery; the teacher is a



facilitator of collaborative learning activities and the learners are proactive participants. The fact that the course book under analysis is written for multinational and multilingual classes and the fact that it implicitly assumes that students from all sociocultural and linguistics backgrounds favour the pedagogical approach embedded in it is potentially problematic.

The assumption that students from all socio-religious backgrounds learn the same way is questionable. It has been shown in Sri Lanka (see Liyanage, 2003, Liyanage, 2004) that even though students share the same geographical boundary, their preferences for learning English as an L2 differ based on their religious and ethnic alliances. Although the book under analysis has not been prepared especially for that context, it has been shown (Liyanage, 2003, 2004) in Sri Lanka that the type of learning promoted in the book is not favoured by a vast majority of students. Moreover, the teaching-learning activities in the book under analysis rely on the students' use of social affective strategies which researchers in various contexts have found to be the least used strategies of all (see Liyanage, 2004; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). Liyanage & Birch (2001) have also found that group work activities are not always well received by students from some Outer and Expanding Circle cultural backgrounds.

If, as Canagarajah (1999) has identified, Inner and Outer Circle countries naturally prefer two distinct pedagogical approaches in learning second/foreign languages, for the sake of efficacy it would seem sensible for the most culturally appropriate approach to be used in each of these contexts. The book certainly carries elements of the teaching/learning culture of the Inner Circle. Therefore, we argue that it carries, through the embedded methodology, serious cultural influences and assumptions both explicitly and implicitly. In doing this, it is attempting, for whatever reason, to promote the pedagogy of the Inner Circle within a context where such an approach is culturally inappropriate.

As has been demonstrated (Liyanage, 2004; Liyanage, Birch, & Grimbeek, 2004) preferred language learning approaches have their roots in the learner's ethnicity and religion and to ignore this is to ignore the very fundamentals of the learner's culture.

## **Conclusion**

We have attempted to show in this paper how an English language textbook, produced in an Inner Circle country, carries with it the imprint of the Inner Circle culture. This is manifested through the cultural contexts that are presented in the textbook. These contexts are drawn completely from the Inner Circle (predominantly Britain) even though, as has been shown, English is more widely used in Outer and Expanding Circle contexts.

Not only is the British culture foregrounded, it is presented in such a way as to accentuate its attractiveness and superiority over other cultures. Our analysis has remarked on the similarity between aspects of the textbook and the tenor and mode of discourse most commonly associated with advertising. We believe that this similarity is the key to a covert aim of the course book (viz., to sell the way of life and values of western Inner Circle cultures to learners of English from Outer and Expanding Circle cultures). In this respect, TESOL is a vehicle for cultural invasion, a 21st Century

"Trojan Horse" which is invited across national boundaries on the pretext of giving access to what is undoubtedly the most powerful lingua franca the world has ever seen. While we would not deny the importance of learning English in the modern world, this paper advocates a critical analysis of the implications of this endeavour.

In addition to the cultural content embedded in the textbook, we have analysed the teaching/learning process implicit in the book's teaching units. It has been demonstrated that not only is the cultural content drawn from the Inner Circle, but so is the teaching approach. While this is perhaps understandable, since it would be uneconomical for the publisher to produce books which responded to the learning preferences of all potential users, nevertheless the link that has been established between teaching/learning approaches and deep cultural variables, such as religion, should give cause for concern. It could be argued that the tendency of Inner Circle TESOL textbooks to mandate a methodology which is alien to the learners is the ultimate form of cultural imperialism, demonstrating an arrogant lack of regard and sensitivity for the most fundamental aspects of the learner's culture.

This paper has reported on an initial pilot study of a single TESOL textbook. Clearly, there is a need to broaden the study to take in other textbooks. But even more important is the need to investigate how the textbooks are actually used in classrooms in Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circle contexts. It may be, for example, that teachers are not particularly influenced by the authors' suggested methodology. Or it may be that, as Canagarajah (1999) found, students have their own ways of resisting inappropriate content and methodology. In which case, the Trojan Horse may have an Achilles' heel.

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<sup>i</sup> The page, unit and lesson references in this section are made to the *New Headway* English Course (Pre-Intermediate). Student's book (Soars & Soars, 2000).

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