

Introduction to
“The Representation of American Culture in the English Language Classroom in Hungary”
Thematic Issue
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The representation of American culture in the English language classroom in Hungary is a topic that would deserve far greater attention than it is actually getting in academic discourse in applied linguistics and EFL methodology. The diversity of the English-speaking world is ignored not only in the legal-institutional background of EFL education, i.e. in the National Core Curriculum as well as its framework curricula and the local curricula of the individual schools, but also in the standardized language examinations (including the final Matura exam at both intermediate and advanced level), not to mention the textbooks and other materials that English teachers use in their classes. These documents and resources take no notice of linguistic variation in the English-speaking world whatsoever, and they mostly ignore its cultural diversity as well. There are, of course, some positive exceptions that serve as a breath of fresh air, but the overall tendency that British English predominates EFL education in Hungary is beyond doubt, as it has been proven empirically with regard to all the aforementioned facets of the system by Huber (2023).

At the same time, it is not only American culture, but culture in general that is underrepresented in EFL education, with instruction mostly being focused on language proficiency exclusively, even though applied linguists and educators tend to agree that language education should be contextualized in the cultural background of the target language (see Kovács 2017, Kim 2020, Makhmudov 2020, among others). In the world of English as a Lingua Franca, this can – and probably should – cover practically all kinds of international cultural themes (Hariri 2022). An openness towards the linguistic as well as cultural diversity of the English-speaking world strengthens acceptance, inclusivity, open-mindedness and aids intercultural communication, thus, it is something that educators and education systems should strive for worldwide (Marlina 2014, 2018; Rauer and Tizzano 2019).

It is against this background that the present issue of *Americana* addresses the topic of American culture in teaching English as a foreign language in Hungary. Even though the USA belongs to Kachru’s (1992) Inner Circle and it most certainly is a primary center of English as a pluricentric language in Clyne’s (1992) model, it is still subject to the challenges highlighted above, thus, devoting scholarly attention to the representation of American culture in Hungarian EFL education is definitely necessary, with a view to promoting diversity in language education.

The first contribution in this thematic issue, George de Man’s “Approaching an Intersection: Pragmatic Competence and Being a University Student,” is concerned with pragmatic competence in an EFL context, and addresses the topic on the example of the early reality television show *Candid Camera* and its possible uses to aid pragmatics instruction in higher education TESOL settings, to which he refers rather insightfully as *pragmatics for specific purposes*.

In the second article of this issue, “The Impact of Culture on Listening Assessment,” Jonnie Hill explores the role of culture in listening assessment, i.e. the extent to which one’s own cultural background, as well as one’s familiarity with the target language culture influences their performance on listening tests. Hill’s study is based upon a rather complex methodological background, performing content analysis on students’ responses in a set of listening exercises to examine what students understand on a conceptual level, and how their cultural background as well as their knowledge of the target culture influences their understanding.

Zsombor Váczi presents a case study on the topic of what he terms as “The American Impact: How American Culture Has Been Reshaping English Language Learning in and out of the Classroom.” He conducted his case study in a school in Budapest, Hungary, involving learners of English from grades five to twelve. In this case study he analyzes middle and high school students’ attitudes towards different varieties of English as well as their consumption of English media content. His results demonstrate Hungarian learners’ inclination towards the American accent and the American popular cultural content they consume, strengthening the above observations on the importance of inclusion and diversity in the foreign language classroom.

In the fourth contribution of this thematic issue, titled “The Crucible Project: Representing American Culture through Theatre in Education,” Mátyás Agárdi et al. draw some highly interesting language pedagogical conclusions from their experience with an English language drama project they conducted together as members of a drama group called SZthEatre, which started out as a play they put on stage for the 13th National English Language Drama Festival in Veszprém, Hungary, in 2023, and later evolved into a complex project with rich drama pedagogical potential.

Next, Zsolt Deli offers a multifaceted theoretical overview of the topic of American culture in teaching English in Hungary and worldwide. Titled “Representing American Culture in Teaching English as a Global Language,” Deli’s contribution sets out to investigate the hypothesis that the incorporation of American cultural elements into English language teaching can improve both learners’ proficiency and their communicational competence in the target language. Investigating various facets of the language learning process and the education system, from textbooks to culture-related projects and empirical learning in and outside the classroom, he concludes that the incorporation of American culture into English language instruction through authentic materials and a complex, multi-layered approach holds promising implications.

Shifting the focus of the thematic issue from culture to language, Gyöngyi Püski’s article titled “Hungarian EFL Learners’ Language Attitudes: The Influence of American English on Non-Native Speakers’ Accent Preferences” discusses Hungarian learners’ beliefs and attitudes concerning different accents of English. Basing her empirical findings on an impressive sample and convincing research methods, Püski concludes that students strive for native-like accents, and even though they tend to evaluate British English more favorably, they seem to be attracted more to American English, for instance because they find it more intelligible and more similar to their own accent.

Probably the most complex research out of all the contributions in the present issue, Andrea Kocsis’s paper titled “Meme-Assisted Debate: 21st Century Visuals Serving EFL Spoken Production on a Sample of Level B2 Hungarian Secondary School Students” reports on the empirical findings of a highly innovative, quantitative empirical research project carried out with Hungarian secondary school students, targeted at their attitudes towards memes in education. The project is based on a set of communicative tasks utilizing memes as a source of inspiration for a sequence of debate-type speaking activities. With the help of really robust and rigorous statistical analyses, Kocsis arrives at the conclusion that a meme-based learning environment can indeed add to the creative atmosphere of the classroom, increase the effectiveness of lexical enrichment, and enhance the quality of brainstorming sessions, to only name a few of the advantages.

Dorina Bálint analyses some of the most widely used EFL textbooks in the Hungarian market, concentrating her analysis on the extent to which American culture is present in them. Titled “The Representation of American Culture in EFL Textbooks in Hungary,” Bálint’s paper analyses two entire textbook series in terms of vocabulary and the receptive skills, with her major finding being that the textbooks tend to stay neutral, suggesting a lack of cultural diversity, which she interprets as a grave problem with respect to pluricentricity, even though

she adds that it is certainly advantageous from the perspective of contextual and grammatical coherence.

Last but not least, Luca Rausch-Molnár concludes this issue with a highly interesting essay on the role of English nursery rhymes in American culture, titled “English Nursery Rhymes in the U. S.: The Importance of Cultural Aspects in Education.” Rausch-Molnár’s article investigates nursery rhymes as important tools in both informal and formal education, taking three English examples as a case in point, and discussing their journey throughout the centuries as well as across the Atlantic.

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