

Representing American Culture in Teaching English as a Global Language

Zsolt Pál Deli

Abstract: This paper aims to show the relationship between culture and language. English is a global language spoken all over the world occupying a status incomparable to other languages, and culture is an integral part of ourselves, affecting all areas of our life in a profound way. Language, as the primary tool of human communication, is not an exception. Besides offering learners linguistic knowledge and potentially advanced language skills, it is inseparably interconnected with culture, whether it be through literature, media, popular culture, sports, only to mention a few areas. Representing cultures in education is inevitable in general, and in language teaching in particular. Integrating American culture in teaching English is vital for a number of reasons. It helps students understand cultural norms and social conventions, which can make their communication more effective and stimulating, promoting motivation and involvement in real life-like settings in the target language. Today, the depiction of cultural diversity, sensitivity, and awareness in education are probably more important than ever in human history, making the language learning journey a more realistic adventure. A holistic approach of incorporating cultural features into teaching practices may substantially promote a deeper level of language education and contribute to more accomplished learners who possess insights into cultural aspects beyond mastering English.

Keywords: American, culture, English language, learning, teaching

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1. Introduction

The representation of American culture in English language teaching has been of great interest to teachers and researchers alike. The interplay between language and culture, I believe, is a remarkable phenomenon in educational contexts. In English language education, the representation of cultural elements is essential in deepening the language learning experience. Besides a large number of cultures in the world, American culture carries a variety of traditions. The incorporation of American culture into English language teaching not only promotes linguistic skills and proficiency in the target language, but it also promotes a more thorough understanding of American society, values and customs.

This paper aims to highlight the significance of integrating American culture into English language teaching, and the role it may play in encouraging cultural competence, intercultural communication skills, and a global way of thinking among learners. Through an overview of American culture, educators can take advantage of inspiring language learning settings in helping students become more aware of intercultural exchanges in an increasingly globalized world.

1.1. Research question

In what ways can the incorporation of cultural elements into English language teaching contribute to improving learners' English language proficiency levels and make their communication more effective and stimulating in real life-like settings in the target language?

1.2. Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that the incorporation of cultural elements into English language teaching can improve both learners' proficiency skills and communicational competence in the target language in a number of ways since it is proven that language learning is profoundly embedded in cultural contexts.

2. English as a global language – the role of English in our everyday life

An indispensable and essential account of the subject, David Crystal's (2003) book titled '*English as a Global Language*' discusses the rise of the English language to its present status; therefore, I will chiefly rely on this source in this chapter, focusing on some of the key aspects of how English could become the prominent language of our globalized world. Throughout the centuries, rising to its present position among the languages of the world, English has become the leading language of international communication due to historical, political, economic, and cultural factors.

Each era in our human history has had its dominant lingua franca(s). For example, during the reign of Alexander the Great, it was Koine or 'common' Greek, in which the New Testament was written. In a similar way today, English is spoken by billions of people throughout the world, its widespread dominance making it the ultimate global language of our time. Today it is the predominant language of a number of important fields such as science and

technology, international business, entertainment, international political discussions, aviation, only to name a few. In other words, English being a dynamic and diverse language, with its wide range of dialects worldwide, undoubtedly, is the world's lingua franca (Seidlhofer 2001; Alptekin 2002). Yet, its dominance is not only indicated by the number of people who speak it, but rather it is also indicated by the fact that it is geographically scattered across the globe, penetrating all layers of various fields in societies and by the immense number of people who speak it as a second or foreign language. In Scandinavia, for instance, it is hard to find someone in everyday encounters who cannot speak conversational English.

'A language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country' (Crystal 2003, 3). These "Special roles" have many aspects. This role is most evident in countries where many people speak English as their mother tongue. In the case of English, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, several Caribbean countries and some other territories are included. However, only in a few countries has a mother tongue ever been spoken by the majority of the inhabitants such as Spanish spoken in some twenty countries, especially Latin America; therefore, the use of the mother tongue itself cannot give any language a global status. To achieve this status, languages must be adopted by other countries around the world. It must be decided on whether to give it a special place in their community, in spite of the fact that they may have few (or no) native speakers at all (Crystal 2003, 4).

There are two main ways to do so. First, a language can become the official language of a country and be used as a means of communication in areas such as governments, courts of law, media, and the educational system. The role of an official language is best illustrated today with English, which has a special status in more than 70 countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, India, Singapore, and Vanuatu. This unique status outnumbers any other language – although French, German, Spanish, Russian and Arabic have also developed a considerable status of official use.

Secondly, although not possessing an official status, a language can be given priority in a country's policy in foreign language teaching. It is inevitable that global languages will eventually be used by more people than any other language, and the English language has already reached this stage by now, and it should not be forgotten that language dominance and economic, technological and cultural power are closely interconnected (Crystal 2003, 4).

There are certain factors that can tell us why or why not a language can become an international language. Contrary to popular belief, the number of speakers of a speech community is not enough in itself. For example, Latin used during the era of the Roman Empire did not become the lingua franca of the time because of the number of its speakers, but because of the simple fact that the Romans were the most powerful empire (Crystal 2003, 7).

Similarly, it is falsely thought that the ease of learning a language or structural characteristics involving such factors as the presence or lack of inflectional endings can contribute to the world-wide spread of a language. In other words, less grammar is believed to promote popularity on the road to becoming a widely-spoken language.

Familiarity of vocabulary items has nothing to do with it either. Actually, English is more like a Romance than a Germanic language in its vocabulary (Crystal 2003, 7-8). In fact, no structural, grammatical, lexical, cultural, literary or religious features are sufficient to explain the spread or even the survival of a language. Probably, there is not a more precise example for the previous statement than Latin itself: a once wide-spread and prestigious language of the past. What can, then, ensure the establishment, the spread, and the maintenance of an international language? The answer is power. Political and military power are prerequisites for the establishment of such language, and economic power is indispensable to maintain it (Crystal 2003, 9).

If we look at the previous criteria, we can confidently conclude that English is the global language of our time, a real lingua franca, or 'common language'. Why is it not another language possessing all these qualities? After all, why is English the lingua franca? The answer lies in some important facts predominantly involving geo-historical, and socio-cultural factors. Jenkins in

her 2003 book titled *World Englishes. A resource book for students* (40-41), where she provides activities for students to consider and discuss, presents the following reasons highlighted by Crystal (2003, 107): historical, internal political, external economic, practical, intellectual, and entertainment reasons.

First, the pioneering voyages to the Americas and Asia, and the colonial expansion in the 19th Century to Africa and the South Pacific regions as a continuation were chief contributions to English becoming a geographically globalized language. Second, due to the socio-cultural factor, English is present in many walks of life, and the dependence on English as a token of economic and social well-being is enormous. On the international level, it serves global human relations in the political sphere, and fields such as ‘business, safety, communication, entertainment, the media and education’ are overwhelmed with the English language as well (Crystal 2003, 29-30).

In the early seventeenth century, the Puritans, Cavaliers, and settlers from many other places brought a large number of immigrants at various stages, first from the British Isles in general, during later years from all parts of the European continent, and eventually from virtually all over the world (Schneider 2011, 76). This movement of people entailed the impact of their characteristic speech forms, with American English being the result of a ‘product of a mixing process’ (Schneider 2011, 76). This statement is also true for those migrants whose native language was any language other than English. In this case, the three generation immigration model is confirmed when the first generation is still fluent in their mother tongue, the second generation follows the bilingual pattern, and eventually, the third generation totally becomes American in linguistic terms, with the immigrants losing their native language completely (Schneider 2011, 76; cf. Thomason 2001).

Despite its opponents or supporters, it is undeniable that English is the global lingua franca of our age. Nevertheless, not much attention has been paid to it; even more, it has been a matter of denial by many so far that, as a result of English being the most widespread international language, nonnative speaker of it have contributed at least to the same degree to its formation as native speakers of English. This has led to the creation of a contradictory situation in which a large number of its speakers speak English as a foreign language, and a substantial amount of communicational exchanges occur among people whose native language is not English at all. Yet, it is still an accepted view that it is still native speakers who set the accepted norm for users of English (Seidlhofer 2005, 339).

According to Jenkins (2003, 18), the most influential model of how English spread in the world is the one constructed by Kachru (1992, 356). Jenkins explains that the first diaspora countries are the ones with native English speakers, while the second diaspora countries are the ones with the ESL countries representing the outer circle and EFL countries the expanding circle. Speakers belonging to the ENL group set the standard, speakers belonging to the ESL group develop the norm, and EFL countries depend on the norm.

Kachru (1992) presents a model of circles, according to which the ‘inner circle’ covers countries where English is the primary language, such as the USA, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, with an approximate population of 320-380 million people. The ‘outer circle’ includes countries from the earlier spread of English with ESL settings. Typical characteristics of these countries indicate that chief institutions use English, and English plays a significant role in second language education, creating a multilingual environment. Singapore, India, Malawi and another more than fifty states belong here, practically The Commonwealth of Nations worldwide, a voluntary association of the former territories and dependencies of the British Empire, but now they are a clustering of fifty-six sovereign states with a population of 300-500 million people. The ‘expanding or extending circle’ involves non-colonial countries, where English does not enjoy an administrative status; yet, where English is recognized as a crucial language enjoying an international status. English is dominantly taught in educational institutions as a foreign language, and quite a lot of people are able to communicate in English at certain levels. Some countries belonging to this category

are China, Japan, Poland, Greece, and a number of other states in increasing numbers, the estimated population of them being in a range of 500-1000 million people. The term ‘expanded circle’ is often referred to as a more accurate choice of words reflecting the present situation since the whole expansion started in the ‘80s, with English having been recognized virtually all over the world by now (Crystal 2003, 60).

Kachru (1990) also points out that the developing world forms a significant part of the concentric circles of English; which, as pointed out earlier, carries a unique cultural diversity and a varied speech relationship into English and its literature as well. Yet, this diversity should not be undervalued as it is currently done by some scholars. These three circles undoubtedly bring linguistic diversity to English; and we should not underestimate the subsequent cultural diversity, as some scholars do Kachru 1990: 5). Tom McArthur (1987), claimed that the three English circles had produced several English languages. Although conformist scholars may find this fact deplorable, it is still a linguistic fact about English today (cited in Kachru 1990, 5).

Jenkins (2006) explains that there are three possible explanations for the term World Englishes, citing Bolton (2004: 367). First, it serves as general label containing all varieties of English in the world and various methods used to define and examine them. Secondly, it is used in a narrower sense to denote to the so-called New Englishes in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean (Kachru's outer circle). Thirdly, it refers to the pluricentric approach to the study of English associated with the name Kachru and his colleagues (cited in Jenkins 2006, 159).

Kachru (2005, 157– 159) similarly makes precise categories on investigating World Englishes, including historical facts about the spread of English, the various characteristics of linguistic processes in the varieties of English, the role code-mixing and code-switching play, together with sociolinguistic background information, and language contact effects of English with local languages as well as bilingualism and multilingualism (cited in Jenkins 2006, 162-163).

English has also opened the gates to an access to human knowledge. By the beginning of the 19th Century, Britain has become the leading nation in industry and trade, bringing an incredible economic growth with a large number of innovations in the manufacturing industries appearing during and after the Industrial Revolutions, which also resulted in a substantial growth in population between 1700 and 1800, from 5 to 10 million people. All this had deep linguistic consequences as well. Thousands of new vocabulary items appeared in the lexicon, and with the of the advent of technological advancements, new terminology was created in order to reflect the innovations of the time. Since many of the revolutionary improvements came from an English-speaking country, for those wanting to access up to date knowledge, it was inevitable to learn English well (Crystal 2003, 80). Today it is assessed that approximately 90–95 per cent of scientific articles including major scientific journals and conference proceedings in the fields of science, technology, medicine and engineering are published in English. The percentage of scientific books may be slightly lower than that of journal articles, but most of them are still published in English. It is estimated that between 75 and 85 per cent of scientific books are written in English, especially those widely used in academic and research fields.

According to Samarin (1987, 371) the term *lingua franca* refers to language use between people with different native languages, and who speak English as a second language. So based on this definition, English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) excludes native speakers (cited in Seidlhofer 2004, 211). ELF is also characterized as a contact language among speakers not sharing the same mother tongue or culture, but having chosen English as ‘their foreign language of communication’ (Firth 1996, 240, cited in Seidlhofer 2004, 211; cf. House 1999, 74).

Jenkins (2006, 169) mentions Seidlhofer's study (2004) that even though the corpus is designed to form the basis of research in each aspect of English as a *Lingua Franca*, Seidlhofer has put most emphasis on the lexicogrammar of English as a *Lingua Franca*, and she did so assuming that it has the most to do with language education, and the main purpose is to identify habitually and systematically used items. Probably the corpus used as a tool named VOICE is considered to be the most comprehensive ELF research project, and Seidlhofer (2001) in her

foundational paper highlighted the conceptual shortcomings of the use of English as a lingua franca in the expanding circle and argued strongly for the description and possible encoding of ELF (cited in Jenkins 2006, 169).

VOICE represents spoken English as a Lingua Franca mostly based on conversations taking place among fluent speakers of English with various first languages, without their being brought up in an English-speaking environment. The previously recorded and later transcribed material reflects a number of life settings and functions, and roles Seidlhofer (2004, 219).

It should be noted here that natural languages do not form a rigid system; on the contrary, they continually change over time. However, the case of English, in a sense, is unique. English is extensively used in all domains of life in all continents of the world by people with a vast number of first languages and at different levels of proficiency, frequently ignoring conventional linguistic norms (Seidlhofer 2018: 85), and a similar concept is mentioned earlier in Grosjean's (1997, 165) article where the renowned expert in the field of bilingualism assigned the term 'complementary principle' to this phenomenon.

By the end of the 19th Century, new inventions were developed in the USA as well by emblematic figures like Thomas Edison and Benjamin Franklin among others, and this country became a target country for a large number of scientists and inventors including Nikola Tesla. Only between 1750 and 1900, with British and American research added, half of all the scientific publications were published in English. Almost half of the people recorded in the *Chambers Concise Dictionary of Scientists* were working in environments where English was used as a means of communication (Crystal 2003, 81). Later, with the foundation of certain bodies and organizations all over the world such as the UN, Commonwealth, Council of Europe, European Union, NATO, OPEC, only to mention a few, developed the practice of using English as either the official language or a working language (Crystal 2003, 86-87). The media has similarly been immensely affected by the prominence of the English language; and, as its importance is well known by now, if media presence is successful, then the success of political achievement is guaranteed, leading to power ensured (Crystal 2003, 90). English can boast with a long history of presence in the press of the western world starting with the inventions of new printing technologies in the 19th Century, when independent press products appeared especially in the United States with 400 daily newspapers by as early as 1850, and that number grew to 2000 by the turn of the century. Continental Europe saw various censorship practices, other restrictions having been put into place as well, and the developments of non-English written press was much sluggish indeed (Crystal 2003, 91).

The growing competitions among companies, the novel technologies in printing, and the rapid spread of mass production entailed the need to place ads in the printed press, where new displays emerged. The 1920s brought a big improvement in this field, and the ads of companies such as Ford, Coca Cola and Kodak became emblematic during that era (Crystal 2003, 93).

Broadcasting was similarly affected, and English became the foremost language to have been transmitted by radio. This incredible boost was so intense that by 1922 more than 500 licensed broadcasting stations were operating on a regular basis, reaching 5000 by the year of 1995 (Crystal 2003, 95-97).

In Britain, the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), originally founded in 1922, to 'inform, educate and entertain' (Crystal 2003, 96), enjoyed a monopoly all up until 1954. Subsequently, similar companies were formed in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and by 1927 in India. The media has had an unquestionably great influence on English growing and spreading worldwide, and according to figures dating back to 1994, listeners receiving radio programs originated from countries where English had a special status (Crystal 2003, 95-97).

When we come to the topic of English being present in the domain of cinema all over the world, it is virtually unnecessary to say anything in its defense at all. Feature films first started to be shown in England and France at the dawn of the 19th Century. As far back as in 1915 in

Hollywood, California, a systematic development of the filmmaking business took place (Crystal 2003, 98-100).

Charlie Chaplin began shooting his films in Raleigh Studios in that same year. The studio and the star system were created during these years, and the leading studios known to us today as the so-called 'moguls' started to rule the industry, including companies like MGM, Paramount Pictures, Fox Studios, Warner Brothers Studios, and a number of others.

Following the era of silent movies, and with the development of new filmmaking technologies, sound was added, a new innovation of the time. During that time the English language greatly influenced and dominated the world of film production, when 32 film studios were either American or British as opposed to 12 being German or French, and a striking 97% of the languages of the movies then were filmed in English, with a minute 3 % of them being shot in languages other than English. A somewhat shocking 94% of the directors produced work exclusively English. The category of best foreign film was introduced by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1947, but even today, there is still a very strong presence of movies filmed in English at practically every film festival. For instance, at the Cannes film festival, 50% of the films ever given a prize, were films made in English (98-100). Unquestionably, English language films still dominate all over the world, a big portion of them still being made in Hollywood.

This part of the paper could be further elaborated in an almost endless way, but its scope will not allow a lengthy account of presenting all walks of life where English has a well-rounded role. It is known that pop music, international travel, education, aviation, international trade and business as well as science in general, with one of the top being medical science, are all deeply immersed in English, and with sober judgement we can say that it can be expected that this trend will remain the same in the foreseeable future as well.

3. The Role of Culture in Language Teaching

Language and culture are inseparable. According to Byram (1997), the teaching of language without cultural context renders the learning experience incomplete and potentially misleading, and the inclusion of the cultural factor is necessary to provide learners with a complete understanding of language. Culture clearly has educational value and is undoubtedly used by teachers and learners in education and learning. Pedagogy involves making complex things accessible to students. (Byram and Wagner 2018). The arrival of globalization, increased mobility, and the technological progress we witness have made an impact on our life and the way we communicate with each other, and it is increasingly recognized and accepted that the integration of cultural skills into language teaching and learning is of crucial importance. (Liddicoat and Scario 2013). Moreover, studying foreign languages entails the understanding of the people and the culture the specific language is embedded in. Understanding others, as one of the aims of language teaching, even if it has been variously foregrounded and often marginalized in educational practice. (Liddicoat and Scario 2013).

Byram and Wagner (2018) argue that cultural education is an integral part of language education is a widely accepted maxim among language educators all over the world. Teaching culture as information on target language countries is a common, but misunderstood view, because these methods are often present in textbooks and are widely accepted because many instructors rely on textbooks as their main support. Yet, (Kramsch 2020, 11) points out that the social symbolic aspects of language have been silently ignored in language learning and teaching, which does not only mean that we have the ability to make ourselves understood, but also it means that other people listen to us, take us seriously, respect and appreciate us.

Consequently, the approach of cultural representation helps students understand the pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of language and improve their communication skills and provide them with a complete understanding of language. Similarly, culture plays an indispensable role in language teaching regarding how languages are used, understood and

interpreted for a number of reasons. First, language and culture are closely related, and the understanding of cultures in context is fundamental to processing idiomatic expressions and the subtleties of thought. Therefore, it significantly enriches the depth of the learning process beyond the level of simply acquiring a knowledge of words and grammar. It augments the knowledge of learners with cultural norms and competences, and social conventions of the target language are also enlightened for a more effective communication in more real life-like settings. In addition, incorporating cultural elements into English language teaching has the further benefit of making the learning experience a more interesting and motivating adventure. Living in international and multicultural settings, and communicating with locals from various cultural backgrounds clearly promote global awareness by students' experiencing diversity of cultures. Another important factor is authentic language use, with the help of which learners can communicate with more confidence in a more natural way. Familiarizing cultural differences and similarities can be beneficial in raising respect, tolerance and sensitivity in learners. For example, discussing regional differences, such as cultural ones between the South, Midwest, the East Coast and West Coast, can further improve students' understanding of the diversity of American culture and society. Cultural knowledge and awareness ultimately contributes to the improvement and mastery of all language skills, and a more precise understanding of authentic material can raise proficiency levels.

4. The Role of American Culture in English Language Teaching

Even though under attack and debate at times, the culture of the United States has had a substantial role in influencing a variety of spheres worldwide. The political and military influence of the United States has had far-reaching consequences in many cases. The economic power of the United States is unquestioned, and notable companies in various areas of technology, innovation and research, including medical discoveries at world-famous institutions such as Mayo Clinic or Johns Hopkins University are all well-respected in the scientific community.

Similarly, freedom of expression or individualism are deeply rooted cultural values. It was mentioned earlier that box offices on an international level are dominated by movies made in Hollywood, and a great number of countries adapt various TV series produced in the studios of Los Angeles, and American pop, jazz, blues, and rock music have all influenced hundreds of millions of people in all corners of the earth. As far as literature is concerned, American writers are read internationally both in English or in professional renderings in many other national languages, representing as many as twelve Nobel Prize laureates. Cosoveanu (2013) states that teaching English, American culture and contemporary American poetry to Romanian students can create a raised interest in literature by creating a cultural context.

Teaching languages through culture plays a fundamental role in shaping the way languages are used, understood, and interpreted. Therefore, since it is known that language is interconnected with culture, representing American culture in language teaching provides learners with a fuller understanding of the language in its socio-cultural context in order to avoid misunderstanding.

Several teaching approaches have been adopted to integrate American culture into English language teaching. The integration of authentic materials such as American literature (Cosoveanu 2013), newspapers, magazines, films, TV shows, as well as music allows learners to engage in real-life language settings in cultural contexts. Furthermore, cultural topics of history, geography, sports, and the presentation of famous landmarks encourage learners to broaden their perspectives and experiences, promoting cultural exchange and awareness.

Schneider (1996: 1) takes an account of recent research on American English. Throughout the years, the detailed and systematic study of American English within the framework of American studies has become a sub-field of sociolinguistic research, although the author notes that, at times, it is quite ambiguous how the study of American English is categorized, and the

question is raised whether it constitutes an independent academic field or it is part of a broader field of linguistic and sociologic enquiry under various labels, and Cortazzi and Jin (1999) argue that the incorporation of real materials such as newspapers, films, music, and literary texts provide examples of the use of language in the cultural context for learners. For example, films can provide cultural narratives reflecting American values, historical events, and social issues.

5. Some Cautions in Representing American Culture

The integration of American culture into English language teaching, besides its numerous benefits, also entails some challenges. An important concern is the risk of maintaining cultural stereotypes. American culture is a very diverse one, including a wide variety of ethnicities, traditions, and regional differences in all the fifty states. Presenting diversity helps students to understand the varied nature of American society. In order to avoid stereotypes, teachers must be careful not to present a homogeneous view of American culture. The diversity of American culture, including the varied ethnic, racial and regional cultures present in the United States should be highlighted. Kramsch (1993) observed that culture is not a single stone, but it is a rather complex and dynamic meaning system. Oversimplification and stereotypes should be called attention to while diversity and complexity in teaching English should be presented. Consequently, it is essential to raise the awareness and sensitivity of English teachers concerning the strategies they must implement in designing their curricula and activities.

In Latin America, for instance, English has been considered to be ambivalent. On the one hand, English is viewed as a form of political imperialism, and any relationship with American English is particularly undesirable. The aversion to English linguistic imperialism has led countries such as Brazil to try to prohibit its use. Politicians have been criticized for using their English skills to communicate with other leaders for their own advantage, neglecting the needs of their own people. On the other hand, people believe that English is an opportunity and a language to promote upward mobility, something to be mastered in order to be able to compete in the world's globalized society (Christiansen 2018).

Another challenge it poses is ensuring cultural relevance and sensitivity. It is expected that instructors understand the cultural background of students together with the need to create an inclusive environment. This requires the recognition and respect of learners' cultural differences in order to avoid cultural imperialism, and in this respect it is American culture itself that is portrayed as a standard example to follow. Risager (2007) advocated a transnational standpoint in language teaching, representing several cultures and promoting a global understanding.

6. The Benefit of Intercultural Competence

The ultimate purpose of the assimilation of American culture into English language teaching is to cultivate intercultural competences of learners, whereby they can get into the habit of being able to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of different cultural backgrounds, which can enhance understanding of the cultural contexts language is embedded in so that students can feel more comfortable in cross-cultural interactions. Following behavioral patterns and communicational styles in different cultural contexts is an invaluable asset. McKay (2003) emphasizes the importance of the language competence of students in English in all countries where English is the international language in schools. In addition, she argues that these countries should take the responsibility of selecting and developing language teaching materials and methodologies in accordance with the language competence of learners. Learning about American culture and cultural differences may also increase empathic skills and develop intercultural relationships. Language learners who are exposed to cultural issues can be better equipped to comprehend the context in which the language is used in order to refine their communication skills, so being aware of cultural and social norms are fundamental to effective

communication. For example, understanding the cultural backgrounds and settings of conversations in American society can help students participate in interactions with native speakers more naturally.

7. Textbooks Used in the English Classroom

Teaching English through culture has a number of practical benefits that can improve the language learning experience of students. Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) argue that successful English teaching relies on local English language teaching professionals, with a global perspective in a local context. Therefore, when teaching English as an international language, teachers should be responsible for the selection and development of linguistic materials and choosing the methods of language instruction within the framework of the language competence of learners. In other words, a global way of teaching English should be a central point of current teaching methodology. Today there are a number of course books on the textbook market both for elementary and high schools students with quality materials in them such as *Matura Leader* used in preparation for the Hungarian Secondary School Leaving Exam (the *Matura Exam*). This book incorporates topics related to American culture in its reading and listening assignments respectively (Mitchell and Malkogianni 2020, 77, 101). Other course books titled *American to the Top* (Mitchell 2016) together with *Traveller Plus*, are also available, especially designed for teenagers and young adults from beginner to intermediate levels, and they all include American cultural traits of the most varied subjects in their lessons in all language skills such as reading, speaking, listening, writing as well as vocabulary practice (Mitchell 2020, 12, 82, 84-85).

Huber in his 2023 book titled *Pluricentricity in foreign language teaching: The case of English and German in the Hungarian education system*, concludes that the content of textbooks used in classrooms form an integral part of the language teaching and learning process. Huber (2023), referring to Sadker and Sadker (2001, 134) states that since the vast majority of time devoted to teaching in the classroom is based on textbook materials, textbooks are foundational for teachers to make decisions in establishing their teaching strategy. Therefore, Huber's (2023) finding is that the tasks designed both for listening activities and reading comprehension exercises are idealistically expected to contain a wide repertoire of materials of standard variants of language. Pluricentricity is expressed at every level of the linguistic system, so it is inevitable to take advantage of that in developing all language skills. In addition, incorporating cultural elements into the curriculum not only serves the goal of improving learners' communicative competence, but it is essential in extending their scope of the world in general. Understanding and learning about different cultures in the world can help deepen learners' knowledge of how cultures affect the way people live and work, make decisions, as well as how countries are operated. As a result, it also improves people's intellectual abilities and skills of critical thinking (Bálint 2024, 63), and it is essential that pluricentric teaching material taught from textbooks in English language classrooms ought to be familiarized with students like building blocks are progressively put together by masons, making sure the progressivity of the learning process (Huber 2023, 47).

The criticism and analysis of textbooks is inevitable, forming the theoretical framework for pluricentricity as the basis of investigation (Huber 2023: 48). At present the application of the pluricentric model is still marginalized in language teaching, however, it could carry many advantages (Huber 2023: 86). Unfortunately, the representation of pluricentricity in textbooks is predominantly limited to the examination of lexical items or pronunciation, but other linguistic subsystems are intact, which is a problem Huber (2023, 87). Furthermore, as Huber (2023: 49) notes, the representation of native speakers in textbooks has been prevalent in terms of researching English as a lingua franca, and the number of variant language use has been frequently neglected in the domain of native standards of language use, placing the study of pluricentric approach in the background.

Regarding research in the field, Jenkins's (2006, 163) recent evidence on studies on Lingua Franca and World Englishes suggests that, regarding corpus-based research, the vast majority of corpora are normally centered around British and American Englishes; however, there also seems to be a tendency to include corpora from outer circle Englishes. Similarly, the appearance of dictionaries and grammars based on Englishes other than British or American Englishes has also happened. Likewise, Schneider (2011, 76) notes that it is a generally accepted fact that American English was the first established variety of the colonial language varieties of English. It is shocking how deeply rooted is the ideology of standard language use as a prescriptive approach in reference works published in Britain and the United States, assuming the false notion that it is national standard usages are the ones pointing to benchmarks of acceptance both within a country and in a global way too (Seidlhofer 2018, 88-89).

In order to prove his point, Huber (2023, 77) compares textbooks both in German and English in order to see how pluricentricity and the standards of nondominant varieties are applied in them. Moreover, Huber (2023, 77) analyzes various English textbooks, especially focusing on lexical content, reading and listening skills Huber (2023). Even though English being the leading international language in the world, Germans has an advantage over English as a language to be examined in terms of pluricentricity (Huber 2023, 49), and he claims that the excessive presence of British English in the textbooks under examination not only excludes a variety of nondominant Standard varieties, but it discriminates against American standard English as well. Huber (2023, 87)

Huber (2023, 52-53) then makes certain practical proposals for the implementation of the presence of pluricentricity in Hungarian public language education, with the hope of it being also incorporated in teacher training curricula in the future. Potentially, due to the global nature of our time, the fact that learners may encounter a number of forms in the future has to be taken in consideration. Therefore, disregarding the various forms of norm in English language textbooks is an impassable route, so an equal representation of the standard variants at all levels of language use is called for (Huber 2023, 48).

8. Taking Advantage of Authentic Materials and the Media in the Classroom

Authentic materials, media and the application of pragmatics are an invaluable tool for representing American culture in English language teaching; however, Stephens et al. (2012) report that, in fact, many first-generation students at colleges face the challenging difficulties of a pragmatic nature. For example, entering into the postsecondary level of education, raises issues of reconciling the cultural norms they bring with them and the culture present in the various university settings they encounter as freshmen (cited in De Man 2024, 72), and De Man (2024, 72) states that the application of pragmatics in classroom practices is, unfortunately, not always taken the full advantage of, motivated by the belief that all the important aspects students need to be acquainted with should and can be learned outside the classroom.

A widespread method is to incorporate real materials such as newspapers, films, music, and literary texts into classroom practice, and these resources can provide learners with examples for the use of language in cultural contexts. For example, films such as *Forest Gump* and *The Pursuit of Happiness* may represent cultural narratives reflecting American values, historical events, and social issues (Cortazzi and Jin 1999). These resources can expose the language to students as it is used in real life settings and contexts. Newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* or magazines such as *Newsweek* or *Time* can be used to discuss current events and social issues, offering insights into American social values and political landscapes. Films and television programs can not only offer entertainment, but also cultural values depicting the dynamics of everyday life, humor and work in the United States (Cortazzi and Jin 1999). Music is another powerful means of cultural representation. Jazz, rock, and hip-hop, besides being artistic expressions, are reflections of American tradition and life. Similarly, literature representing life from all walks of ethnic groups such as African-Americans,

Native Americans, Hispanics and residents from Asian origin can provide a more comprehensive view of American culture. Literary works by authors such as Toni Morrison, Mark Twain, William Saroyan and other authors deliver a variety of narratives that reflect experiences and perspectives of different cultural groups. By analyzing lyrics of various authors can initiate discussions about cultural topics in contexts. For instance, studying Bob Dylan's songs and rap musicians' lyrics portraying urban life, students can get closer to understanding American history and social issues more thoroughly. Singer-songwriter Bob Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016, which well reflects the high quality and depth of his prose written during the last couple of decades. The simplistic prose of Ernest Hemingway, the legendary crime stories of Raymond Chandler, or the poetry of Robert Frost may bring American literature closer to readers who are non-native speakers of English from various cultural backgrounds in addition to improving proficiency in English. In previous studies, Bentahila and Davies (1989) argued that learners should have some knowledge of native language standards (cited in Bayyurt 2006, 234).

9. Cultural Projects and Empirical Learning in the Classroom

An effective approach of teaching language through culture is the practice of using cultural projects. Activities such as research into American holidays, or the virtual exchanges with American students enable students to explore cultural topics in an active and inventive way. These projects promote a broader understanding of American culture and its various manifestations in life. Moran (2001) emphasized experiential learning activities that can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical applications and increase the cultural consciousness of learners.

Therefore, the implementation of more practical teaching methodology would be expected and inevitable. Drama education is such an implied method that can be used with great success if done properly. Beyond educational benefits, it is able to develop skills needed in everyday life settings as well as promoting skills of appreciating art and creating real art performances (Agárdi et al. 2024, 7). For instance, Agárdi et al. (2024, 7) mentions that the U.S. Embassy in Hungary runs an information center called American Corner providing people with educational and cultural details together with guidelines in a number of cities country-wise. The programs that American Corner offers can introduce 'local communities and individuals to American society and culture' by providing people of all ages cultural programs for free through various activities (Agárdi 2024, 7). A three-day English language drama festival is held in Veszprém each year, involving students from three different school types of the Hungarian education system, such as elementary school, high school and university levels. A genuine theater atmosphere is created when the various groups deliver their performances in the English language. Theater insiders and experts in English give their opinions, evaluation and advice to the participating groups through discussions after the performances (Agárdi et al. 2024, 7). Keeping students' alertness is also a significant issue; and, many times, making students pay attention in the classroom in order to hand over knowledge is certainly a challenging endeavor on the teacher's part. Now in today's digital world it has become an even more critical task considering the fact that digital contents are briefer, and students' attention shorter (Agárdi et al. 2024, 7).

Similarly, giving cultural projects and empirical learning activities to learners may encourage active involvement in American culture. These techniques allow learners to investigate in-depth cultural issues, which, in turn, they can apply in developing their language skills. For example, projects on American holidays such as *Thanksgiving* or *Independence Day* can benefit students to explore the way they were celebrated earlier as well as the way they are celebrated today. Presentations on American cultural icons such as Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, Benjamin Franklin, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant and others can highlight the contributions they made to American society and culture. Empirical learning

activities also include exchanges and interactions with native speakers. Online people-to-people activities can also enable students to communicate and practice their language skills with their American counterparts in real-time settings.

10. Conclusion and Future Implications

In conclusion, the representation of American culture through authentic materials in English language teaching holds promising implications for educators and learners alike, and the integration of American culture into English language teaching serves as a lively and multi-layered approach in the language learning process. By incorporating cultural elements into language teaching, educators can make it possible for learners to understand the English language in a wider context. Addressing the diversity and complexity of American culture is vital, and maintaining cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness may ensure a comprehensive representation of American culture. Therefore, teachers of upcoming years should be encouraged to make use of this way of teaching English to newer generations.

It is the hope of the author of the present paper that this overview holds certain implications as to how the incorporation of cultural awareness into English language teaching can contribute to a better understanding of the environment language is embedded in and the world around us in general. This teaching approach promotes mutual respect and understanding and emphasizes the global nature of cultural exchange (Risager 2007). Language teachers worldwide should be informed about it, and given training in light of the above facts, and they should also be encouraged to exploit and employ the existing knowledge and experience for the potential benefit of future generations of learners of English.

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