Culture in an English-language Training Program

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The received notion of culture as a monolithic national identity has in recent decades given way to a new conceptualization. Culture is increasingly viewed as dynamic and multidimensional. Culture can include national or ethnic, but also disciplinary or professional, institutional, consumer, technological, and individual dimensions. This new understanding of culture plays a role in analysis of relationships in the English language classroom between students and instructor, and in negotiation between students and administrators. The dynamics of a 6-month program in English, offered at an American university for Chinese participants, is better understood through the emerging model than through the more limited and traditional concept of ethnic interaction. In particular, the new model of culture explains the otherwise unexpectedly strong power negotiation by students in the program.

Introduction

In the past few decades, Asian students have increasingly interacted with Western teachers of English. However, this interaction has reportedly produced misunderstanding and friction in the classroom (Li, 1998; Rao, 2001; Chang, 2004) due to differing concepts about effective language learning instructional methods and approaches. This friction is often portrayed as arising from a difference between Asian and Western notions of pedagogy. However, a recent instructional program in the United States for adult Chinese learners suggests that an ethnic model (e.g., "Chinese," culture versus "American" culture) does not accurately
explain the dynamics of instruction, and ethnic culture can only be seen as one of the dimensions in the cultural interplay of classroom language instruction. A more complex notion of culture — that of small cultures — may be the more informative model. In this article we delineate that model of culture and show how it relates to a specific instructional program.

**Defining Culture: The Received View**

An early notion of culture, now still much in use and which we therefore refer to as the received view, is that any national or ethnic group shares a definable culture. Acceptance of this somewhat monolithic notion allowed people to speak of “German culture” or “Hispanic culture,” “tribal culture,” or “American culture.” Such a notion of culture has come under increasing attack in the post-War period, culminating with postmodernist criticism. For example, Keesing regards culture as largely the invention of Western anthropologists who simply needed “a framework for our creation and evocation of radical diversity” (Keesing, 1994, p. 301). Over time, he believes this essentialist notion of culture infiltrated our everyday discourse, allowing people to define themselves by comparison to what they are not.

Divisions into “self” and “other” have become increasingly difficult to maintain in a world where the globalization of markets and media now provide diverse groups of people with shared objects, such as cell phones and soft drinks, as well as rituals, like attending universities or surfing the Internet. As a result, a software tycoon from India may have far more in common with Bill Gates than with a street vendor in Delhi. At the same time, as Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) point out, tremendous diversity continues to exist not only between, but within, groups of people. This challenges the traditional idea of culture as “monolithic and homogenous” (p. 64). Political divisions or geographic boundaries play a limited role — indeed, a limiting role — in our understanding of culture.

**New Views of Culture**

Atkinson (2004) considers the postmodern view of culture, with its emphasis on radical change, to be complementary to the hectic pace and chaotic diversity of modern life. The notion of culture as a “dynamic,
ongoing process which operates in changing circumstances to enable group members to make sense of and meaningfully operate within those circumstances” (Holliday, 1999, p. 248) seems more valid as globalization renders large, static notions of culture increasingly obsolete. Kramsch (2002) posits that:

Culture has become less and less a national consensus, but a consensus built on common ethnic, generational, regional, ideological, occupation- or gender-related interests, within and across national boundaries. (p. 276)

**The Concept of Small Cultures**

In a teaching environment, the institution, academic discipline, and classroom each constitute separate, yet often interrelated, cultures (Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999). The relevant linguistic, analytical, and rhetorical needs of the learners should therefore be considered part of these cultures (Jacob, 1987). Of course, learners bring their own notions of culture into the classroom, and they should have ample opportunities to share their knowledge and understanding with instructors and peers (Jones, 1999). There remains, however, an undeniable need to deal with the “shifting identities and cross-cultural networks” (Kramsch, 2001, p. 205) created by the globalization of English. The tremendous diversity that exists within national, regional, professional, and social boundaries must perforce extend our notion of culture. Add to this the variability that comes from individual choice: sociocultural norms provide guidelines for behavior, but these are “reworked and remade in the messy crucible of everyday behavior” (Atkinson, 1999, p. 637; see also Giddens, 1979, from whom Atkinson draws). As a result, culture can no longer be viewed as a permanent fixture; it instead is to be seen as a fluid, temporary construct that is not “received,” but rather, negotiated between groups and individuals in a variety of social situations.

An increasing number of language scholars are adopting the view that culture is a moving, multiple target. Atkinson (1999) states forthrightly: “[H]uman beings exist in multiple social worlds, have multiple social allegiances, and play multiple social roles — all of which, additionally, are continuously changing” (p. 643). Kramsch (2004) adds: “Culture is not one worldview, shared by all the members of a national speech community; it is multifarious, changing, and, more often than not, conflictual” (p. 255).
Changes in Chinese Pedagogical Literature

Since the economic transformation of the People’s Republic of China in the 1980s, articles have appeared in the West that address the learning styles and pedagogical expectations of Chinese learners of English. Much of that literature assumes that Chinese culture is a monolithic determinant in learner attitudes. Rao (1996) lists features that influence Chinese learners of English, including “use of translation as both a teaching and learning strategy” and “teacher’s authority and student’s passive role” (p. 463). Ho and Crookall (1995), in an article on teaching learner autonomy in tertiary education in Hong Kong, speak of “[Chinese] students’ respect for authority” and state that “many Chinese students will not challenge their teacher’s position on a given point (or even indeed authority in general)” (p. 237). Common themes in this literature on Chinese pedagogical style are the emphasis on rote learning, teacher-centered instruction, and heavy reliance on textbooks for instruction, including for language learning. But already at the time these received views of ethnic culture were published, other scholars were testing such notions. Garrott (1995) distributed a questionnaire, the Chinese Values Survey, to 512 college students in 15 different universities in China. The survey asked students to rank a list of 40 values (from education to patriotism, from sincerity to “keeping face” to thrift, and so forth) by personal importance. A monolithic view of culture would predict similarity in the findings. The results, however, cast doubt on the model of monolithic Chinese culture as a predictor of cultural values. Smaller cultures influenced the values of these college students, as the author reports: “[M]arked differences appear in values perceptions between men and women, between younger and older students, and between English majors and non-English majors ...” (Garrott, 1995, p. 218). Further evidence of dynamism in the Chinese educational environment is offered by Liao (2000), who documents changes in pedagogical assumptions over the past 25 years in China.

Critical Pedagogy

The impact of these changing definitions of culture from received to dynamic interpretations has had an influence on the discussions of classroom teaching in EFL and ESL, especially in the realm of “critical pedagogy.” Critical pedagogy questions the teaching of native English
language cultures (e.g., British and American) and sees the teaching of a monolithic culture model as perpetuating neocolonial traditions. Phillipson's (1992) and Pennycook's (1994) influential books chronicling colonialismand practices of English language teaching have been followed by a flurry of publications on the same topic.

Some recent publications have addressed such concerns for the English teaching classroom. A study of linguistic imperialism (Canagarajah, 1999) presents a useful analysis of the challenges facing English language teaching between the center (native English speaking countries of the technologically advanced West) and the periphery (post-colonial countries or those where English is ascendant in a neocolonial political and economic environment). Canagarajah considers discourse and ideology to be part of the same phenomenon, and "... each community's culture is made up of a conglomeration of diverse strands which embody hybrid traditions of domination and resistance" (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 30–31). Relevant to the case study we will present in this paper, the students that Canagarajah studies in a Sri Lankan environment are offered a process-oriented English language instruction when their own discourse prefers a product-oriented approach. How these "peripheral" students resist this center-sponsored pedagogic approach resonates for our own study, though ours is set in the U.S. Midwest, one of the hearts of the "center" in Canagarajah's terms.

Benesch (1999), another scholar who has written about the usefulness of critical pedagogy in the classroom, describes an ESP class (specifically, an English for Academic Purposes psychology bridge class) at a U.S. university. She reports how immigrant ESL students in her class learned strategies to negotiate coverage and interaction in the psychology class. Instead of being silent note takers, they became active questioners. Benesch's study on power in a bridged classroom provides useful concepts for our study, as our students attended an economics class with an ESL bridge teacher.

Warschauer (2000) summarizes the interconnection of the two strands of small culture and empowerment:

As a result of changes in globalization, employment, and technology, L2 speakers of English will use the language less as an object of foreign study and more as an additional language of their own to have an impact on and change the world. They will use English ... to express their identity and make their voices heard.... [I]f the central contradiction of the 21st century is between global networks and local identities, English is a tool for both. (p. 530)
The Ministry of Finance Program

From July 1, 2003, to December 12, 2003, the Indiana Center for Intercultural Communication (ICIC), part of the English Department at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), offered an instructional program formally titled “English for Specific Purposes in Business, Finance, and Economics” (and informally known as the “MOF Program”) to staff from the Ministry of Finance of the People’s Republic of China. Eight participants began the program and a ninth came a month into the 6-month program. The program, in Dudley-Evans and St John’s (1998) terms, would be called English for Professional Purposes. A profile of the participants can be seen in Table 1.

The MOF program offered both classroom instruction and professional development. Instruction included classroom lectures as well as guest lectures by professionals and government employees. There were also site visits to business and government offices. A special feature of the program was the placement of each participant with an American family for a home-stay that lasted the length of the program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Professional Position</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Seniority in Agency</th>
<th>Previous Overseas Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Deputy section chief</td>
<td>University graduate</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Assistant supervisor</td>
<td>University graduate</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Deputy director</td>
<td>University graduate</td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Section chief</td>
<td>University graduate</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Deputy director</td>
<td>University graduate</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>University graduate</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Division chief</td>
<td>University graduate</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Deputy director</td>
<td>University graduate</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Section chief</td>
<td>University graduate</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Needs Analysis

In preliminary correspondence prior to the program, our Chinese Ministry of Finance contact had no knowledge of the participants’ language skills and could offer little information about English use in the prospective participants’ workplaces. Therefore, ICIC undertook a needs analysis after the arrival of the participants to determine their actual workplace use and need for English, their current proficiency, and their desires and expectations for the course. The components of both the initial and ongoing needs analysis are listed in Table 2; the initial questionnaires for the students and the ongoing feedback form, as well as an end-of-program questionnaire, are in the Appendix.

Table 2. Needs analysis in MOF program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Ongoing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Precourse information from the client</td>
<td>Feedback forms (every 21 days) and follow-up interviews:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Precourse information questionnaire &amp; follow-up interviews</td>
<td>• How did you like the class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional details, use of English, learning styles</td>
<td>• Which activity did you like the most/least?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-assessment questionnaire &amp; follow-up interview</td>
<td>• Evaluation of teachers, assignments, and self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Standardized oral proficiency interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Standardized listening comprehension test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Standardized grammar test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Writing sample (prompt: When do you use English in your work? Describe whom you use it with, and for what task.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Needs analysis questionnaires and interviews given in the first two days after arrival revealed that the participants required English skills for occasional meetings with World Bank and Asian Development Bank officials (many of whom were themselves nonnative speakers of English). These meetings concerned loan projects carried out at the provincial level. Three of the nine participants, in the initial needs assessment interviews, reported particular vexation in communicating with World Bank economists from India or Pakistan. The participants attributed this vexation to differences in pronunciation from the variety of English they had studied or were familiar with in China.

The language proficiency testing (The Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency, including written and listening instruments, and an
oral proficiency test scaled from 50 for halting and fragmentary speech to 95 for near-native speech), coupled with a writing test and oral interviews, showed a proficiency range that began at near beginner and moved up to the intermediate range. None of the participants had advanced ability in any of the four skills of speaking, listening comprehension, reading, or writing. The overall results of the needs analysis indicated the participants would benefit from enhanced English proficiency in reading financial and economic documents; in writing memos and reports; in listening to presentations and discussions on infrastructure development topics, particularly in a variety of English dialects and pronunciation patterns; in learning social talk, greeting and invitation techniques, the elements of business negotiation; and in acquiring the ability to discuss financial charts and budget projections.

In the course of the needs analysis, the students were asked to state their own desires and goals for the program. They invariably expressed the wish to learn more about American culture, to increase vocabulary, and to improve their pronunciation of English.

Program Instruction

A curriculum was designed and implemented that focused on English in business and administrative situations, with guest lectures by local business and government leaders. Classes featured a course in business English, and students had additional specialized courses in reading, discussion, and presentation of business materials; in American culture and government; and in writing. Participants spent an average of 22 hours per week in the classroom, attending classes from Monday through Friday. Table 3 lists the components of the program curriculum.

Of the five regular instructors, four were native speakers of English, the fifth a native of Western Europe. Two were Ph.D.s with extensive ESL experience, another had a master’s degree and broad experience in ESL, and there were also two current M.A. graduate students, one with previous overseas EFL experience.

Due to collaboration with the Department of Economics at JUPUI, participants were able to audit a regular academic course — E337: Economic Development — twice a week during the university fall semester. The course examines policy and planning for sustained economic growth, and examines development problems and experiences in developing countries. An English instructor sat in the class with the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business English</td>
<td>- Scheduling meetings, discussing plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Negotiating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Social small talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Readings</td>
<td>- Reading and discussion of business materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Presentation of case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Development</td>
<td>- Audit regular academic course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Cultures</td>
<td>- Federal, state, local governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Industry, agriculture, trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Music, art, literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>- Proposals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- E-mail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants and met with them after each class to assist with specialized vocabulary and comprehension of the lectures. The auditing MOF participants were encouraged by the instructor to discuss, for the benefit of all class members, their actual experiences in projects in their provinces.

Various activities supplemented and reinforced the classroom work, bringing economic theory and governmental and business practice together in authentic situations. Table 4 lists the special activities offered in the MOF program.

By the time the program ended in early December, each student showed considerable gains in oral and written language proficiency and all but one showed marked gains in reading and listening in scores on standardized tests given at the beginning and at the end of the program (see Table 5).

Students reported satisfaction with the training, and reported particular satisfaction with their success in producing the business-related reports and business case studies they were assigned in the latter half of the program. Participants rated the overall program highly, and stated that the homestay, visits to government and business locales, interaction with business and government guest speakers, and attendance at community events were the most attractive features of the program.
Table 4. Special activities in the MOF program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop</th>
<th>Economics of Social issues 10 day Workshop (Center for Economic Education)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Site Tours | - Indiana State Capitol (Legislative & Judicial offices)  
- Municipal Waterworks  
- Chicago Mercantile Exchange  
- Indiana State Budget Office  
- Indiana Department of Revenue Processing Center  
- Indianapolis Athenaeum (German Community Center) |
| Field Visits | - Tree farm and nursery  
- Orchard  
- Winery  
- Indiana State Fair |
| Guest Speakers | - Government:  
  * Internal Revenue Service  
  * Indiana Department of Revenue  
  * State Representative  
- Business:  
  * Dentist  
  * Pilot  
- Nonprofit  
  * Community volunteer  
  * Chinese student association president |
| Collaboration | Pairing with students in IUPUI introductory linguistics course |

Table 5. Comparison of intake & end scores in the MOF program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Identifier</th>
<th>Oral Proficiency Test intake / end</th>
<th>Writing Skills (Essay about job) intake / end</th>
<th>Michigan Test (45 points) Listening Skills intake / end</th>
<th>Michigan Test (100) Vocabulary / Reading / Grammar intake / end</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>75 / 90</td>
<td>80 / 85</td>
<td>27 / 33</td>
<td>46 / 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>85 / 90</td>
<td>75 / 85</td>
<td>34 / 39</td>
<td>69 / 72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>80 / 85</td>
<td>70 / 85</td>
<td>34 / 30</td>
<td>69 / 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>75 / 85</td>
<td>70 / 85</td>
<td>19 / 27</td>
<td>36 / 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>75 / 85</td>
<td>60 / 75</td>
<td>31 / 36</td>
<td>40 / 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>65 / 75</td>
<td>60 / 70</td>
<td>18 / 31</td>
<td>23 / 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>65 / 75</td>
<td>60 / 70</td>
<td>18 / 33</td>
<td>23 / 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>70 / 85</td>
<td>70 / 75</td>
<td>23 / 33</td>
<td>46 / 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>55 / 60</td>
<td>55 / 66</td>
<td>16 / 22</td>
<td>28 / 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Culture in Relation to the MOF Program

Power Negotiation

Perhaps the most salient feature of the MOF program was the negotiation of power by the participants. Unlike workplace English for Occupational Purposes programs overseas, where the workplace supervisors are present in the same building or even in the classroom, these students were an ocean away from their supervisors. The members of this group, with a mean age of 36.6, were sophisticated in economic theory and business practices, and before arriving for training in the United States, were already accustomed to wielding power within province-level bureaucracies. The participants soon proved adept at power negotiation within the training program.

The most surprising power play involved a teaching assistant from India. In arranging for our MOF participants to audit an academic course (E337: Economic Development), we requested the Department of Economics to furnish a graduate teaching assistant for a once-a-week recitation class. Our belief was that, since the language of the lectures was designed for the native English-speaking students who were officially registered and attending the class, the recitation class would provide some review of the lecture concepts and aid MOF participants with homework assignments and examinations.

The Department of Economics fortuitously supplied us with a teaching assistant who had, before returning to graduate school, spent several years working for the World Bank. This individual was a native of India. Our needs analysis had shown that MOF participants often encountered World Bank officials from the Indian subcontinent in their work, and in our intake interviews about their English needs, three of the nine had specifically complained about the difficulty of understanding Indian-influenced English pronunciation. What could be better, we believed, than to introduce our students to a modified version of Indian English from a former World Bank economist in a controlled learning environment? The students, however, did not share our view.

Immediately after the first recitation class, a delegation of three MOF participants appeared at the program director’s office. They informed the director that they were unable to understand the Indian teaching assistant, and that they wanted the recitation class dropped from their schedule. When the director pointed out to them the results of the needs analysis and suggested that exposure to Indian English was precisely what they needed...
to improve their workplace performance, their response was surprising: “We came to America to learn standard American English, and even if this is good for our jobs, we don’t want it.” A subsequent meeting with the entire MOF group was arranged for later in the day. By the time the director arrived in the classroom, the nine students had made a decision among themselves: even if the recitation class were continued, they would not attend. The director offered to work with the teaching assistant to ensure a high quality of instruction, but this also was rejected by the participants.

In the end, the recitation class had to be canceled because the students refused to attend. In place of the recitation class, the instructor for the program’s business English course began to attend the economics class and held a one-hour review of the lecture after each class. Students later expressed appreciation for the “understanding” shown by the program director to their request, and their satisfaction that they were able to maintain a steady diet of exposure to standard American English. The MOF program students appeared to prefer a prestigious standard dialect, regardless of its practical utility in their working environment; they were either unaware or unmoved by any sense that teaching our standard constituted, in the view of scholars like Phillipson (1992), Pennycook (1994), and McKay (2003), a form of cultural imperialism. In answer to a questionnaire near the end of the program, it became clear that the group did not have uniform views. “I prefer to learn standard American English,” wrote one participant with the majority view. Another pointed to the power of America in justifying the importance of learning American English. But a third participant wrote, “I think that international English is best to learn, because I have to meet people from [many] kinds of countries, not only from America and England.” This was seconded by another participant. Despite the variation, the majority view remained summarized by yet another participant: “I believe American English is more popular in the world.”

Compromises Through Negotiation

The participants showed both individual and group initiative in other power negotiations as well. They seized every chance to negotiate on issues such as homework, textbooks, and days off. Participants often prefaced a request or demand by mentioning how dependent the Ministry of Finance would be on their own recommendations in making decisions about funding future programs through ICIC.
Other strategies were also used by the students. A similar training program funded by the Chinese Ministry of Finance was going on simultaneously at a university in the United Kingdom. Participants cited amenities there as a reason to institute them in our own program, stating that ICIC needed to stay competitive with the UK program if we wanted to see future agreements with the Ministry. Once the group had asked for, and won, a week free for travel time based on a similar concession in the UK program, they then requested that ICIC pay for their travel — a bid that they did not win.

The type of negotiation outlined by Canagarajah (1999) did seem to make its appearance in the MOF program, as participants often protested a particular classroom practice or program activity because they felt more comfortable with pedagogical approaches from their own environment. For example, when it became clear that most of the textbooks would be loaned for use, rather than given to students to bring back to China, participants objected. “I hope [to] have textbooks completely, and step by step to the deep level,” wrote one. Without textbooks to show their supervisors, they claimed, it would appear that they had learned nothing in America. Further discussion with the students made it apparent that, for the participants, knowledge was a fixed item to be owned and encapsulated in book form. We countered with explanations of the nature of learning and the concepts of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and showed why we depended less on textbooks (though several were used in the program) and more on modified authentic materials to meet their learning needs. In the end, the students were assigned business case study reports and final reflection reports that they then brought back to show their work units. This solution was an effective compromise that preserved our institutional notion of knowledge as negotiated and plastic, while accepting their notion of knowledge as material and concrete. Feedback at the end of the program indicated great satisfaction and pride on the part of the students in their projects.

**Small Cultures in the Classroom**

Just as the varied approaches to critical pedagogy of scholars such as Canagarajah help to explain some phenomena observed in our program, the notion of dynamic small cultures helps to explain other phenomena. When the academic semester started, we arranged for the president of the campus Chinese Student Association to speak to our group. The
participants reported that they found the talk interesting and useful because they learned of the resources that the Chinese community had to offer. However, none of the participants appeared to befriend the Chinese students on campus. The participants’ closest social contacts, in addition to their home-stay families, were in fact bureaucrats from the Indiana Department of Revenue, whom they met through an extended series of guest lectures and site visits. A monolithic culture model would predict socialization with other Chinese on campus. We surmise that another cultural dimension — that of disciplinary culture, in this case bureaucratic — proved the stronger cultural dynamic.

Lessons Learned

As the MOF program progressed, we made increasing efforts to convey to the participants the particular approach and aim of ESP in meeting their needs for English in their workplace. Since their peers in the UK program were studying general academic English, we found ourselves spending time explaining why our lesson plans were fluid, individualized, and focused on economics, business, and government. In response to a questionnaire near the end of the program, a participant wrote, “In the business reading class, we have done many things about writing and culture. I don’t know what is really a reading class.” Despite the group push for general English instruction, not every participant held the view, and written feedback revealed that for some, the ESP approach was paying off: “[M]aterials related to our job are very helpful to us,” wrote another participant.

By the last month of the MOF program, some students, as became apparent both in their conversations with the director and the instructors and in their regular triweekly feedback questionnaires, had accepted the training program’s approach to addressing their needs.

Conclusion

The power negotiation by the participants is elucidated by Canagarajah’s (1999) model: the periphery uses the language and techniques of the center to gain power and to negotiate for actions that fit the periphery values. But in turn our own instruction and discussion had its effect on the participants. Postmodern models such as Keesing’s and Atkinson’s demonstrate the dynamic and changeable nature of culture in this instructional program.
Participants came in as members of a discourse community, that is, bureaucrats, as well as members of the same (Han Chinese) ethnic group; they came from the periphery of the English language universe yet brought age and education and life experience to bear in ways that maximized their power; they brought their socialization with them but in turn were influenced by what they learned and acquired during the six months of instruction and home-stay with American families.

In the end, the measurable levels of proficiency in English went up for all the participants. They highly recommended the program to the Ministry, and we now are expecting a second group. We intend to orient this second group to the ESP approach early on, and use power negotiation as a springboard for better cultural communication. Since ESP methods require a dynamic, discourse-based approach to learning, we can work with the dynamics of the classroom and the group in a similar way, remaining aware of the multiple cultures and multiple discourses within which we both teach and work.

For the future, we look to strengthen the weak claims made here about small cultures through triangulated research and the development of assessment instruments to measure such small cultures in similar training programs.

Acknowledgement

Our thanks to Dwight Atkinson, whose writing initiated our interest in the topic, and who commented on this paper.

References


Appendix A: Precourse information questionnaire

Personal Details

Family name ___________________ First names ___________________

Nationality ___________________ Main language __________________

Date of birth ___________________ Female/male __________________

Contact address _____________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

Contact numbers ___________________ e-mail address ________________

Professional Details

Name of your work organization __________________________________

Length of time with organization _________________________________

Educational background _________________________________________

Job title ______________________________________________________

Length of time in current job ___________________________________

Your Job

Please describe the roles and responsibilities of your job.

________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________

Current Use Of English

Do you use English in your current job?

If yes, is this mainly spoken, written or both? Please describe your English use in detail: greeting guests; negotiating contracts; writing letters or faxes; etc. Tell about any use.

________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________
How many hours a week are you likely to use English?

Do you use English mainly in-company, externally or both?

Do you use English mainly with native speakers (for example Americans), non-native speakers or both?

How much have you studied English in the past? Where?

Have you visited the U.S. or any country in the past and used your English to communicate? Please give details.

Do you use English outside of work (with friends, when traveling, for hobbies, etc.)? If “yes,” how often?

Future Use Of English

Do you want to improve your English for your current job or for a new one? If “yes,” please tell what you want to improve (writing, listening, conversation, business negotiation, cultural understanding, etc.)

Is English ability helpful for promotion at your current job?

What do you personally hope to get from this English course?
Does your employer want you to improve English skills? If “yes,” why?

____________________________________________________________________

Would better English skills allow you to make a greater contribution to your company? If “yes,” how?

____________________________________________________________________

**Learning Style**

Do you prefer group activities or working alone in the classroom?

____________________________________________________________________

Do you consider yourself more outgoing or more reserved?

____________________________________________________________________

Would you mind discussing and correcting your errors with your classmates?

____________________________________________________________________

Would you mind discussing and correcting your errors with your instructor?

____________________________________________________________________

Would you mind sharing the instructor’s comments on your work with a classmate?

____________________________________________________________________

Would you like to come to the front of the class to give a presentation?

____________________________________________________________________

Would you enjoy taking part in “role-play” activities?

____________________________________________________________________
Appendix B: Self-assessment Questionnaire of ESP
Students participating in the ICIC’s MOF Program

Your Name: ________________________________

Address: __________________________________

Telephone (home): __________________________
(e-mail): __________________________________

Employing Organization Name: __________________

Professional Position: ________________________

Nationality: ________________________________

Native Language: ____________________________

How many years have you been speaking English? __________

How many years of formal English instruction have you had? __________

Please describe your English communication abilities (use an “X” to mark your skill level):

<table>
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<th>None</th>
<th>Limited</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Writing</td>
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What specifically do you want to learn from these lessons?

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________
Appendix C: MOF Feedback Form

Your Name ________________________________

Tell us about the Morning Class with Aija
How did you like class recently? Why?

________________________________________________________________________

Which activity did you like most? Which activity did you like least? Please explain.

________________________________________________________________________

Circle the answer that expresses your feeling best.

The amount of homework was:  too much  okay  not enough

Tell us about the Culture Class with Kyle
How did you like class? Why?

________________________________________________________________________

Which activity did you like most? Which activity did you like least? Please explain.

The amount of homework was:  too much  okay  not enough

Tell us about the Business Readings Class with Cathy
How did you like class this week? Why?

________________________________________________________________________

Which activity was most helpful for you? Which activity was least helpful? Please explain.

The amount of homework was:  too much  okay  not enough
Tell us about the Economic Development class taught by Professor Osili. How did you like class this week? Why?

______________________________________________________

Appendix D: Questionnaire

1. If our MOF program gave grades (ABCDF) to pass or fail the course, do you think you would have tried harder in class? Why or why not?

______________________________________________________

2. Which type of English do you think is best to learn?
   a) international English — no special type
   b) standard American English
   c) British English
   Why did you think so?

______________________________________________________

3. We have drawn materials from many textbooks in this course, and from magazines, newspapers, the Internet, etc. Has this material met your needs? Are there disadvantages or weak points to this?

______________________________________________________

4. What do you think to be the biggest DIFFERENCE between American and Chinese culture?

______________________________________________________

5. From your observation of American businesses, what do you think is the biggest DIFFERENCE between Chinese and American ways of doing business?

______________________________________________________
6. During the course of the program, did you experience any case of misunderstanding or embarrassment (inside or outside the classroom) caused by a difference in culture?
If so, what was it?

7. From your observation of American government offices, what do you think is the biggest DIFFERENCE between Chinese and American government cultures?

8. Did anything surprise you about the way your teachers acted?

9. Is there anything you don’t understand, or find puzzling or strange, about the MOF program?

10. Do you think the size of your group (eight students, later nine) was best for your study? Please explain your answer.

11. Do you think the ages of your group had an effect on the class learning? If there were also very young or very old participants, would it change the class atmosphere?

12. If this class were held in China, how would it be different?
Is there anything else you want to say about your experience in America?

THANK YOU!