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Chinese Students & Methodology Courses

Andrea G. Osburne,
Central Connecticut State University

Much has been made in recent literature of Chinese English teachers' negative response to courses in teaching methodology. Foreign teacher trainers in the P.R.C. have noted the continuing interest among teachers in literature rather than in methodology and linguistics, and also the primacy attached to upgrading teachers' English language skills in teacher training programs (Cowan 1979, Patrie and Daum 1980, Mahon and Grabe 1982, Scovel 1983, Maley 1983, Oatey 1984). Grabe and Mahon (1981), attempting to explain the reluctance to study teaching methodology, cite such factors as the traditional nature of China's educational system, the fear of teachers that use of new methods would not serve the examination preparation needs of their students, individual teachers' limited influence on educational policies in terms of methods selected for actual use in the classroom, and the preference which teachers consider their students to have for traditional methods. Yet Oatey (1984) points out that attitudes in China towards methodology may be changing. Within this context it is worthwhile to reexamine the issue.

An Experience at Hunan

The experience reported here involved graduate students enrolled in two sections of a master's level course in methodology in 1986 (part of a program sponsored by Queens College, CUNY at Hunan University). The course at Hunan followed a fairly standard design; there were units on teaching methods, the four skills, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, culture, testing, lesson plans, and ESP. The textbook (Celce-Murcia & McIntosh, 1979) was supplemented by approximately fifteen journal articles. Students took three examinations and wrote four lesson plans, with a fifth one optional; the examinations were identical in format to those I have used in the U.S., and one, which required analysis of a method to which students had not previously been exposed, was identical in content as well.

At the end of the course, the students were asked to fill out an anonymous course evaluation form. The form contained twelve questions which were to be answered on a scale of 1 to 5, with each numeric value being defined for each question. These items were divided into two types. Items of the first type (questions 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, and 12) related to course quality, and in these a rating of 5 on an interval scale represented the most favorable response, with 1 representing the least favorable. Items of the second type (questions 2, 3, and 8) related to the quantity of various course paraphernalia such as examinations and other assignments, and in these, a rating of 3 on a nominal scale represented the most favorable response ("just right"), with 1 and 5 representing the least favorable ("too few" or "too many"). The questions, along with a summary of the responses, appear in Table 1. As shown, the overall reaction of the students to the

Table 1. Students' Responses to Course Evaluation
(Sample size= 44; Degrees of freedom = 43; Critical *t* value = 2.704)

Question	Mean Score	Calc. *t* Value
1. The objective of this course has to acquaint you with basic language teaching skills. To what extent do you feel it has been successful in this regard?	3.86	7.815
4. Were lectures and discussions helpful?	4.14	9.452
5. Were handouts helpful?	4.41	12.306
6. Were the exams fairly designed to give you an opportunity to demonstrate your grasp of course material?	3.95	6.850
7. Were the exams fairly graded?	3.82	6.475
9. Did the instructor seem knowledgeable and interested in the material?	4.57	19.649
10. Did the professor cover the subject matter of the course sufficiently?	3.95	9.695
11. Did you have enough opportunities in this course to ask questions and confer with the professor?	2.57	- 4.600
12. In general, was your experience in this course positive or negative?	4.05	7.571

Conclusion:
Null hypothesis that response is neutral is rejected at .01 level of significance.

Question	Percentage of Most Favorable Response	Calc. Chi Sqr. Value
2. Were reading assignments aceptable?	79.5	98.954
3. Were special projects like writing lessons plans acceptable?	81.8	107.818
8. Were there enough (or too many) exams?	68.1	73.045

course in methodology can be seen as quite favorable, except in the case of question 11, which will be discussed below.

Discussion and Conclusions

It should be recalled that this survey was conducted at the conclusion of the course. Had students been surveyed at the start regarding their opinions about taking a methodology course, the results could have been quite different. The first week, I was the recipient of complaints identical to those that have been widely reported by others: requests to teach language skills only, threats that attendance would gradually dwindle, and so on. Perhaps the negative response so widely reported is based on premature sampling. It would not be surprising to find that Chinese students, like others, require some time and persuasion to appreciate the value of a new concept.

As far as the negative response to question 11 is concerned, I believe that it reflects Chinese students' different assumptions about the appropriate availability of instructors. During the course, four office hours for consultation were provided weekly (most American graduate students would probably consider this amount of office hours reasonable). Other American instructors teaching these students complained that the students rarely made use of their office hours, but rather came to see them at home at all hours. Insisting that office hours be used for the methodology course did result in students actually making use of them. However, the perceived inconvenience was apparently regarded unfavorably by the students.

The above analysis indicates that Oatey's assertion that attitudes in China towards courses in teaching methodology may be changing is not overly optimistic. Foreign instructors going to China to teach can expect that even if students' initial response appears to be negative, it should be possible to give them a standard methodology course successfully.

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About the Author

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Conference Announcements

The twenty-third annual convention of TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) will be held at the San Antonio Convention Center in San Antonio, Texas March 6-11, 1989. Contact: Richard Orem, Convention Chair, TESOL '89, TESOL Central Office, 1118 22nd Street, NW, Suite 205, Washington, DC 20037.

The SEAMEO Regional Language Centre in Singapore will hold its 24th Regional Seminar from Monday 10 to Friday 14 April 1989 in the RELC Building. The theme of the Seminar is "Language Teaching Methodology for the Nineties." Contact: Director, (Attention: Chairman, Seminar Committee), SEAMEO Regional Language Centre, 30 Orange Grove Road, Singapore 1025, Republic of Singapore.

The second International Language Testing Conference, sponsored by the Japan Association of Language Teachers, is scheduled to be held March 30-31, 1989 at The University of Tsukuba in Japan. Contact: H. Asano, International Language Testing Conference, Foreign Language Center, The University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba-shi, Ibaraki-ken 305, Japan.

From July 12 to 21, 1989, the Institute of Culture and Communication at the East-West Center will offer a workshop for college and university faculty who wish to develop courses in intercultural and international topics. Contact: Larry Smith or Richard Brislin, East-West Center, Institute of Culture and Communication, Honolulu, HI 96848.

The 1989 Second Language Research Forum (SLRF) will be held February 23-26, 1989 at the University of California, Los Angeles. Data-based second language research is solicited in areas including, but not restricted to language universals and SLA, computers and second language research, discourse, bilingualism, interlanguage, classroom research, input, sociolinguistics, and language testing. Contact: Mohammed Daoud, Program Co-chair, SLRF '89, UCLA TESL/Applied Linguistics Program, 3309 Rolfe Hall, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1531.

The Naming Chain

Peter Duppenthaler,
ECC Foreign Language Institute

No matter how well-prepared the teacher may be, the class will just not jell if the students do not have a chance to get to know one another. This does not mean that the teacher should spend a lot of time on the first day having students give self introductions. Although this is a nice idea, it is something best left till after the ice is broken and the students have some idea of who is saying what.

The activity that I have found to be helpful and meaningful is a simple way to get to know one another's names. After all, without a name and a face to attach later information to, what good is class time spent on self introductions? The activity, which I call "The Naming Chain," is also an excellent way for the teacher to learn the names of the students (at least enough of them so that the teacher will not feel that learning the rest is more of a job than he or she is up to).

The procedure is simple and can be used, with a slight variation (see below), with any size ESL/EFL class on the first day. The activity should take about ten to fifteen minutes at most. In addition to giving the students a chance to learn one another's names and the teacher a chance to learn the students' names, it is a great way to help the students learn and be able to pronounce the teacher's name. One would be surprised at how many students do not know their own teacher's name or at least lack the confidence, in how to pronounce it correctly, to ask for the teacher by name at the office or over the telephone.

Although I use this activity in my EFL classes, it is obviously suitable for any situation in which it is important to develop group rapport—be it a classroom, workshop, or whatever.

Procedure

1. Once you have taken roll, ask the students to form a circle. If this is impossible, then have them carry out the activity sitting in their regular seats.

2. Begin by saying that you want the students to learn one another's names.

3. Tell them that you will say your family name and then the student next to you will say your family name and his/her own family name. I use family names because this is what is usually in the roll book; however, you can use first names, or English nicknames if you and the students prefer.

4. After the student next to you has said his/her name, the student next to him/her must say your family name, the family name of the student next to you, and his/her own family name.

5. Each student in turn must say all the names that have been said, in order, beginning with the teacher's name and ending with his/her own. While each student is doing this, the teacher should try saying the names along with each student and jotting down any helpful "reminders" (e.g., wears glasses, etc.) that

can be used to help identify students later on.

6. Once the last student in the class has said all the names plus his/her own, the teacher should do a quick spot check by asking various individual students to give the names of other students the teacher indicates. If there are still a lot of problems (e.g., with pronunciation), repeat the activity in reverse order (you may want to be the first one to say your name if you would rather not have to be the last person in the group).

Variation

If the class is very large, divide the students into groups. Have them call off numbers so that there will be about ten to fifteen members in each group and then have all the same numbers sit together. Once they have gotten together, demonstrate to the class, join one group, and begin the activity. When one round has been completed, have the students count off again, regroup, and repeat the activity. Repeat the counting, regrouping, and activity until the majority of the students have had a chance to learn one another's names.

Follow-up

As a follow-up, quickly repeat the naming chain activity at the beginning of the second class. In addition, during the class ask each student to write his/her name and one piece of interesting information about himself/herself (e.g., hobby, favorite musician or food, home country/town, etc.) on a piece of paper, and collect the papers. Before the next class make a "Find Someone Who" activity sheet (listing one piece of information for each student with spaces for their names after the information) and do the "Find Someone Who" activity in the third class (students get one sheet each, circulate asking questions in order to find out which student fits which piece of information, and fill in the names on the sheet). Be sure to include a piece of information about yourself and join the fun.

By the end of the third class, each student should know and be able to pronounce most of the other students' names, as well as their teacher's. After this, I think that you will find that the students will feel more comfortable about being together and more willing to come to you with their problems—a great way to pave the way for learning more about and from one another.

About the Author

Peter Duppenthaler received his M.Ed. (TESOL) from Temple University. He has taught English in Japan since 1974, and is currently chief of both the Educational Research Division and the Educational Training Section at ECC Foreign Language Institute, Osaka, Japan. Current interests include: teacher training, curriculum design and development, and the relationship between age and learning.

Dimensions of Cultural Competence: Implications for the ESL Curriculum

Harry Krasnick, Canada-Indonesia Language Program

While guidelines for teacher training developed over a decade ago recognized the need for teacher cultural competence (see Center for Applied Linguistics, 1974; TESOL, n.d. [1976]), only recently do we find attempts at the measurement of cultural competence, and there are still unresolved conceptual issues. For instance, the NTE Programs' Test for Teaching English as a Second Language (see De Vincenzi, 1987) includes a test of "cultural awareness." What is meant by that term? Does it differ from "cultural sensitivity"? These questions have implications not only for teacher training but for cultural competence as a part of the ESL curriculum.

Terminology: Sensitivity or Awareness?

Some writers do not make a clear distinction between cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness in teacher training:

> ...education designed to develop multicultural awareness or sensitivity (Sutman, 1981, p. 107).

> ...cultural awareness in the sense of being sensitive to the cultural factors which influence both parties in human interaction (Harris & Moran, 1979, p. 132).

> ...increasing trainees' awareness of their own culture with the expectation that such awareness will sensitize them to the key dimensions of cultural difference (Fontaine, 1983, p. 174).

There are, however, different connotations in everyday language. According to *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, "sensitivity" refers to

> the capacity of a person to respond emotionally to changes in his interpersonal or social relationships

while "aware" means

> marked by realization, perception, or knowledge; showing heightened perception and ready comprehension and appreciation

While *Webster's* does not deal with the role of awareness and sensitivity in *cross cultural* situations, clearly there is a difference between competence for social interaction (sensitivity) and knowledge (awareness). This basic distinction can be seen in many discussions of cultural competence for teaching.

Four Conceptions of Multicultural Teaching Competence

We can distinguish four different conceptions of the teacher's cultural competence, all of which are related to the everyday conceptions of sensitivity and awareness.

Attitude. Brislin (1981) defines attitudes as "people's reactions toward a concept, or, in everyday language, their feelings, beliefs, and readiness to act" (p. 41). Some writers describe competence for multicultural teaching in just such terms:

> ...an interest in the students' history, economy, customs, folklore, language, and so on (Weing, 1973, p. 154).
>
> ...concern for and patience with people of other cultures, and an acceptance of their varied cultural values and patterns of behavior (Sutman, 1981, p. 197).
>
> ...attitudes and values [that] reflect his honest belief in the worth of all human beings (Crane, 1978, p. 15).

The attitudinal version of cultural competence, aimed at the teacher's interpersonal relations with students, implies cultural sensitivity rather than cultural awareness.

Knowledge. Quite a common conception of cultural competence for teaching is knowledge, which is linked to cultural awareness. For example, Tzeng (1983) discusses "the cultural awareness approach, in which the trainees are provided with general information of the target culture" (p. 233), and Hughes (1983) refers to the assumption that "knowledge of cultural differences—even a general knowledge, what's sometimes referred to as *'cultural awareness'*—will improve intercultural relations" (p. 45; emphasis in the original). For ESL teacher education, the most relevant conceptions of this type refer to knowledge of sociocultural factors as they affect the learner's progress (see Center for Applied Linguistics, 1974, p. 3; TESOL, n.d. [1974], n.p.).

Skill. A third conception of teacher cultural competence is that of skills. Brislin (1981) lists six skills for cross cultural contact:

> ...knowledge of the subject matter, language [skills], communication skills, taking advantage of opportunities, ability to use traits in a given culture, and ability to complete one's task in a given culture (p. 63).

This formulation, though it includes knowledge, is aimed at social interaction more than understanding or awareness. Another list of skills (see Harris & Moran, 1979, pp. 129 130) is framed in terms of the "capabilities" to communicate respect, be nonjudgmental, personalize knowledge and perceptions, display empathy, change roles, demonstrate reciprocal concern, and tolerate ambiguity. Here, too, the emphasis is on interaction rather than knowledge.

Trait. While skills can be acquired and lost, traits are considered relatively immutable. As such, traits may be relevant in teacher selection as well as in training itself. We see traits like conceptions of cultural competence in Troike and Saville-Troike's (1982) assertion that cultural awareness and sensitivity is an "*underlying personal characteristic*" (p. 212, emphasis in the original) and in the Center for Applied Linguistics guidelines' (1974) reference to awareness and sensitivity as "personal qualities" (p. 2). Brislin's (1981, p. 70) list of desirable traits for overseas assignments comprises tolerance of different points of view, strength of

personality, the ability to develop relations with others, intelligence, a task orientation, and a willingness to receive and use feedback from others. Again, interaction rather than knowledge is the focus.

Relative Importance of Awareness vs. Sensitivity

That cultural awareness alone is not sufficient is stressed by Wilson (1984):

> Cognitive multiculturalism sometimes conflicts with affective multiculturalism. Some can function intellectually as multicultural persons, but when it comes to demonstration or practice have very little skills in this highly complex art (p. 7).

Bennett (1986), who offers a development model of training for intercultural sensitivity, goes further, limiting the role of cultural awareness to that of helping to overcome trainees' initial denial of the existence of cultural differences:

> At this stage of sensitivity (and only at this stage) the best technique for development seems to be "cultural awareness" activities. These generally take the form of "Mexico Night" or similar functions, where music, dance, food, and costumes are exhibited. In terms of this model, the purpose served by these activities is to create more differentiation of general categories for cultural difference. It should be noted that *not much more can be expected from such functions, even though they are sometimes touted as great contributions to intercultural sensitivity* (pp. 187-188, emphasis added).

Below, we will have an opportunity to examine these writers' view that sensitivity is the ultimate goal by comparing it to sociological studies of both intra and intercultural competence.

What has been argued so far has implications not only for teacher training but for the ESL curriculum because competence for cross cultural social interaction is essential in both cases. Against this background, the typical cultural competence syllabus in ESL—primarily reading passages dealing with topics such as American holidays, famous American cities, and popular entertainers—seems rather impoverished, tacked on conversation exercises notwithstanding. With few exceptions,[1] then, the cultural competence found in the ESL curriculum is really nothing more than cultural awareness. The underlying message seems to be that students either do not need cultural sensitivity, or are expected to get it elsewhere than in the ESL classroom.

Receptive vs. Productive Competence

The reception/production dimension cuts across that of awareness/sensitivity. Generally, cultural competence is treated as receptive competence. Thus the NTE examination on teaching ESL, like the typical ESL cultural awareness syllabus, can measure competence by merely asking questions. The well accepted "culture assimilator," a technique for increasing trainees' ability to make appropriate cross-cultural attributions of the meaning of others' actions (see Brislin, Cushner, Cherrie, & Yong, 1986), also is aimed at receptive competence.

However, ESL learners also need *productive* competence. We do see an emphasis on productive skills in the communicative competence-oriented ESL curriculum, where the student learns how to speak politely, apologize, and perform various other "speech acts," but this emphasis on "acting" is absent in the typical ESL cultural competence syllabus. Below, some viewpoints borrowed from sociology are used to illustrate the need for productive cultural competence in everyday life.

Impression Management: An Example of Productive Competence

The late Erving Goffman, the founding father of microsociology, emphasized the individual's need to actively control the impressions he "gives off"[2] in communicating with others if he is to achieve his specific goals:

> He may wish them to think highly of him, or to think that he thinks highly of them, or to obtain no clearcut impression; he may wish to ensure sufficient harmony so that the interaction can be sustained, or to defraud, get rid of, confuse, mislead, antagonize, or insult them (Goffman, 1959, p. 3).

Note how vivid this sociologist's description seems when compared to the implicit assumptions of many ESL curriculum designers, who treat learners as passive conformists who always seek to follow the rules and meet other people's expectations.

Though Goffman does not take a cross-cultural approach, he clearly describes this "presentation of self in everyday life" as an exercise in cultural competence:

> ...when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole (p. 35).

Though this productive cultural competence can be taken for granted in the case of native members of a culture, it becomes problematic in the case of ESL learners. Let it be noted that this competence is in no sense optional:

> The ability to manage or adapt to diverse communicative situations has become essential and the ability to interact with people with whom one has no personal acquaintance is crucial to acquiring even a small measure of personal and social control. We have to talk in order to establish our rights and responsibilities. (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1982, p. 4).

In speech act terminology, this kind of talk is more than performative—it is perlocutionary. The requirement, then, is one of interaction, not merely knowledge.

The importance of cross-cultural differences in perlocutionary speech acts is demonstrated in Danet's (1980) study of persuasive appeals in letters of complaint to customs authorities in Israel. She found that, unlike individuals of Western origin, who employed normative appeals, people of Middle Eastern origin favored altruistic appeals, which were not effective. Similarly, Wodak's (1980) study of social class differences in how defendants

"interpret themselves" to the court in legal proceedings showed that individuals are successful "only if they know the explicit and implicit values and norms [of the justice system] and are able to verbalize and operationalize their knowledge in spontaneous interaction" (p. 373, emphasis added).

Summary

A number of propositions have been advanced in the foregoing discussion of cultural competence:

1. There is a lack of uniformity in terminology.

2. There are conceptions of teacher cultural competence based on attitudes, knowledge, skills, and traits.

3. A distinction between awareness and sensitivity, or knowledge and interaction, can be seen in those conceptions.

4. Cultural sensitivity, not cultural awareness, is the primary goal in conceptions of cultural competence based on attitudes, skills, and traits.

5. Cultural awareness by itself is not sufficient.

6. Effective everyday communication implies productive competence which is cultural in nature.

All of these propositions apply to ESL teachers, yet their implications have not yet been appreciated, much less incorporated into teacher training programs. In fact, new teachers often lack a systematic understanding of even their own culture. The results range from superficial psychological reductionism (Japanese students are "polite," Indonesians are "shy") to the essentially ethnocentric deficit theory (foreign students "lack" study skills). Clearly, cultural competence defined as cultural awareness, even in combination with good intentions, is not sufficient. Teachers must be able to *respond* appropriately to cross-cultural differences in the classroom, not just evaluate students according to Western cultural norms and values.

As for students, the recent appearance on the market of a variety of ESL textbooks purporting to promote cultural competence testifies to the growing recognition that ESL learners, too, need cultural competence. Unfortunately we rarely see anything more than cultural awareness in those books. Instead of "Mexico Night," we have "disco night," or "at the fast food restaurant."

There is no reason to think that ESL learners are satisfied with a lower level of effectiveness in their daily lives than the rest of us are. According to the viewpoint presented above, what learners need in the way of cultural competence is not just cultural awareness but cultural sensitivity; not just receptive competence but productive competence. Without that, there can be no "empowerment" of learners.

Notes

1. See Krasnick (1988)

2. By this term Goffman means to refer to "a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of the actor,

the expectation being that the action was performed for reasons other than the information conveyed in this way" (Goffman, 1959, p. 2). In other words, the individual also "gives off" information about himself as he is communicating.

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Information on EFL/ESL Videos

Are you looking for information about currently available EFL/ESL videos for use in your program? Have you produced EFL/ESL videos available for purchase or loan? The ESOL Video Materials Directory, a database of existing EFL/ESL videos for teaching and teacher training has been created by the TESOL Video Group as an on-going project and service. Information about videos currently available worldwide may be obtained, or submitted for inclusion in the database, by contacting the coordinators of the ESOL Video Materials Directory: Lina Mendez, Foreign Language Education, The Ohio State University, 249 Arps Hall, 1945 North High St., Columbus, OH 43210 USA (Telephone: 614-292-5381) or Peter Thomas, Hunter College IELI, 10th floor East, 695 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021 USA (Telephone: 212-772-4295).

Impact of Foreign Graduate Students

A new study on the impact of foreign students on U.S. engineering education—a field of special significance to the U.S. economy and national interest—concludes that foreign graduate students are now essential to the operation of U.S. engineering programs. Without foreign graduate students, who constitute more than 50 percent of Ph.D. candidates in engineering, research in engineering schools would suffer seriously and the teaching of undergraduates would be damaged as well. *Boon or Bane* is the latest in an ongoing series of policy studies from the Institute of International Education (IIE). This new IIE study makes very clear the extent to which engineering training and research are now dependent on foreign graduate students. It is available for $4.00 prepaid shipping and handling from IIE Books, 809 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017.

Stories from American Business

Review by Sheila M. Lalonde, BYU-Hawaii

STORIES FROM AMERICAN BUSINESS. Patricia Costello. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1987. pp. 112. Paper $7.25.

Stories From American Business is a lightweight, easy-to-read collection of American business success stories, touching on many fields in American culture.

It is an up-to-date, modern book divided into ten teaching sections. Each section tells the story of an American who has achieved success in his or her personal life. The stories relate to the reader the stimulus which promoted the success of each individual. Each story is also personalized with a picture of the person or persons involved. The narrative used includes idioms and vocabulary used in the field being discussed.

Each section, except the first, which is a dialogue type interview, begins with a narrative of the success story. This is followed by comprehension questions which are intended to be used for discussion of the field mentioned. These questions include WH-questions, descriptive questions, and memory recalling questions. It then provides three vocabulary exercises which build student repertoire in sentence writing, matching synonyms and actual meaningful communication. At the end of each section are suggestions for classroom activities, which include problem solving and role playing as well as questions about real life situations referred to in the story.

Each section is designed to take the student through reading comprehension activities, oral group discussion activities, vocabulary and written comprehension activities. Each activity directly involves the language highlighted in each section.

As a final expansion exercise for each section, the text includes a problem solving exercise which includes an idiom not used in the story but which is related to the field discussed.

The author of the text recommends it for the high-intermediate to advanced ESL classroom. It has been designed for the specific purpose of teaching business vocabulary and expressions. It could be used as a supplement in a class where the purpose is to introduce students to the use of business language and provide insights into what constitutes success in American culture. Knowledge of business language and practices would be an asset to any teacher using this text. It could be used to advantage by an outgoing creative teacher, as it adds human interest and stimulus to otherwise routine exercises.

St. Nick Visits

(Continued from page 60)

"No."

"Well, has anyone read this before?"

OK, so I was working under an inaccurate cultural assumption. This is Japan, and they don't have quite the same Christmas tradition we do in the United States. Sure, they knew about Santa Claus, the jolly old man in red, but that was about the extent of their Christams experience.

We worked some more on the assignment. I helped them out by writing all the missing words, in random order, on the chalkboard. With those clues, the students were able to finish most of the poem. The difficult spots were the reindeers' names and some rhymes like "bow"/"snow" and "foot"/"soot" where the students were unsure of the pronunciation of one of the words.

What I thought would be a simple, enjoyable class activity turned out quite differently than I expected. It provided opportunities to introduce ideas about language and culture that I had not anticipated.

Of course, we talked about rhyming and how it's a traditional device in English poetry. But the poem also turned out to be a useful device, especially after I read it aloud, to show my students how poetry relies on rhythm. It wasn't as obvious as rhythm, but after I pointed out a few examples, the students were able to recognize Moore's use of alliteration too.

But the Christmas activity did more than just stimulate discussion about poetic devices. I asked the students to describe what Santa Claus looked like. After they all gave a more or less common description of the jolly old elf, I asked them how they had learned what Santa Claus looked like. Pictures. Television. Books. Then I told them that the modern image of Santa Claus, the jolly, jelly-bellied, white-bearded man, was first popularized by Moore's poem.

Another cultural sidelight. As we were working, one of the students asked who Saint Nicholas was. And was he the same as Saint Nick? That gave me the chance to explain about 'nick' names (no connection, however, to the saint) and to explain the traditional legend of St. Nicholas. My Japanese students were surprised to learn that Santa Claus was really Saint Nicholas.[1]

After class, I felt that the activity had gone well, even though it did not turn out as I had expected. If we had had more time, we could have practiced pronunciation using the rhymed pairs. I could have pointed out archaic words and explained how the meanings of some of the words Moore used in writing the poem in the mid-1800's have changed. I might have even asked them to use rhymed pairs in writing brief poems of their own.

I didn't have time for all that, but I might the next time around. This winter, maybe you should let St. Nick visit your ESL/EFL classes too. You might be surprised what he brings to your students.

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[1] 'Santa Claus' is really a nickname itself. It comes from the Dutch 'Sinterklaas,' 'Sinter' (Saint) plus 'klaas' a short form of 'Niklaas' (Nicholas).

A VISIT FROM SAINT NICHOLAS
by
Clement Moore

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a _____.
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that Saint _____ soon would be _____.
The children were nestled all snug in their _____,
While visions of sugarplums danced in their heads;
And Mamma in her kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled our brains for a long winter's _____.
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter
I sprang from my bed to see what was the _____.
Away to the window I flew like a _____,
Tore open the shutter, and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen _____
Gave a luster of midday to objects below.
When what to my wondering eyes should appear
But a miniature sleigh and eight tiny _____,
With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be Saint _____!
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled and shouted and called them by _____.
"Now, Dasher! now, _____! now Prancer and Vixen!
On, _____! on, Cupid! on Donder and and _____!
To the top of the porch, to the top of the _____,
Now, _____ away, dash _____, _____ away all!"
As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle mount to the _____,
So, up to the housetop the coursers they flew,
With a sleigh full of toys—and Saint _____, _____.
And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the _____
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.
As I drew in my head and was turning _____.

Down the chimney _____ Nicholas came with a bound.
He was dressed all in fur from his head to his _____,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and _____.
A bundle of toys he had flung on his _____,
And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.
His eyes, how they twinkled! his dimples, how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a _____;
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard on his chin was as white as the _____.
The stump of a pipe he held tight in his _____,
And the smoke, it encircled his head like a wreath.
He had a broad face and a little round belly
That shook, when he laughed, like a bowl full of _____.
He was chubby and plump—a right jolly old elf:
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of _____;
A wink of his eye, and a twist of his _____,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his _____,
And filled all the stockings: then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he _____.
He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a _____,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere they drove out of sight,
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-_____!"

About the Author

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St. Nick Visits the EFL Classroom

Chris Crowe, Himeji Dokkyo University

It had been a long semester. My students and I were tired of our English conversation textbook, so I promised them a Christmas surprise for the last day of school before our winter vacation.

The surprise was Clement Moore's Christmas poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas." I gave each student a copy of the poem from which I had removed the last word of every other line [see appendix]. Their assignment was, I told them, to write in the missing words.

I expected it to be an easy task. They were university freshmen, Japanese students who had studied English for six years before entering the university. To make their assignment even easier, I explained to them that Moore's poem was written in rhymed couplets, that is, that each pair of lines rhymed. I put a few examples of rhymed pairs on the board. The missing word, I told them, will rhyme with the last word in either the line before it or the line after it. Then I set them to their work.

As I circulated among the students, I saw that they were having a difficult time coming up with words to fill in the blanks. "What's the matter?" I asked. "Aren't you familiar with this poem?"

Silence.

"Come on, almost everyone knows this Christmas poem by heart."

"Uno, have you read it before?"

"No."

"Kobayashi, you?"

"No."

"Sakata, you have, haven't you?"

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