

West meets East: on the Necessity of local Pedagogies

Anne Bannink

University of Amsterdam - The Netherlands

Abstract

There is growing awareness that Western educational practices and language pedagogies cannot simply be exported to other parts of the world. The ethnocentricity of many teacher education projects that aim at introducing CLT to Asian societies have caused cultural conflicts and have led to the call for culturally appropriate methodologies. This paper presents an ethnographic analysis of three situations taken from two in-service teacher education courses in which cultural norms and identities were salient. It is argued that in the context of cross-cultural in-service courses it is important to identify possible culturally inappropriate procedures and ideas and locally introduce these aspects in the learning situation. This approach paves the way for 'intercultural reciprocity' (Coulby 2006), which will allow the course to evolve into a place from which C1 and C2 can be reflected upon without loss of face.

Keywords: intercultural education, teacher education, local pedagogies, discourse systems

1. Introduction: cultural codes

The traditional dress of Vietnam for women is the *ao dai*, a long fitted dress over wide trousers. It is still widely worn in the smaller cities and in rural areas. When I taught at Cantho University in Vietnam, my female students told me that they always wear the *ao dai* when they teach since it is a token of their status as professional women. They told me they also often wear an *ao dai* when they attend a course as a student as a sign of respect for their teacher. On the first day of the course I was involved in, the students were informed about the educational system in The Netherlands during a plenary in the morning. In the afternoon work group we discussed the ways in which the various high school subjects are taught and the students gave presentations about the Vietnamese educational system in return. To illustrate my talk I had brought a videotape of an English lesson taught to a class of Dutch students of English by a friend of mine. The tape had been recorded on a hot day during one of the summer months and the teacher wore a pair of bermuda shorts. When the tape was finished I expected questions and comments on the content and the interactional organization of the class, but my students' main concern was the teacher's way of dressing. They were aghast that a teacher would dress in such an informal way and wondered if the students could respect a teacher wearing shorts. The video had clearly caused a culture shock: the way people dress in specific social situations is not just idiosyncratic but reflects the cultural parameters of the community they are part of. The *ao dai* and the bermuda shorts can be seen as a prototype of a set of global cultural practices in Vietnam and The Netherlands, which are inherited in the local institutional context.

This incident illustrates the fact that teaching in internationalization projects necessarily entails crossing cultural boundaries. The visiting teacher is by definition a cultural outsider and culture shocks are inevitable. This paper explores what can be learned from experiences like the one recounted above and to what extent this could be generalized to other (partially) similar teaching situations where cultural differences are at issue.

2. Theoretical framework

This paper presents an ethnographic analysis of three situations taken from an in-service course in which cultural norms and identities were salient. It is not primarily concerned with the subject-matter of the

course under analysis but focuses on the social context in which its content was embedded and on the intercultural communication which had to be effectuated between people who do not share the same cultural assumptions and discourse systems.

The theoretical framework used in this paper is interdisciplinary. It tries to accommodate various approaches to the analysis of context and draws on work in the field of linguistic pragmatics, e.g. on 'face' (Brown & Levinson ([1978]1987) and intercultural communication (Scollon & Wong-Scollon 1995), on insights from the field of the 'ethnography of education', e.g. on 'cultural therapy' (Spindler & Spindler 1994), and on the importance of a 'third place' in multi-cultural teaching settings (Kramsch 1993).

Brown & Levinson's pragmatic theory on politeness is based on the premise that speakers share assumptions about politeness, which inform their choice of communicative strategies. They suggest that power, social distance and a concern for the mutual preservation of face are basic to the organization of human interaction. Brown & Levinson are quite explicit in emphasizing that the use and effect of politeness strategies are tied to a fixed set of 'social determinants' - features of social situations. Their seminal work has been extended (e.g. Kasper 1990; O'Driscoll 1996, 2007; Arundale 2006)) to take cultural differences in face systems into account. Scollon & Wong-Scollon (1995) use the notion of face as one of the elements that determine the context of interactions. They argue that the meaning of language is jointly constructed by the participants in an interaction and that successful communication is based on sharing as much as possible the assumptions we make about what others mean, on shared knowledge of actions, situations, procedures, relationships and identities. According to Scollon & Wong-Scollon intercultural communication is inter-discourse system communication. Professional communicators are simultaneously members of a number of involuntary discourse systems (cultural, generational, gender) and a number of voluntary or goal-directed systems (corporate/institutional, professional). These systems may make competing demands for membership and identity, which results in complex and multiple identities.

Spindler & Spindler (1994) have introduced the notion of *cultural therapy*. George Spindler defines cultural therapy as "... a process of bringing one's own culture in its manifold forms – assumptions, goals, values, beliefs and communicative modes – to a level of awareness that permits one to perceive it as a potential bias in social interaction and in the acquisition and transmission of skills and knowledge. One's culture as well as the 'other's' culture becomes a 'third presence', removed somewhat from the person, so that one's actions can be taken as involuntarily 'caused' by one's culture, rather than uniquely determined by one's personality" (Spindler 1999, 466).

Through cultural therapy, Spindler & Spindler claim, potential conflicts, misunderstandings and 'blind spots' can be unpacked to reach a rediscovered perception and interpretation of behavior. Kramsch (1993), in her book on foreign language teaching, also uses the notion of a 'third perspective' (C3) as the way to start building an understanding of both the 'home' culture (C1) and the 'target' culture (C2) in foreign language lessons. This more 'distanced' stance would enable learners to take both an insider's and an outsider's view on C1 and C2, which she sees as crucial in cross-cultural communication.

3. Internationalization and the Vietnam project

The last few decades internationalization has flourished in The Netherlands: within Western-Europe borders between the separate nations have more or less vanished and the integration of an international, global dimension in education, research and community service in institutions of (higher) education is seen as highly important by Dutch government officials as well as by people working within the field of education. Projects have been set up in which universities and polytechnics cooperate with government bodies such as the Ministry for the Developing Countries to pool knowledge and resources with institutions in other parts of the world. These projects entail that foreign students come to The Netherlands to complete part of their studies and vice versa, or that teachers share the latest insights in their field with colleagues from abroad. Whatever the format of the projects, people from very different cultural backgrounds are given the opportunity to work together. In this study data from one particular internationalization project will be analyzed: intensive in-service courses taught by the author to lecturers of English language and literature in the School of Education at the University of Cantho in Vietnam.

About two decades ago the Vietnamese government introduced *doi moi*, the Vietnamese 'perestroika'. It meant among other things that people and institutions received permission to establish international contacts. The management teams of all universities in Vietnam were ordered by the Ministry of Education and Training in Hanoi to reform the curriculum and teaching methods of the programs they offered to their students. Furthermore the separate universities were granted more autonomy in certain areas: they were given permission to collaborate with outside organizations, were allowed to organize their own entrance exams and to select and appoint most of their own staff. These innovations were initiated at government level but it is the responsibility of local managers for the changes to be implemented by the members of staff working with the students in the departments. As a consequence of the political changes the system of education in Vietnam is currently in a process of transformation. A shift from an ideologized centrally controlled education system to a more open and decentralized system has been in progress since the early 1990s. As a result of the emerging market economy in the country there is a growing demand for schooling, and teacher education is seen as an important tool to improve educational standards.

From 1995-2005 the University of Cantho, the only institution of its kind in the Mekong delta, and the University of Amsterdam cooperated in the so-called MHO projects (projects for 'The Co-funding of Higher Education'). The main objectives of these projects were the reduction of poverty in the delta, the improvement of the position of women and the protection of the environment. The instruments employed to achieve these goals were curriculum development, and the upgrading of staff, research, facilities and materials. This entailed that Vietnamese members of staff come to the university of Hanoi or Amsterdam to study for an MSc or MA degree or pay working visits to their Dutch colleagues. In return, teacher trainers from the University of Amsterdam went to Vietnam during eight consecutive summers to teach intensive in-service courses to a total of 229 staff members of the School of Education of the University of Cantho. The teachers involved worked within a range of subjects: history, mathematics, science, chemistry, geography, Vietnamese literature, French and English. I taught two English language groups in two consecutive years: 17 university lecturers and 3 High School teachers in the first course and 24 university lecturers in the second course.

The main objective of these courses was to introduce new teaching materials and more interactive teaching methods to the subject-teachers and the teacher trainers, the idea being that these would be implemented in the curriculum and would function as 'loop input' for the teacher-training component. Each course lasted ten days and consisted of a plenary of one hour and a four-hour work group every day. In the plenary Marzano's ideas about interactive teaching and learning (see below) were presented to the students, followed by a session in small work groups, where the teachers worked on applying Marzano's ideas to their own field.

4. The pedagogical framework of the in-service course

When they were in the process of planning the first intensive course, the teachers involved decided that it would be advisable to work within the framework of a pedagogical theory. They decided that Roberto Marzano's *A different kind of classroom - teaching with dimensions of learning* (1992) would fit the bill, partly because this model has been used in the Dutch teacher education programs the trainers worked with, but also because it emphasizes the importance of interactive teaching methods. Marzano presents a method of instruction based on a theory of learning called 'dimensions of learning'. The premise of the model is that the process of learning involves the interaction of five dimensions of thinking: 1) positive attitudes and perceptions about learning, 2) thinking involved in acquiring and integrating knowledge, 3) thinking involved in extending and refining knowledge, 4) thinking involved in using knowledge meaningfully, and 5) productive habits of mind. In Marzano's view learning is a process of constructing meaning; the five dimensions of thinking are to be seen as metaphors for how the mind works during learning. These ideas have consequences for the content of the curriculum, instructional techniques and classroom tasks and the roles of teacher and students. Marzano emphasizes the importance of learning strategies, the organization of a safe and motivating classroom climate, learner autonomy as well as project and group work. The teachers involved in the course agreed on working within this framework and selected specific materials accordingly.

For the workgroups for French and English materials and methods were chosen that reflect the ideas of the communicative approach to language teaching (CLT). CLT classroom practices in the West use authentic materials, link classroom learning to life outside the classroom, emphasize communication through interaction among students, and have a learner-based, content-centered focus. As Brown argues: *'at the heart of current theories of communicative competence is the essential interactive nature of communication ... thus the communicative purpose of language compels us to create opportunities for genuine interaction in the classroom'* (1994, 81). Important aspects of interactive classes are a significant amount of pair- and group work, authentic language input in real-world contexts, language production for meaningful communication.

The implementation of the methodological approaches described above, has consequences for the talk that should be going on in the second or foreign language learning (L2) classroom. The recommendations are that the discourse in L2 classes should be 'authentic' – in the sense that it should be an expression of what the participants in the interaction genuinely feel and believe – whereby the baseline for authentic discourse, for prototypical communication, is seen as 'doing conversation' (van Lier 1996). Since the goal of the communicative framework is to promote more spontaneous student talk, the interaction will have to be organized in such a way that students will self-select turns at talk. This also means a change in student and teacher roles: students are encouraged to be autonomous and to co-operate with their peers in group and pair work and the teachers (partly) lose their traditional role of experts who are in charge of tasks and topics. The traditional teacher-fronted classroom does not lend itself very well to this way of teaching. In order to ensure a predominantly symmetrical organization of classroom floors more informal teaching situations need to be created. In what follows I will investigate how these Western pedagogical and methodological recommendations resonate with unmarked cultural practices for classroom talk in Vietnamese society.

5. Cultural systems

Of all involuntary discourse systems the cultural system is the most inclusive. Dutch culture is deeply rooted in the Western concept of a democratic society. Its predominant ideology is individualism and egalitarianism. Vietnamese society is more hierarchical and collectivistic (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005). So from a very early age people in Vietnam are socialized in discourse forms that emphasize showing respect to those above and providing guidance and leadership for those who come after. Individuals are not so much perceived as independently acting individuals but as acting within the hierarchies of kinship and other social relations. These cultural differences are mirrored by the Dutch and Vietnamese 'face' systems. In linguistic pragmatics 'face' is defined as the combination of unmarked assumptions about the participants and their relationships and the negotiations dealing with those assumptions. It is a paradoxical concept: it deals with involvement and independence, which must both be projected simultaneously in any communication by both speaker and hearer. The calculation of face strategies (or the appropriate face system) is always inextricably tied to the expression of the hierarchical system of relationship between or among participants in an interaction. This shows in the face systems employed by Westerners and Asians. Since hierarchy is important in Asian culture and since most Asians are quite conscious in any interaction of who is older/younger, who has a higher/lower level of status or education, the dominant politeness strategies are those of independence to show deference. In Western society the unmarked strategies are those of involvement to show egalitarianism.

Scollon & Wong-Scollon (1995) argue that the different politeness systems are reflected in the patterns for topic introduction in interactions. Deductive rhetorical strategy – introducing a topic right at the beginning of an interaction – is a face strategy of involvement. Inductive rhetorical strategy – delaying topic introduction – is a politeness strategy of independence. In an asymmetrical politeness system the person in the higher social position will use strategies of involvement. This entails the use of deductive rhetorical strategies. The person with the lower status, on the other hand, will use inductive strategies. As a consequence the person in the higher social position will feel free to initiate topics in interactions, while the person with the lower status will avoid introducing a topic or delay bringing it up until it follows naturally from the preceding discourse. These interactional arrangements have serious consequences for teacher and student roles - it is, e.g., inappropriate for a student to introduce a topic of her own in teacher-student communication - which is reflected in the methodology and routines of foreign language teaching

in Vietnam: the lessons are strictly teacher-fronted, students only speak when explicitly invited to by the teacher to answer a specific question, the teacher is seen as the transmitter of knowledge and the students as empty vessels into which this knowledge should be poured. This type of traditional classroom organization ('chalk and talk'; Kennedy 2000) does not lend itself very well to communicative language teaching. The teacher-centered lesson is by nature asymmetrical and implies more or less strict hierarchical speaker-hearer roles and teacher-student role obligations. As shown above, the target culture in foreign language teaching is communicative and peer-oriented. This means that in order to implement the communicative approach a shift in lesson content by itself will not do the job. There are also far-reaching interactional consequences: the target culture approach to language teaching entails a shift from hierarchical to more symmetrical lesson floors. With the communicative method of language teaching and learning, the emphasis is on individual communication, which reflects an underlying ideology of individualism and egalitarianism. A teacher who espouses the communicative approach to language teaching will promote a face system of symmetrical solidarity, both among the students themselves and between teacher and students. In this system all participants predominantly use strategies of involvement, which is consonant with the deductive strategy of introducing topics, such as introducing one's own thoughts on a particular subject. The concepts 'group work' and 'pair work' are associated with "notions of choice, of independence, of freedom, of privacy, and of equality" (Sullivan 2000, 118). In Western communicative language classes the teacher introduces group work to allow the students to express their individual opinions and feelings, but in Vietnamese culture the purpose of a group is consensus. Introducing the communicative methodology, then, may set up cultural conflicts for both teachers and students who are oriented to a hierarchical face system since *'the discourse system is closely tied to an individual's concept of identity. Any change in the discourse system is likely to be felt as a change in personality and culture ... If we suggest change we have to be very aware that we are not only suggesting change in discourse patterns. We are suggesting a change in a person's identity'*. (Scollon & Scollon 1981, 55).

Below I will discuss three data, which illustrate how cultural and professional parameters are inherited in the context of the in-service course.

6. The data

6.1 Data 1: dress codes revisited

In the introduction of this chapter I mentioned that I had taken a video of an English lesson to Vietnam as an instance of an – in the Dutch context – fairly traditional English lesson as they are frequently taught in schools in The Netherlands. The recorded lesson is teacher-fronted throughout, but there is much lively interaction between teacher and students and the atmosphere is relaxed. I had not anticipated the commotion about the teacher's dress, in spite of the fact that we had been briefed by the project manager on some cultural 'do's and don't's' before our arrival in Vietnam. The way we should dress was an important element during this briefing. We were told that the Vietnamese dress modestly and that we were supposed to wear formal clothing in our role of teachers (cf. Nguyen, Terlouw & Pilot 2006). I had taken these remarks as applying only to real-world face-to-face interactions. As a consequence of this advice I did not bring any bermuda shorts or short skirts, although they suit the climate of Vietnam perfectly. What would have happened if I had ignored the warnings I had been given on the appropriate way to dress and had worn a pair of shorts in class after all? It would have been a 'ritual fault' and the whole repertoire of defense mechanisms in the context of cultural faux pas would have shown up. My students would have kept silent and would have pretended to ignore the transgression ('collusion'; Goffman 1979). In this instance, however, the bermuda shorts were worn by a Dutch teacher who was not present 'live' on the current classroom floor, they were embedded in a 'text world' (Werth 1999). There was no direct identity relation - nobody in the class 'owned' the informal, from a Vietnamese point of view inappropriate, way of dressing - and therefore the subject could safely be put on the agenda of the session, without loss of face for any of the participants. The differences in dress code could be employed for 'cultural therapy' as Spindler & Spindler (1994, 1999) described it: the video constructed a 'third' place, which allowed the dress code to become a point of discussion on the official classroom floor. The culture shock promoted the awareness of global cultural differences for both my Vietnamese

students and myself and formed the basis for reflection on more specific cultural differences in teacher and student roles in The Netherlands and Vietnam.

When I showed the tape to another group of students during the second course, it generated identical comments. I had decided to use the video again, not because it helped achieving content aims of the course – clearly I did not intend to encourage my students to wear bermuda shorts while they were teaching – but because it conveyed an important cultural meta-message which was in line with the objective of exploring the feasibility of introducing innovative, communicative teaching methods: the informal dress of the teacher could be seen as a metaphor for more symmetrical classroom floors and teacher and student roles obtaining in mainstream Western classrooms. This provided me with an opportunity to topicalize the issue without the risk of loss of face for any of the participants of the interaction.

6.2 Data 2: violating rules of cultural conduct

The well-known American film *Dead Poets Society* (1989, directed by Peter Weir) tells the story of the impact of the arrival of an unconventional teacher of English literature on the lives of a group of adolescent boys at an exclusive boarding-school in the USA during the 1950s. The teacher involved intentionally overrules default cultural expectations about teacher roles in order to achieve higher order goals in the world at large. He encourages his students to be original and creative thinkers, to be non-conformist and to seize the day. The boys react to his passionate plea for free thinking according to their personalities and for a while the teacher's approach seems enormously successful. But then one of the boys gets caught in a terrible double bind: his adored teacher advises him to fulfill his ambitions to become an actor while at the same time his father explicitly forbids him to do so. He is unable to cope with this dilemma and commits suicide. The teacher is fired and the students are beaten back into the 'mould' of the school system. However, at the end of the film, when the teacher enters the classroom for one last time to fetch his belongings, a few of his students show him that he has achieved his goals after all.

When I was in the process of selecting the materials I wanted to take with me to Vietnam, I decided to take a video of this film with me, because I thought it would provide some interesting comments on the non-cognitive, affective objectives of the teaching of literature. I had planned the session on the teaching of literature at the end of the course, so that it would follow the plenary on Marzano's fifth dimension *Productive habits of mind*. According to Marzano critical and creative thinking and self-regulation are essential in learning, so the theme of the film would suit the discussion of this dimension.

Before we watched the film, I drew a grid on the blackboard with the names of the main characters of the film. After the first ten minutes, in which the protagonists of the story are introduced, I stopped the video and asked the students what they could tell me about the personalities of the characters on the basis of this short introduction. During the film I wrote the most salient statements that were made on education in general and the teaching of literature in particular on the blackboard.

The students watched the film with great interest and when it was finished a passionate discussion ensued about the responsibilities of teachers and the duty of children to obey their parents. Asian culture emphasizes membership in basic groups such as the family or one's working unit (Scollon & Wong-Scollon 1995). Asians tend to be more conscious of the obligations they have to members of their own social group and therefore of the impact of their actions on other members of their social group. Individual members of a culture are not perceived as independently acting individuals, but they are seen as acting within the hierarchies of kinship and other such relations. The concept of self that is involved in communications is larger in scope than the individual, therefore education and socialization will focus on the development of the broader unit, and success of the individual unit will be seen as part of the activities of the larger units of society. In contrast, the film clearly advocates the western ideal of free choice of the biological individual person: the sympathy of the makers is undoubtedly with the teacher and the non-conformists among his students.

As in data 1, there was no identity relation between one or more persons in the world of the film ('text world'; Werth 1999) and the world in which the story is told: the current social setting or 'discourse

world' (ibid.). This time it could even be said that the issues in the film were 'twice removed' from reality: the film was not a documentary but a story with fictional characters. The dilemma the film puts forward – a respect for authorities versus freedom of choice of the individual – and the clash in cultural perspectives made reflection on differences between Western, Anglo-Saxon and Vietnamese cultural values and their consequences for teacher and student roles possible and necessary. This provided a non-face-threatening framework for a critical assessment of the systems of thought involved, not so much to fill one frame with a different content but to make explicit the boundaries of the frame and try out a different one, which is difficult because of the layer of self-perception on which the outsider's look is based (Kramsch 1993). In this way home culture (C1) and target culture (C2) merged into C3 and so the conditions had been created to question default assumptions on teacher-student roles, lessons, taken for granted procedures. According to Kramsch this third perspective addresses both the insider's and the outsider's view on C1 and C2. This explicitly does not mean that it is a culturally neutral domain but a more complex domain: the C3 is the content and social context intertwined. In this view the class can be seen as an emerging multicultural community.

6.3 Data 3: *off-record floors*

For the first course the English group consisted of seventeen university lecturers and three High School teachers who worked with teacher trainees at their schools. On the second day of the course the only male High School teacher came up to me during the tea-break and asked if I could tell him how he could use the ideas that had been discussed up till then in his school. He added that his classes consisted of at least sixty students, that the classroom furniture had been nailed to the floor, that the rooms were very small and noisy because of the absence of glass windowpanes and that there was no audio-visual equipment available in the school. I reacted by saying that I was glad he had brought up the matter and that I would like to discuss it in class. When we came back after the tea-break, I announced that Mr. D. had come to me and asked me if I could address the issue of compatibility of the methods and materials of the course in the daily teaching practice of Vietnamese schools and classrooms. I continued by saying that I was very happy that he had asked this question and that I thought it would be a good idea if we would try and find answers to his questions together. I suggested that the group would brainstorm about the matter in pairs for five minutes and subsequently discuss their suggestions in the entire group.

I think it is significant that this matter was brought up by one of the High school teachers and that he posed his question to me outside the class during the tea-break (cf. Kennedy 2000; Toh 2003). There was a clear hierarchy among the participants of the course: I was told beforehand that the most senior teacher would be 'head of group' and that it was important that I would recognize this student's special status; the high school teachers were at the bottom of the hierarchy. The low status of the High school teacher meant that loss of face was not as much an issue for him as it was for other members of the group who were higher up in the hierarchy. The question was brought up outside the classroom, not on the official classroom floor, but in an off-record domain. This was possible because we shared a lingua franca: English. If the course had been taught via an interpreter, the only channel to put forward this problem would have been the official, public classroom floor. There the presence of 'overhearers' could have caused loss of face on my behalf since the student's question might have been interpreted as implying cultural incompetence on my part: I had given inappropriate advice, had recommended an approach to teaching which was irrelevant to the local context ('perlocutionary force'; Austin 1962). The absence of a mediator, however, allowed the rules of conduct to be relaxed and enabled the student to ask me a question in private, without the risk of embarrassing me in front of the entire group.

7. Conclusions

With in-service courses two contexts obtain: the primary context of the here-and-now course and the secondary context of the remote teaching practice of the students. There will always be cultural differences that are salient to the here-and-now teaching situation if not to the secondary one: the more homogeneous floor in which current students in their role as teachers have to implement what they have learnt. The cultural expectations students might be willing to violate in their current student role vis-à-vis an outsider, they might not be prepared to enforce in their role of insider-expert. By putting the question

on the official classroom agenda and by not answering myself but by asking the members of the group to come up with suggestions, their expert status in the home culture was acknowledged: if the objective of a course is for the participants to implement the western, in some degree alien ideas in their own classrooms, these ideas must be accommodated to default cultural norms obtaining there. The students are the experts there, and for the success of this part of the course the teacher has to depend on the co-operation and expertise of the students. This role reversal could be explicitly evaluated in class. The students could be asked how they felt about being made 'expert' in this specific discourse situation: could they do this in their own classes; did the teacher lose respect in their eyes by assigning students the role of autonomous experts; would their students respect them less if they did so?

Interactive teaching methods and the communicative approach to language learning are marked vis-à-vis the culturally dominant discourse norm in Vietnam that pervades schools as cultural institutions. Contextual constraints are generated at this cultural level and are inherited presuppositionally as normative conventional expectations for utterances (cf. van Dam 2002). In intercultural communication different discourse systems operate simultaneously (cultural, professional, gender, generation, etc.) and these systems may make competing demands for membership and identity. Vietnamese culture is the higher order 'frame' (Goffman 1974) which is inherited in the way teachers of English as professionals behave. It may be temporarily invalidated in the in-service course, in the here-and-now context, in which the participants of the course act in their role of student/apprentices, but it will come back into force in the daily teaching practice of the students in their role of teachers/experts. In the in-service course discussed in this paper the new methods and knowledge were introduced by teachers who were not culturally competent in Vietnamese society. Although cultural differences are considered a handicap in intercultural communication (cf. Gumperz 1992; House 1997; Scollon & Wong-Scollon 1995), the result of this incompetence of the trainer was that cultural norms were 'mentionables' and could be put on the agenda as a permanently relevant topic to be oriented to.

8. Pedagogical frameworks revisited

Western teacher trainers and educational consultants have swamped Southeast Asia during the past two decades. Political leaders of countries such as Thailand, China and Vietnam urge the population of their countries to learn English. The instrumental benefits are huge: English has become the international language for commerce, technology and science and therefore of key importance for the socio-economic development of this part of the world. With the introduction of English as an important educational asset came Western so-called advanced teaching methodologies (Le Ha 2004) and, as slowly emerged, inherent socio-cultural dilemmas. As Ouyang argues in an impressive paper on a Chinese teacher's attempts to introduce CLT in her personal context: *'It is my conviction that education reform seen purely from a methodological perspective is superficial ... A change in methodology ... involves ... a remaking of socialization processes guided by different ideologies, as well as a remaking of social identities and power relations.'* (2000, 398; cf. Jacob 1997). CLT, e.g., with its emphasis on group learning within a constructivist social environment may entail bringing the teacher's knowledge into question (Nguyen 2006), which has grave consequences for the status of teachers in the society at large. Asian teachers's roles differ from their Western counterparts: their task is not only to teach their subject, they are also 'moral guides' (Kramsch & Sullivan 1996): they act as role models for their students.

Cultural differences in the educational practices of the Western, Anglosaxon and Asian world should be perceived as what they really are: as differences not as deficits. If we discard the Self-Other dichotomy (Pennycook 1998) that underpins this prejudice it becomes clear that educational practices are deeply embedded in the culture of the region. It is important we develop a sensitivity to detail of context (Coulby 2006) and search for harmonious combinations of local and global pedagogies. Le Ha (2004) reports on the accounts of two Vietnamese university teachers of their own teaching and concludes that they use a variety of pedagogical approaches. They remain faithful to their traditional teacher role while at the same time "encouraging students to ask questions ..[to help] them to become engaged in 'reflective thinking and critical thinking'." (2004, 54). Sullivan (2000), in an investigation of English language classes in Vietnam, found that the lessons were mostly 'uncommunicative' according to the accepted, Western definition: the classes were generally teacher-fronted, with very little group-work or use of authentic material. She also found, though, 'rhythmically tuned responses and the formation of playful

narratives [which] can be considered as an important part of learning, whether in Vietnam or the Anglo-Saxon world' (2000, 130) and therefore concludes that '*examination of the use of CLT in 'non-core' countries such as Vietnam requires us to confront the historical embeddedness of English terms and to reflect on Anglo-centric values that are being exported within a framework of 'communicative' classroom activities. By broadening the definition of CLT to one that can include teacher-led, playful oral narrative styles, for instance, we are encouraged to recognize the many ways that CLT is being appropriated throughout the world*' (Sullivan 2000, 131).

9. Concluding remarks

I have learned from my experiences that in the context of cross-cultural in-service courses it is important to identify possible culturally inappropriate procedures and ideas and locally introduce and topicalize these aspects in the learning situation. I realize how important it is to recognize the expert role of the students: if it is for them to decide whether novel ideas and methods will benefit their teaching or not, will fit the default cultural norms obtaining in their practice. For the success of that part of an in-service course the teacher is dependent on the openness and expertise of her students, and teacher and students have to negotiate among themselves how this can be done. The obvious way is by listening to the students, by encouraging them to develop their own voice and by respecting their judgement. During the two courses I taught I tried to anticipate, create and exploit interactional slots that are non-threatening, non-current or non-public. The data analyzed above show that this approach provided opportunities to discuss a ritual fault and the violation of cultural norms in a 'text-world', which bears no identity relation to the current social setting. Off-record floors also appear to be important: since they are non-public, there are no 'overhearers', which makes them a 'safe place' to deal with sensitive issues.

If dimensions of cultural discrepancy are made explicit and cultural teacher and student expectations are discussed students and teacher will *both* learn. This will result in 'intercultural reciprocity' (Coulby 2006, 247): all participants involved in the project will become aware of the global and specific contextual factors which influence their daily teaching practice. The in-service course then evolves into a genuine 'third' place, from which C1 and C2 can be reflected upon without loss of face. This will allow students and trainer to 'remain and become': to be members of a truly intercultural community.

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About the Author

Anne Bannink is assistant professor of Linguistics at the English Department of the University of Amsterdam. She also works as a teacher educator at the Graduate School of Teaching and Learning of the same university. Her research interests include discourse studies, second/foreign language acquisition, anthropology of education and intercultural communication. In her PhD thesis she analysed the socio-cultural and interactional dimensions of four types of educational encounters in higher education. She is coordinator of the *ACLIC research group* Multiparty Discourse and Anthropology of Education (<http://www.hum.uva.nl/aclc/object.cfm/objectid=39109DE4-FAC5-4D90-AE6B98E8575EAC77>)

Author's Address

Affiliations: Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication
University of Amsterdam
Spuistraat 210
1012VT Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Telephone: +31 20 5253053
Fax: +31 20 5253052
E-mail: e.a.bannink@uva.nl

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