

THE CULTURE ASSIMILATOR: A TOOL
FOR TEACHING CULTURE IN
THE ESL COMPOSITION
CLASSROOM

By

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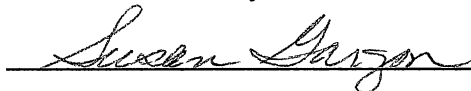
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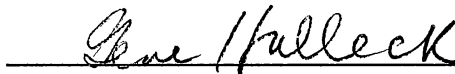
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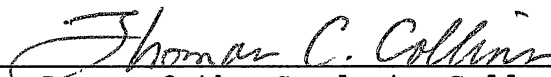
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although many language teachers realize the importance of incorporating culture into their classrooms, they don't always know what aspects of culture to teach or how to teach them. Several models have been developed to integrate language and culture into the classroom (Nostrand, 1978, Seelye, 1984, Lafayette 1978, Crawford-Lange and Lange, 1989). There have been techniques developed to introduce cultural elements into the classroom, culture capsules (Taylor and Sorenson, 1961) and culture clusters (Meade and Morain, 1973).

A third technique, the culture assimilator (Fiedler et al., 1971), is a method of cross-cultural training that has been suggested for use in the foreign language classroom (Lafayette, 1978, Seelye, 1984, Hughes, 1986, Dunnett et al., 1986 and Crawford-Lange and Lange 1989), but has not been developed extensively for the ESL classroom. The purpose of this study is to develop assimilator episodes and a method for teaching them in an ESL classroom.

This study begins in Chapter Two with a review of literature on teaching culture in the language classroom and previous research on the culture assimilator. Chapter Three

explains how five assimilator episodes were developed for this study. The steps explained in this chapter include the generation of the incident, the generation of the responses to the incident, validation of the responses and generation of the explanations for the responses. A discussion of the results of the validation and an overall discussion of the method of developing the episodes is included.

Chapter Four explains the method that was used to teach the assimilator episodes developed in Chapter Three. The episodes were taught in an ESL composition course at Oklahoma State University. The method of teaching included a discussion of cross-cultural communication and then the students doing the episodes in groups in class. Students also took episodes home. The results of the student responses are discussed. An evaluation of the teaching method is included based on my observations and the observations of the instructors of the course.

Chapter Five discusses the implications of this study for future development of assimilator episodes using the method in this study. The need for incorporating the assimilator episodes into other ESL classrooms is also discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND TO TEACHING CULTURE AND THE CULTURE ASSIMILATOR

As language teachers, we are often so busy teaching the basic skills, that we don't have the time to address the culture that shapes the language that we are teaching. This may seem to be less of a problem for the ESL teacher than the foreign language teacher because the ESL student is living the culture and most ESL teachers are from the culture of the language they are teaching. But, in spite of the fact that the ESL teacher is an expert on his or her culture, he or she is still faced with the question of what aspects of culture he or she should be teaching and how to present those aspects in the classroom. This chapter discusses how the teaching of culture has developed over the last thirty years, what methods have been proposed and then finally, introduces and discusses the culture assimilator, which is the focus of this study, as a technique for teaching culture in the language classroom.

Teaching Culture in the Language Classroom

These days, when communicative competence is the goal, and there is a call for the use of authentic materials, the teaching of culture must be at the center of language teaching. Indeed, Morain (1983) explains that the prevalent opinion is that "culture is the *raison d'etre* for language study" (p.405). This has been generally recognized, as Patrikis (1987) says, "Every recent general work on language pedagogy has its canonical section on cultural understanding." In fact, he claims that the recently popular phrase "content-mediated instruction" is the description of the integration of language and culture (p. 4). These statements indicate that there has been agreement, especially, in recent years that incorporating culture into the classroom is crucial: "The momentum of the eighties provides the basis for departmental consensus in that the sociocultural context of a language is essential, first, for communicative competence and, second, for the education of Americans today" (Nostrand, 1988, p. 30).

Central to the issue of teaching culture in the classroom is the type of culture that is to be taught. Traditionally, the culture that was being taught in the classroom was of the variety "Big C", which Morain (1983) describes as the culture of the fine arts. Since the sixties, with the advent of the audiolingual method she says that a new type of culture was introduced to the language

classroom and that was the culture with a "Little c", which is the sociological/anthropological meaning of culture that includes the type of culture that describes the daily life and value systems of people (p. 403).

Nostrand (1988) gives us some insight into the path that the teaching of the culture of the sociological/anthropological variety has followed since the push to incorporate it in the classroom. The 1960s reflected a more positive attitude toward incorporating culture in the classroom than that of the 1950s. Nostrand adds that by the 1970s, teachers would claim to introduce culture in the classroom, but the material that was introduced was in bits and pieces and unorganized. The 1980s brought the recognition that these disorganized bits needed to be organized and integrated into language teaching. He claims that by integrating language and culture, the two can be mutually beneficial which, in turn, benefits the student: "As a result, both [language and culture] grow more interesting, motivation is aroused, and learning becomes more efficient" (p.29).

The introduction of the "Little c" culture has raised with it many questions for the language teacher which Nostrand (1978) poses:

If then, we decide to seek descriptive knowledge of a culture, we face a series of questions. What is to be its purpose? Let us suppose it to be cross-cultural understanding and communication. By what criteria

shall we select, out of the infinite whole, what is essential to be described? How define the essential elements, and on what standard of evidence? How organize the essentials into an adult understanding? And finally, how unfold the result for a given type of learner? (p. 277)

In response to these questions, there have been efforts to provide frameworks in which to present, in an organized manner, the bits and pieces of culture that were taught in the 1970s (Nostrand, 1978, Lafayette, 1978, Seelye, 1984, Crawford-Lange and Lange, 1989).

To incorporate any one of these fully in the classroom would take a change in curriculum. For example, Crawford-Lange and Lange's (1989) integrative system incorporates eight stages in the process: identifying a cultural theme, presentation of cultural phenomena, dialogue, transition to language teaching, verification of perceptions, cultural awareness and evaluation of language and cultural proficiency (pp. 146-150). In order to effectively introduce this system into the classroom the curriculum would have to be designed around it. Curriculum development is very seldom an area in which the language teacher has the power to effect a major change.

Nevertheless, Seelye (1984) maintains that cultural instruction must be purposeful to be effective (p. 48) and these systems offer up some guidelines that the language

teacher can follow in order to make the cultural material he or she introduces into the classroom purposeful.

Thus far, the teaching of culture has been discussed in terms of the foreign language classroom. These issues are relevant to the ESL classroom as well, a place where one may not think that teaching culture is necessary since the students are living in the culture of the language they are studying and the teachers are native speakers of the language. McLeod (1976) argues that it is necessary because the international student who comes to the U.S. is not here long enough to go through the hypothesis testing that is necessary to acquire a new culture. In addition, she claims that though the ESL teacher may be a native speaker of the language and as a result, teaching the culture implicitly, the students may not get "the message" unless the material is made explicit (p. 212).

The guidelines for making cultural material purposeful must be expanded to include the special needs of the ESL classroom. The models developed for the foreign language classroom and the suggestions made for the ESL classroom can be combined to yield guidelines that will be discussed in the following section.

Guidelines for Teaching Culture

First of all, the classroom material must integrate language learning and culture learning (Crawford-Lange and

Lange, 1989, Seelye, 1984). Obviously this is important for the language classroom.

Then, McLeod (1976) suggests the use of materials which illustrate cultural relativity. She says that teaching the concept of cultural relativity, the theoretical equality between cultures, will help the student respect the culture he or she is studying. Dunnett et al. (1986) also emphasize the fact that cultural discussions in the EFL class should be guided in such a way that "they do not become judgmental and lead to the conclusion that some cultures are superior or inferior" (p. 158). McLeod claims that teaching cultural relativity will promote cultural relativity in the heterogeneous classroom(p. 214).

Another guideline for teaching culture proposed by Crawford-Lange and Lange (1989) is that the material address the affective as well as the cognitive domain. The second language situation indicates special needs for the student because the student will be going out into the culture when he or she leaves the classroom. Hughes (1986) emphasizes the importance of the affective domain for the students. Individual or psychological issues that include an individual's motives, intention, desires, and reasons for behavior are more important to second language students than institutional issues that he defines as forms of organization, concepts, customary beliefs and patterns of behavior. By studying the psychological issues, the student can relate to the value system of the culture that he or she

is living in and make some decisions about his or her own values (p. 162).

This leads to the last guideline; the material should be relevant to the interests of the students (Sesso, 1979, Brooks, 1986). The culture that we present in the classroom should reflect the culture that the students encounter when they walk out of the classroom. The cultural material should reflect what Archer (1986) refers to as the culture bump, a situation in which "an individual from one culture finds himself or herself in a different, strange or uncomfortable situation when interacting with persons of a different culture" (p. 171). To ease the resulting anxiety from these encounters, Archer suggests discussing these situations in class. By discussing these culture bumps in class, the teacher gives the students the language to talk about the situations. Talking about the bump depersonalizes the situation, which allows the student to examine it without emotional stress. This also teaches the students how to re-form perceptions of culture (Crawford-Lange and Lange, 1989).

The students should understand that social variables affect the way people behave and speak (Seelye, 1986, p. 50). In addition to the understanding of social variables, the students should understand that culture itself is a changing variable (Crawford-Lange and Lange, 1989).

So there are several things to consider before incorporating culture in the language classroom. Language

and culture learning should be integrated. The affective as well as the cognitive aspects should be considered. The material should be of interest to the student and culture should be understood as a changing variable. These guidelines help the teacher to understand what kinds of materials to use to teach culture. The question now is how to present the material.

There are two techniques that have been developed specifically for presenting culture in the foreign language classroom, the culture capsule (Taylor and Sorenson 1961) and culture clusters (Meade and Morain 1973). The culture capsule, as explained by Seelye (1984) consists of "a paragraph or so of explanation of a minimal difference between an American and a target custom, along with several illustrative photos or relevant realia" (p. 129). Taylor and Sorenson (1961) insist that the piece of realia is crucial to the culture capsule. A presentation is made of the culture capsule and the students are asked questions following the presentation. Culture clusters tie together about three capsules in a unit. The unit is followed by a simulation. Both the culture capsule and culture clusters have been implemented into the language classroom (Lafayette, 1978, Seelye 1984, Crawford-Lange and Lange, 1989).

The culture assimilator is a third technique, which was originally developed by a group of psychologists for cross-cultural training. The assimilator episodes also begin with

a minimal difference, a paragraph or so describing a situation in which a crosscultural misunderstanding has occurred. The students are then required to chose the correct response that explains the situation. They are then given immediate feedback through explanations of each response. The difference between the assimilator and the capsule is that the explanation of the minimal difference is given to the students as part of the presentation of the capsule and with the assimilator, the student is required identify the difference (Seelye, 1984, p. 129). The culture assimilator has been recommended widely and implemented in the language classroom (Lafayette, 1978, Seelye, 1984, Hughes, 1986, Dunnett et al. 1986, Crawford-Lange and Lange 1989).

There are several advantages of the assimilator over the traditional method of reading books for cultural information: "Assimilators are more fun to read; they actively involve the student with a cross-cultural problem; and they have been shown to be more effective in controlled experiments" (Seelye, 1984, p. 117). There are also advantages of the assimilator over the culture capsules and culture clusters. The assimilator is more versatile. Brislin (1986) says that the assimilator can be used by individuals or by groups, they can be used as a basis for group discussions or they can be used as a take-off for role play (p.25). In contrast, the capsule is designed to be used in a more structured manner in the classroom and the

clusters are time consuming, in addition to having the disadvantages of the culture capsule. The fact that the students must identify the misunderstanding in the assimilator episode gives them practice in problem solving is an advantage of the assimilator. In addition, the explanations that are provided at the end of the assimilator episode are valuable because they not only explain the correct answer for the situation, but also the incorrect answers.

The Culture Assimilator

Before discussing how the assimilator can be incorporated into the language classroom the assimilator needs to be discussed. Fiedler et al. (1971) define the culture assimilator as "a programmed learning experience designed to expose members of one culture to some of the basic concepts, attitudes, role perceptions, customs and values of another culture"(p. 95). Fiedler et al. recommend analyzing the subjective culture of the two groups to get an understanding of those customs, values and perceptions (p. 96). Triandis (1971) defines subjective culture as "a cultural group's characteristic way of perceiving its social environment" (p. 3).

When individuals come from two different subjective cultures, their perceptions of a situation may differ drastically and the situation may be interpreted differently by the individuals. In this situation, each individual is

making different attributions about the situation.

Attributions are "inferences about the causes of behavior" (Albert, 1983). If each individual comes from a different subjective culture, the potential for misunderstanding can be large. The culture assimilator is designed to examine the attributions that individuals make based on their subjective culture and to reduce the misunderstandings that occur in cross cultural situations.

In order to enable the individual to examine the attributions that he or she is making based on his or her own subjective culture, the individual must be presented with concrete situations. The concrete situations that the culture assimilator employs are called critical incidents. Fiedler et al. (1971) describe the ideal critical incident for the American going overseas: "the ideal incident must describe (a) a common occurrence in which an American and a host national interact; (b) a situation which the American finds conflictful, puzzling, or which he is likely to misinterpret; and (c) a situation which can be interpreted in a fairly unequivocal manner, given sufficient knowledge about the culture. Finally, the incident must be relevant to the American's task or mission requirements" (p. 97). The culture assimilator consists of several critical incidents (Fiedler et al. recommend 75-100, p. 99).

Each critical incident is followed by alternative responses to the episode. Of the four or five alternative responses, Fiedler et al. recommend that all be plausible

but only one correct while the others contain various "ethnographic errors"(p. 98). Following the alternative responses are feedback explanations in which the individual is informed whether their choice was appropriate or not and why. They also provide the individual with more information about the culture (Fiedler et al. 1971, p. 98). Fiedler et al. add that one of the "most important functions of feedback is to expose the learner to some of the major themes characterizing the two cultures with which he is working"(p.99).

In summary, the culture assimilator is a method of cross cultural training that focuses on the attributions that the individual makes based on his or her subjective culture. The culture assimilator consists of a number of critical incidents which are episodes of contact between two individuals from two different cultures in which there is a misunderstanding of the behavior involved. The critical incidents are followed by alternative explanations for the behavior and the alternatives are then followed by feedback explanations which inform the trainee whether the alternative he or she has selected is correct or not and why, often expanding on an underlying theme that the incident illustrates.

There is an involved process in the development of the culture assimilator for which Albert (1983) gives a clear explanation step by step. The first step that Albert describes is the development of the episodes. This can be

done in several ways: through direct observation of interactions, personal interviews, questionnaires, or group discussions (Albert, 1983, p. 191). Albert also adds two other ways that episodes can be generated: 1. through ethnographic and historical records and 2. by analyzing the subjective cultures of the two cultural groups (p. 191).

Brislin's (1986) method is similar to what Albert has suggested as the observation of interactions. Brislin used the participants in a workshop for cross-cultural trainers to generate episodes for his culture-general assimilator by having the participants relate episodes from their own cross-cultural experiences which they thought would be relevant for the task at hand (creating episodes for a culture general-assimilator). This study follows Brislin's example and generates episodes from situations of cross-cultural experience because students can participate in the process through their own cross-cultural experiences.

The next step in developing the culture assimilator is constructing the episodes. The incidents generated are often too specific or too general for use in the assimilator, so the developer must extract the most useful episodes from the ones generated. Albert discusses the criteria for a good episode: "the episode should be a clear and straight forward representation of the original conflict situation. These representatives should capture the essential features of the situations with enough detail to be vivid, yet not so much as to detract from the central

issues...And they should "speak" to the intended audience in terms of both content and language use" (p. 192).

The next step is what Albert calls the elicitation of attributions. This is the step where the alternative responses that appear at the end of the critical incident are elicited. To elicit the responses, several methods have been suggested. Knowledgeable informants or material from subjective culture studies can be used (Albert, 1983, Fiedler et al., 1971). Brislin et al. (1986) used a team of people experienced in different types of cross-cultural interaction, those who have worked with international students or business people or missionaries, to elicit the alternative explanations for their culture-general assimilator (p. 28).

The next step that Albert lists is the selection of attributions. This is a step that is often done at the time of elicitation of attributions (Brislin et al., 1986, Fiedler et al., 1971).

After the assimilator episode is created, there is a validation process for the episodes. Fiedler et al. (1971) gave the episode with the alternative explanations to a sample of people from the target culture (the culture about which the attributions are being made). The subjects were asked to choose the best alternative and those episodes that had the highest agreement rate between the researcher's best choice and the subjects' best choice were kept as part of the total assimilator. Fiedler et al. also asked the

subjects to rate the importance of the episodes, thereby helping to decide which incidents represented "the most frequent and most important problems that occur" (p. 99).

Brislin (1986) modified this process and used experienced sojourners who had had at least two years of intense cross-cultural experience for their validation sample (p. 44). The validation was done through the mail and the subjects were given a brief introduction to the task and then given instructions for the task. Not only were the subjects asked to decide which answer was most appropriate, they were given a scale for each alternative. They were asked to check one of six spaces that ran from "I am certain that this is correct" to "I am certain that this is not correct" to the question "How likely is it that this alternative is correct?". For statistical analysis, a numerical weight was given to each choice from the scale (p. 46).

Numerous evaluations have been done on developed assimilators. In fact, "this approach to cross-cultural training has been evaluated more extensively than other approaches" (Brislin and Pederson, 1976, cited in Albert, 1983). Albert (1983) reviews the evaluations and concludes,

It is clear from all of the studies conducted so far that the ICS [culture assimilator] is an effective instrument for imparting cultural information. A number of studies have shown that it increases the isomorphic attributions made by trainees, and that it

facilitates interpersonal relations between the trainees and members of the target culture.

In addition, she says that although the findings are less clear about attitudinal and behavioral changes, the assimilators do affect task performance (p. 209).

Summing up, she states that the culture assimilator is "ideally suited for educational purposes. In addition, "The ICS [culture assimilator] is basically a cognitive instrument and the evidence suggests that it is very effective as a culture learning and training device" (p. 210).

The culture assimilator has traditionally been used in a situation where cultures interact one-on-one. Fiedler et al. (1971) designed their assimilators for Americans interacting in another culture. For example, they report the results of studies done on an Arab assimilator, a Thai assimilator and a Greek assimilator. All three assimilators were designed for use by American military personnel in those respective countries. Albert (1983) finds this traditional use restrictive and says that the assimilator method could apply to ethnic groups within a country or foreign nationals coming to the United States or "any cultural group interacting with members of any other cultural group anywhere in the world" (p. 191).

Brislin et al. (1986) have taken this one step further and have created a culture-general assimilator that is designed to help members of any culture adjust to any other

culture. Brislin feels that the creation of a culture-general assimilator will provide cross-cultural training material that will be of widespread use, something that the culture specific assimilators have not been able to accomplish (p. 25). Incidents that are used in the culture-general assimilator involve people from various cultures, not just Americans and one other culture. The incidents in the culture general assimilator also represent situations that might be helpful for the tourist or the student or someone working in another culture. So the assimilator is designed to assist people with various goals interacting in various cultures.

For ESL students, the culture-general assimilator would be more useful than the assimilator originally designed by Fiedler. The main reason for this is that many times the ESL classroom is culturally heterogeneous. It would not be beneficial to have an assimilator that focused on two cultures in the heterogeneous classroom. The general type of assimilator would also be more useful because the goals for being in the U.S. may vary from student to student.

Brislin (1986) reports successful use of his culture-general assimilator by Broaddus(1986), who gave the assimilator to undergraduate psychology students. Broaddus found that people who are trained by the culture-general assimilator analyze cross-cultural situations better than untrained people. The trained students in the study also scored significantly higher on a test of attitudes and

behavior concerning intercultural interaction (Brislin p.51).

Cushner (1987) reports the results of a study using the culture-general assimilator created by Brislin et al. (1986) modified for use by AFS students to New Zealand. The subjects for the study were 50 students from 14 countries. The control group and the treatment group attended two weekend sessions with two sessions in each weekend. The treatment group was trained with the culture-general assimilator and the control group spent the time in discussion groups. Tests were conducted immediately following, three months and six months following the training session. Comparing the two groups, Cushner reports, "the number of significant differences found in this study suggests that the culture-general assimilator is capable of bringing about marked improvement in individuals' knowledge about factors affecting cross cultural interaction and adjustment as well as increased ability to adjust to the demands of an international sojourn"(1987, p.11).

Ilola (1991) used 12 culture-general assimilator episodes combined with a method of cooperative learning to give cross-cultural training to school teacher trainees, who would be teaching in multicultural classrooms. The students did the assimilator episodes in triads with Ilola guiding discussion of the episodes following the group work. The results of her study indicated that the combined assimilator/group training was successful in that

"participants demonstrated greater intercultural problem solving ability as demonstrated by solving new problems, providing explanations for underlying issues in intercultural conflict, and analyzing personal experiences" (p. 19).

Conclusion

Over the years, teaching the anthropological meaning of culture has come to be recognized as important in the language classroom. This applies not only to the foreign language classroom, but to the ESL classroom. The culture assimilator, a proven technique of cross-cultural training, has been also used to teach culture in the foreign language classroom. Several qualities make culture assimilators desirable: they are enjoyable for the students, they engage the student in a problem solving activity, and they can be incorporated into a variety of classroom activities, such as group discussion or role play.

Most of all, the culture assimilator fulfills the guidelines outlined in this chapter for what kind of cultural material should be introduced. The assimilator can be used to integrate language learning and culture learning (Crawford-Lange and Lange, 1989, p. 164) and to promote cultural relativity (Dunnett et al., 1986). Since the assimilator episodes represent culture bumps, discussing them can reduce anxiety about cross-cultural conflicts (Archer, 1986). The assimilator also addresses the

affective domain. The assimilator also emphasizes the variability of culture by allowing for discussion of how a conflict would be perceived in different segments of the culture. And finally, the assimilator covers material of interest to the students. The students who participated in Ilola's (1990) study reported that they benefited from the exercise and that it was enjoyable (p. 1).

In the next chapter, the steps that were used to develop the assimilator episodes for this study will be addressed. Sources for generating critical incidents and responses will be discussed. Responses to the incidents will be evaluated based on the responses of a validation sample and the explanations for the developed episodes will be discussed

CHAPTER III

THE CREATION AND VALIDATION OF THE CULTURE ASSIMILATOR EPISODES

Numerous culture assimilators have been developed for and successfully used in cross-cultural training. Foreign language classrooms have incorporated the assimilators as a language learning tool. This study explores whether culture assimilator episodes can successfully be used as a tool for teaching culture in the ESL composition classroom and at the same time help the students improve their writing skills. To test this, five assimilator episodes were developed and then incorporated into an International Freshman Composition course, English 1013.

The second thing that this study does is to explore whether the assimilator episodes can be developed by the ESL teacher using student generated input. Because the development process is long and complicated and assimilators are not widely available nor designed specifically for the individual ESL classroom, a simple method of developing the assimilator episodes would be beneficial to the ESL teacher. This chapter describes the process used in this study to

create the five assimilator episodes that were taught in English 1013.

Generating Incidents

The steps follow those outlined by Albert (1983) which were discussed in Chapter Two: generating incidents, generating responses, validating the responses and generating explanations. The following section will discuss each of the steps involved in generating the incidents for this study.

Sources of Critical Incident Generation

Generation of critical incidents is the first step in creating assimilator episodes. For this study, several sources were used to elicit the critical incidents. First, the material from a journal topic assigned in English 0003 (International Composition for Graduate Students) from Spring 1991 was used. This assignment was originally given to the students because I was curious about their cross-cultural experiences and felt it would be a useful writing assignment. The students were asked to write about an experience that they had had with an American where they felt confused or embarrassed. This assignment was not originally given to elicit critical incidents for the assimilator episodes, but some responses were found to be useful when creating the episodes.

The second source for eliciting critical incidents was the students enrolled in two sections of English 1033 (the second semester of undergraduate international English composition). The elicitation of incidents from these students was specifically done to help create the assimilator episodes for this study. The students were asked to write about a situation that they had encountered in the United States that may have confused, embarrassed or upset them. There were 28 students in this group. This group was chosen because most of them had been in the United States longer than one semester. Therefore, they would have had more opportunity for interaction with Americans than students in the first semester composition course.

Critical incidents were also elicited informally from TESL graduate students. Some of these students were international students and some were Americans who had had overseas experience. The international experience of both the international and American students in this group produced some interesting material for critical incidents.

Results of the Critical Incidents

The incidents that the 1033 and 0003 students wrote the most often about were not cross-cultural misunderstandings but language problems. One Chinese student reported that he had asked for chili sauce in a restaurant and the waitress had brought cherry jam. Another student related a story in which he and an American friend went to a dorm function and

the student was terrified when the friend asked him if he wanted a punch (the drink). None of these language situations were used because they did not represent a cross-cultural problem. There were several other incidents that students wrote that were not cross-cultural problems, such as a message that was mistakenly left for a roommate or a commentary on how men and boys here listen to heavy metal. However, other responses did yield culture-related incidents.

The second most frequently-discussed incident was the fact that Americans smile and say hi to strangers. Especially troubling to the students was the fact that Americans rarely, if ever follow up on these encounters. One student commented that he felt this made Americans "false". These responses were the basis for the **Making Friends** (Appendix F) incident which depicts a situation where a Chinese student is puzzled by the fact that an American with whom he has had a conversation does not acknowledge him at a later date.

The incident **A Hug** (Appendix G) was based on an observation of a Sudanese TESL student who indicated that Americans don't greet each other the same way that Sudanese do. **A Hug** tells about an American and a Sudanese who are friends and the Sudanese hugs the American in greeting at the airport, which makes the American uncomfortable.

Speaking Out (Appendix B) was based on the classroom experience of a TESL graduate student. This incident talks

about a Chinese student who starts talking to a classmate in the middle of class while the professor is lecturing. The professor stops lecturing and looks at the Chinese student who becomes confused.

Paying the Bill (Appendix B) is an incident that tells about how an American invites his Sudanese friend to go out to a restaurant, but pays only for his own meal which upsets the friend. **Having Dinner** (Appendix E) is a situation in which Ken and his Pakistani friend, Khalid, make plans to go to dinner, but Khalid comes to the restaurant late. Both of these incidents came from an informal discussion of potential incidents with several TESL students. The consensus was that these were a common source of misunderstanding.

On the Phone (Appendix D) is a situation in which Armando who comes from a Latin American country receives a phone solicitation during dinner and doesn't know how to get off the phone politely. This incident was developed from comments that the 0003 students made in their journals about different phone calls. I felt that phone solicitations were often difficult even for Americans so the information would be valuable to the international students.

Burp (Appendix C) is an incident in which an Indonesian student burps following dinner to show his appreciation for dinner. His American hosts are offended and he does not know why. This was an incident reported by a 1033 student. Based on my own cross-cultural experience, I felt that this

would be a source of misunderstanding between Americans and internationals.

The episodes, **Burp** and **Having Dinner** were developed to replace the episodes **Speaking Out** and **Paying the Bill** because the latter two were found unsuitable after generating responses for them. Because they were not included in the group of developed episodes they are both in incident form in Appendix B.

There were several very good incidents that were not developed for the study. One student was shocked that Americans do not remove their shoes when they come in the house. Another student wrote that, while students leave class before the professor does in the U.S., this is unacceptable in Malaysian society. Yet another student was concerned over the treatment of the elderly in the U.S. These are excellent possibilities for future episode development.

Discussion

Overall, the material obtained from all three sources was useful for developing the critical incidents. The responses of the 0003 students were interesting. The responses of the TESL graduate students were very good because they were produced within the context of informal conversations about cross-cultural interactions and these students have more cross-cultural experience. I think that the 1033 responses might have been even better if the

students had been given a more detailed explanation of the type of situation they were expected to produce. Perhaps introducing a completed assimilator episode to these students before they wrote the assignment would have made the task more clear and would have resulted in more appropriate incidents.

Procedure for Writing the Incidents and Questions

After collecting the material from the 0003, 1033 classes and TESL graduate students, I chose five situations and wrote critical incidents for this study. The incidents were chosen based on that fact that they illustrated some kind of cross-cultural conflict. The historical present verb tense was used in the incidents for ease of understanding and for a narrative quality that is enjoyable to read. The names of the characters used in the incidents are common to the culture that they represent. For example, the names Bob and Ken were used for the Americans and Khalid for a Pakistani.

I then wrote questions for each incident that would elicit responses explaining the cross-cultural misunderstanding. For example, the question for the episode **Paying the Bill** (Appendix B) asks why Ahmed is upset. For the incident **On the Phone** (Appendix D), the question requires a solution to the problem at hand. These questions would elicit responses in the next step of developing the

assimilator episodes and would be the questions in final developed episodes.

Following Brislin's (1986) example of a culture-general assimilator, the incidents varied in the cultures that were represented because the target group was heterogeneous. Like Brislin's (1986) culture-general assimilator, each of these incidents is designed to teach all students something about cross-cultural communication.

Generating Responses

Once the critical incidents have been elicited, generating responses is the next step in developing the culture assimilator episodes. Each incident in an assimilator episode is followed by several potential explanations of the misunderstanding. The following section will discuss the students who participated in this step of episode development and the responses that they gave.

Subjects

The group of subjects that participated in this part of the development of the episodes was students who were enrolled in English composition classes at Oklahoma State University in the Fall 1991 semester. They included English 1013 students, international students in the first semester of their English requirement and English 0003 students. This group consisted of 49 students. The incidents were also

given to a group of 19 English 1113 students, undergraduate American students in the first semester of their freshman composition requirement.

The responses of the American students were overwhelmingly correct, which did not make them useful for generating distractors, but it did help in developing correct responses. This also indicated that the 1113 students would be a good validation group. For the episodes, **Speaking Out**, **Paying the Bill** and **Hug**. the discussion of the American responses will precede the discussion of the international students responses. **On the Phone** was not given to the American students due a time restraint. One episode that produced interesting responses from both the American and international students was the **Making Friends** episode. The results of some of the American responses will be discussed with the international student's responses of this incident.

Table I shows the background information that the international students were required to provide on the cover sheet. Under student status, several different items appear as they were reported by the students. PhD, MS (master of science), MA (master of arts) and Grad are the graduate students enrolled in 0003. The remaining students are undergraduates who are indicated by class Freshman, Sophomore, or Junior. One student just put undergraduate and that is indicated in the table by U.Grad. American

students were not asked to provide personal information so they are not included on this table.

TABLE I
STUDENTS WHO GENERATED RESPONSES

Native Country	Native Language	Age	Length Stay	Student Status	TOEFL Score
China	Chinese	31	3 mo.	PhD	577
China	Chinese	N/A	6 mo.	Grad	580
China	Chinese	31	3 mo.	PhD	590
China	Chinese	25	3 mo.	Grad	600
China	Chinese	30	3 mo.	Grad	550
Korea	Korean	28	2 yr.	Grad	560
Korea	Korean	25	4 mo.	N/A	N/A
Korea	Korean	N/A	2 mo.	MS	N/A
Taiwan	Chinese	25	2 mo.	Grad	N/A
China	Chinese	34	3 mo.	PhD	577
China	Chinese	40	4 mo.	MA	610
Macau	Chinese	25	3 mo.	Grad	553
China	Chinese	29	3 mo.	Grad	593
Malaysia	Malaysian	N/A	2 yr.	Jr.	540
Malaysia	Chinese	32	10 mo.	Jr.	560
Malaysia	Malay	23	3 yr.	Soph.	N/A
Pakistan	Urdu	21	3 mo.	Soph.	N/A
Malaysia	Mandarin	23	N/A	Fr.	N/A
Malaysia	Chinese	N/A	3 mo.	Fr.	N/A
Indonesia	Indonesian	19	3 mo.	Fr.	523
Indonesia	Indonesian	18	2 mo.	Fr.	520
Indonesia	Indonesian	19	3. mo.	Fr.	563
Indonesia	Indonesian	18	2.5 mo.	Fr.	550
Taiwan	Mandarin	22	N/A	N/A	N/A
Indonesia	Indonesian	22	7 mo.	Jr.	607
Bangladesh	Bengali	19	3 mo.	Soph.	503
Japan	Japanese	22	2 yr.	Fr.	523
Indonesia	Indonesian	18	3 mo.	Fr.	517
Indonesia	Indonesian	27	2.5 yr.	U.Grad	540
Indonesia	Indonesian	18	3 mo.	Fr.	520
Finland	Finnish	20	3 mo.	Fr.	N/A
Singapore	Chinese	23	3 mo.	Fr.	630
Malaysia	Mandarin	18	3 mo.	Fr.	550
Ethiopia	N/A	21	3 mo.	Fr.	N/A
Malaysia	Malaysian	21	3 mo.	Soph.	567
Taiwan	Chinese	26	3 mo.	Jr.	543
Lebanon	N/A	20	2 yr.	Soph.	537

TABLE I (Continued)

Native Country	Native Language	Age	Length Stay	Student Status	TOEFL Score
Hong Kong	Chinese	18	1 yr.	Fr.	N/A
China	Chinese	23	2 mo.	Fr.	527
Vietnam	Chinese	21	11 yr.	Soph.	N/A
Indonesia	N/A	18	3.5 mo.	Fr.	513
Malaysia	Malay	22	3 mo.	Fr.	N/A
Taiwan	Chinese	23	2 mo.	Jr.	540
Taiwan	Chinese	24	2 mo.	Fr.	517
Singapore	English*	23	1 yr.	Soph.	617
Bangladesh	Bangla	21	3 mo.	Fr.	610

* This student listed 4: English, Chinese, Malay, and Hokkien

The 0003 and 1013 students were chosen because most of them lack extensive cross-cultural experience. The assignment for this part of the study was given at the beginning of the semester, so the international students who participated had lived in the U.S. a short period of time, for most, a matter of two or three months. Because of their lack of experience, it was felt that they would give responses that would make good distractors for the episodes. The episodes that were given to the international students were, **On the Phone, Making Friends, A Hug, Paying the Bill and Speaking Out.**

Results

In this section, the results of the responses to the episodes will be discussed. Because the responses were given to opened-ended questions and the responses varied in the way they were worded, the answers have been paraphrased

and grouped into categories. Not every single response is here but the most frequent and the most unusual were the most used responses.

For the incident **On the Phone** (see Appendix D), the most frequent answer by the international students was for Armando to explain that he was not married and that he did not need a baby carriage. Some students stressed that Armando be direct and tell the speaker that he had something to do and hang up. Two students said that he should wait for a pause and inform the speaker in a polite way that he was not interested. Several students said to call back after he was married. Four students said to interrupt and hang up. Many students gave appropriate answers, but didn't discuss how to go about giving the answers which was the intention of the incident.

The responses from the American students for **Making Friends** (Appendix F) were more varied than for the other incidents. Most of the students responded that the interaction would lead to an acquaintance, but not a friendship. Some responded that the American did not recognize Liu Jun. One American student said that the American was an idiot. One said that Liu Jun was not interesting. Two said that the American was doing his homework or busy. And one said that the American was angry because Liu Jun had not thanked him.

For this incident, there were three answers that were equally distributed among the international students as the

most common answers: internationals or Chinese all look alike to Americans, Americans don't make friends this way or Americans are friendly to strangers, but that does not entail a friendship, and the American forgot about Liu Jun. An interesting response that both the American and the international students expressed. was that Americans feel superior to Orientals. Two international students expressed this and six of the Americans expressed that the American was embarrassed to be seen with an international or that Americans think that they are too good for international students.

In the Hug incident (Appendix G), the American students responded for the most part either that men don't hug, as a rule, in the United States or that Bob thought Ahmed was gay. Either of these could be the correct response for this episode.

About one third of the international students answered that men don't hug in American culture in the Hug incident. Twelve students said that Bob thought Ahmed was homosexual. Three students had no idea what the responses might be. There were several students who just said it was cultural misunderstanding. Six students thought that Bob did not think that this was the appropriate greeting. One student said that Bob didn't like the way Ahmed smelled and one student said that Bob didn't think that Ahmed's clothes were warm enough for winter. Perhaps this last respondent misunderstood the question.

For the episode **Paying the Bill** (Appendix B), the American students overwhelmingly answered that Ahmed was expecting Bob to pay the bill. Many of them mentioned that this was a cultural difference. There were two responses that this was a cultural problem but they did not mention what that was. The fact that Ahmed expected Bob to pay the bill would be the correct response to this episode.

The American students also responded consistently to the **Speaking Out** (Appendix B) episode saying that the professor stopped lecturing because Liu Jun was interrupting the class and that this was inappropriate behavior.

In both **Paying the Bill** and **Speaking Out** (Appendix B), a majority of the members of the international students answered correctly. Based on the answers received for **Paying the Bill**, it was obvious that the students had already acquired the fact that most of the time, Americans pay their own bill when dining out. The responses to **Speaking Out** indicated to the researcher that this situation, rather than being a cultural misunderstanding, is a universal situation of being impolite. Since the students answered correctly for **Paying the Bill** and indicated that the **Speaking Out** incident was a universal problem, they were thrown out.

For the remaining incidents, I decided what the correct response was based on my own experience and the responses from the American students. Generally, the most frequently occurring responses were added to the correct response to

form the multiple choice answers. Some frequently occurring wrong answers were not used if I thought that a particular answer would detract from a cultural discussion too much or even prevent a discussion from occurring. An example of this was for **A Hug** (Appendix G). The second most frequently occurring answer to, "Why does Bob feel uncomfortable with Ahmed?" was that Bob thought that Ahmed was homosexual. At the time that I chose not to include this as a response I felt that the issue of homosexuality might be an uncomfortable topic for some teachers and some students and that this could lead to discussion away from cross-cultural communication because of its controversial nature even though it might be a cultural aspect of contact between males. A more neutral response was included instead.

In addition to the frequently occurring responses that the students generated, I wrote additional responses that required them to read the incident carefully because I wanted them to use their reading skills. For example, in the **Hug** (Appendix G) episodes response b-"Bob had some bad news for Ahmed and was afraid to tell him" doesn't make sense because the episode says that Bob is looking forward to seeing Ahmed. Responses a and d in **Making Friends** (Appendix F), and response a in **Having Dinner** (Appendix E) were designed in a similar way.

Because two incidents had been eliminated, I wrote two new incidents, **Burp** and **Having Dinner**. **Burp** was based on an experience related by a 1033 student and **Having Dinner** was

based on a discussion of TESL students. I also developed the responses for the **Burp** and **Having Dinner** episodes. The responses were based on the cross-cultural concept that the incident represented. And as mentioned earlier, responses were also based on the reading of the text of the incidents.

Discussion

The responses that were elicited from the students were useful for the development of the distractors. There were some who answered the question saying that the persons involved should have known what behavior is appropriate when they are visiting another country. These responses were too general and indicated that perhaps, as with generating incidents, it should be made more clear the type of responses that are expected.

The problem with generating responses to the incidents by using a large number of students is that sorting through the responses is a time consuming process for the amount of useful material that is finally used. The responses that I generated for the **Burp** and **Having Dinner** episodes were as useful as the ones elicited from the students. For the most part, the responses generated by the students were similar to responses that I would have generated had I done them myself.

Validating Responses

Validating responses is the next step in creating the culture assimilator episodes. The purpose of this stage of development is to test whether the members of the target culture, in this case the culture of undergraduate college students, agree with the researcher on the appropriateness of the responses.

Subjects

The subjects used for the validation of the responses were 22 English 1113 students, American students enrolled in the first semester of English composition at Oklahoma State University. This course is the American equivalent to the international English composition course in which the assimilator episodes would be taught. It was felt that the students enrolled in 1113 would have the equivalent day to day experiences of the students enrolled in 1013.

The students were asked their age and how often they interacted with international students (see the questionnaire in Appendix A). The ages of the students ranged from 17 to 33 with 15 students being 17 to 19, 3 in the early 20s and the remainder ranging from 28-33. Five said that they don't interact with international students at all. Four said they interacted once a month. Two said they interacted once a week and 11 said that they interacted several times a week with international students.

Procedure

To validate the responses, the subjects (the 22 American students), were given the three original incidents and two new ones, **Burp** (Appendix C) and **Having Dinner** (Appendix E). In addition to the incidents, the question that elicited responses and the four to five responses chosen to answer the question were included on the page. Next to each response, there was a scale numbered 1 to 5. The students were asked to circle the number that best reflected how well they thought that particular answer explained the situation. The number 1 indicated that they were certain that the answer was correct and the number 5 indicated that they were certain that the answer was not correct.

A cover sheet (see Appendix A) was also included with this group of incidents. The instructions on the cover sheets were more explicit than the instructions used in stage two as to the nature of the incidents and type of answers that were expected, that is, they should be looking for answers that reflected a cultural difference. The subjects were also asked to explain why they felt the way they did about each answer. This was to help the researcher develop the explanations of each response that appear following the critical incident and responses in an episode.

Results and Discussion

Percentile rankings and frequencies were calculated for each response and compared with the researcher's choices. The results of the frequency and percents will be discussed in this section. Each episode was assigned a name and the tables discussed in this section are labeled as such. See Appendices C, D, E, F, and G, for the critical incidents with responses. Each table includes the distractor and the frequencies and percents. The researcher's choice for each is included in the introduction to each table.

Table II contains the evaluation of the responses by the subjects to the **Burp** (Appendix C) episode. The **Burp** episode is the one where Hendrick, from Indonesia, burps at the American dinner table and shocks his hosts. My evaluations of the responses, in parentheses (1= certain this is correct, 5=certain this is **not** correct) were:

- a) Americans are offended by this kind of talk at the dinner table. (5)
- b) He should have expressed his appreciation of the meal while he was eating, not afterwards. (5)
- c) He didn't burp loudly enough so the Americans thought that he didn't like the food. (5)
- d) Americans find burping offensive when in the company of others. (1)

I chose 5 as the most appropriate choice for response a. Of the 22 subjects, for answer a, 68.18% were certain

that this was not the correct answer for this situation. Interestingly, 13.64% of the group was certain that this was the correct answer. This may indicate that, at least for some Americans, the subject of the conversation does not have a place at the table. Another potential explanation is the wording of the response. It may have been that the subjects misinterpreted the response and thought that talking about burping was not appropriate.

TABLE II
FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTS FOR BURP EPISODE RESPONSES

Scale	Response a		Response b		Response c		Response d	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1	3	13.64	1	4.55	0	0	12*	54.55
2	2	9.09	1	4.55	0	0	6	27.27
3	1	4.55	4	18.18	0	0	4	18.18
4	1	4.55	4	18.18	0	0	0	0
5	15*	68.18	12*	54.55	22*	100	0	0

* Indicates the researcher's response

For item b, I chose 5 as the appropriate answer as did over half of the subjects. The fact that there was not a unanimous decision that this answer was incorrect may be explained because there is no hard and fast rule for when to show appreciation. Each individual has his or her own idea about this. The subjects may have evaluated this response

because they misunderstood it. The response intended to refer to the burp as a way of showing appreciation, but the subjects may have understood it to mean any kind of appreciation. Nonetheless, this is not the most appropriate answer for this episode and the majority of the subjects agreed.

My choice for response c was 5 and the subjects were in 100% agreement with this choice. Although this sample chose this as an incorrect answer, a person from a culture where burping is acceptable may choose this as a correct response.

The d response is my choice of the correct response for the episode. The fact that all the subjects answered in the 1-3 range indicates that there is agreement on this response.

Table III illustrates the frequencies and percents for the **Having Dinner** (Appendix E) episode. This episode involves Ken and Khalid. Khalid is very late for dinner and is upset that Ken is not at the restaurant waiting for him. The following are my responses to the items in the **Having Dinner** episode:

- a) Ken had a test on Monday and decided that he should stay at home and study instead of going out.
(5)
- b) Ken had come to the restaurant, but realized that he had forgotten to put money in the parking meter when he parked near the restaurant so he had gone out to put money in the meter. (5)

- c) In the United States, it is normal practice to confirm a plan one hour before the arranged time. Since Khalid didn't do this, Ken didn't come. (5)
- d) Ken had come to the restaurant, but had left after waiting for 20 minutes because he thought Khalid wasn't coming. (1)

TABLE III
FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTS OF DINNER EPISODE RESPONSES

Scale	Response a		Response b		Response c		Response d	
	Freq	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	18*	81.82
2	1	4.55	1	4.55	1	4.55	3	13.64
3	0	0	1	4.55	3	13.64	0	0
4	1	4.55	1	4.55	5	22.73	1	4.55
5	20*	90.91	19*	86.36	13*	59.09	0	0

*Indicates the researcher's response

The subjects and I agreed for the most part on all responses to this episode. Response a to which I responded with a 5 was chosen to be not correct by 90% of the subjects. The response that Ken had a test on Monday is not indicated in the text of the incident and is therefore an incorrect response to the episode.

I gave response b an evaluation of 5. This is a response that would require the student to think about the

situation. There is no indication in the text that Ken did this and it would not take Ken 45 minutes to put money in the meter. The subjects agreed with this evaluation with 86% answering that this was definitely the wrong answer.

It is interesting that fewer subjects (59.09%) were certain that response c was not correct than were certain for responses a and b (90.91 and 86.36 respectively) since this response was completely fabricated by the researcher with an arbitrary time of one hour for confirmation included. The few subjects that explained their answer focused on the call rather than the time frame in which one should call and said that Ken should have called if he wasn't coming. This may explain the reason that the students responded less certainly to this response.

I chose response d as the correct response. Of the subjects, 96% also felt that this response was the correct one answering with either a 1 or 2.

Table IV shows the frequencies and percents for the **Making Friends** (Appendix F) episode. The episode shows the interaction of Liu Jun and an American at the announcement board. Liu Jun later sees the American at the library and waves to him, but the American doesn't respond. The appropriateness of the responses chosen by the researcher are as follows:

- a) He was busy talking to someone else. (5)

- b) For Americans, a single conversation of an impersonal nature does not constitute a relationship. (1)
- c) Because Americans have a hard time being nice to international students. (4)
- d) Because he didn't feel like talking about bikes at that moment. (5)
- e) The American didn't recognize Liu Jun because he couldn't distinguish him from other Chinese students. (2)

TABLE IV

FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTS FOR FRIENDSHIP EPISODE RESPONSES

Sc.	Response a		Response b		Response c		Response d		Response e	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1	1	4.55	6*	27.27	1	4.55	1	4.55	2	9.09
2	4	18.18	6	27.27	2	9.09	0	0*	10*	45.45
3	4	18.18	2	9.09	6	27.27	2	9.09	6	27.27
4	3	13.64	5	22.73	3*	13.64	1	4.55	1	4.55
5	9*	40.91	3	13.64	10	45.45	18*	81.82	3	13.63
N/A	1	4.55	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

* Indicates the researcher's response

My choice for response a was 5. We don't know if the American was talking to someone else and therefore this is not an adequate explanation for the incident. 54% of the

subjects agreed with this and answered with a 4 or 5. The 40% who were uncertain or inclined to think that this could be the correct answer might have been uncertain how to respond to a response that is not indicated by the text.

Although over half of the subjects (54.54%) agreed with the researcher on response b, 36.37% of them leaned toward or were certain that this was not the correct answer. These were the students that chose e as the correct answer.

For response c, I indicated that this probably not the correct answer responding with a 4. The subjects were for the most part certain that this was not the correct answer with 59% of them choosing a 4 or 5, although 27.27% evaluated this response with a 3 indicating neutrality or uncertainty about this item. The explanations for this response varied. Several subjects, when explaining why they chose the way they did said that American students do have a hard time being nice to internationals. Some respondents said that there was a lot of prejudice against international students and some said that they were shy or unfamiliar with international students' culture as reasons for this behavior. One student responded, though, that the American in this incident did not have a hard time being nice the first time they met. These explanations indicate that this response is a bit ambiguous

I chose 5 for response d. There is no indication in the incident that this was the case and the subjects apparently read the incident carefully enough because 81%

were certain that this was not correct and all of them answered with a 3 or above.

My choice for response e was a 2. This could possibly be the explanation for this incident. However, internationals aren't always able to distinguish between Americans either when they are first exposed to them, which would make it a universal problem. I had not intended that a response that dealt with a universal misunderstanding be the correct answer, but the subjects' responses indicate such responses might need to be considered correct. This problem may explain the discrepancy between my response and the students because 77% of them were certain that e is the correct answer. Most of them who gave an explanation for this response said it was often the case that they could not tell the difference between Oriental students.

The frequencies and percents of the episode **A Hug** (Appendix G) are shown in Table V. **A Hug** contains the interaction between Bob and Ahmed where Ahmed hugs Bob at the airport and Bob is uncomfortable. My evaluations of the responses are:

- a) Bob didn't feel that they were close enough yet to hug. (2)
- b) Bob had some bad news for Ahmed and was afraid to tell him. (5)
- c) Americans don't shake hands and hug at the same time. (3)
- d) Bob didn't feel comfortable hugging a man. (1)

Although I leaned toward item a as a correct response, the majority of the subjects were neutral or leaned toward being certain that this is not the correct response for this episode. One of the respondents indicated that this may be a matter of personality and many said that hugging was appropriate with relatives, but it was clear that this was not the usual practice.

TABLE V
FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTS FOR HUG EPISODE RESPONSES

Scale	Response a		Response b		Response c		Response d	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1	2	9.09	0	0	3	13.64	14*	63.64
2	4*	18.18	1	4.55	2	9.09	4	18.18
3	6	27.27	1	4.55	1*	4.55	4	18.18
4	5	22.73	1	4.55	5	22.73	0	0
5	5	22.73	19*	86.36	10	45.45	0	0
N/A	0	0	0	0	1	4.55	0	0

* Indicates the researcher's response

Response b was not the correct response. The incident says that Bob was looking forward to seeing Ahmed. It is highly doubtful that he had some bad news for Ahmed. The students agreed with this response with 86% of them choosing this response as incorrect.

I chose 3 as the evaluation for response c. I felt that depending on the situation, the Americans students could go either way on this response. A little less than half of them evaluated c as certain that this response was not correct and most of them cited examples of shaking hands and hugging at the same time, but they also mentioned that its occurrence was usually in the context of a very close relationship.

I chose d as the correct answer for this episode. The subjects also evaluated this as the correct answer with 100% answering in the 1-3 range.

Table VI shows how the subjects evaluated the responses for the episode **On the Phone** (Appendix D). In this episode, Armando receives a phone solicitation and is unsure of how to extricate himself from the situation. I evaluated the responses in the following way:

- a) Hang up the phone. (2)
- b) Wait until the speaker at the other end of the line is finished and politely say, "No, thank you" (2)
- c) At the first possible opportunity, politely inform the speaker that he is not interested. (1)
- d) Interrupt the speaker and explain that he is not married because he is a student and his parents won't allow him to get married. (5)

The subjects and I were in very close agreement in evaluating the responses for this episode. Responses a and

b are possible and even appropriate, but c is the best choice for this episode.

Response a is a possible answer, but the incident indicates that Armando wanted to be polite so its not the best answer. I chose 2 to evaluate this response. I think that the subjects were spread very evenly across the scale because hanging up the phone is done, but it's not the most polite answer.

TABLE VI
FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTS FOR PHONE EPISODE RESPONSES

Scale	Response a		Response b		Response c		Response d	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1	5	22.73	7	31.82	17*	77.27	4	18.18
2	3*	13.64	5*	22.73	2	9.09	2	9.09
3	7	31.82	4	18.18	2	9.09	3	13.64
4	3	13.64	4	18.18	0	0	3	13.64
5	4	18.18	2	9.09	1	4.55	10*	45.45

* Indicates the researcher's response.

My evaluation of response b was a 2. Although this might be a correct answer, it's a waste of time for both Armando and the speaker for Armando to wait. Again, the subjects were fairly evenly spread out on the scale, although more students thought that this response was correct than response a with 54% answering with a 1 or 2

compared with 36% answering a 1 or 2 for response a. This may be because response b is more polite than a.

I chose c as the correct response for this incident. Most of the students agreed that this was the best response with 77% of the respondents certain that this is the correct answer.

For response d I indicated that this was not the correct answer and 59% of the subjects were convinced that this was not the correct answer. Neither interrupting, nor giving out so much personal information is appropriate.

Many of the respondents made the comment that hanging up is the best choice because one should be forceful and protect him or herself against the "smooth-talker" at the other end of the line. Interestingly, two of the subjects said all four responses were correct.

Discussion

The procedure for validating responses is useful if the subjects are required to give explanations with their evaluations. The explanations give insight into how successful a response actually is and why the response is or is not successful. What this process does not do is help predict whether a response will be useful in teaching the cultural concept that the incident illustrates. Even though the responses were "validated", there were questions in my mind about how these responses would play out with the international students. Because of this, I did not revise

or throw out any incidents or their responses. I would suggest to the teacher that in the future, responses that posed questions for the validation group be revised or replaced because the explanations are based on the responses and a questionable response may cause problems in developing explanations. One might take this process one step further and give the incidents with responses to a sample group of international students before teaching them.

Generating Explanations

The final step in developing the culture assimilator episodes for this study is generating the explanations that follow the critical incidents and their responses. The following section will discuss the method of generating the explanations, the results of the generation and a discussion of this step in episode development.

Method of Generating Explanations

Many of the explanations for the episodes were provided by the subjects who validated the responses. Often though, there were not enough explanations given (many of the students did not fulfill this part of the assignment) and the types of explanations given were not appropriate (they were not based on cross-cultural communication) to develop the explanations based on this data. Therefore, some of the explanations were developed by the researcher or the

explanations were based on the comments of one or two students.

The explanations were based on the responses themselves. So, the explanations would tell the reader whether a response was not appropriate based on the text, such as response b for **A Hug**-"Bob had some bad news for Ahmed and was afraid to tell him". Or the explanation may indicate to the reader that a response does not explain a cross-cultural misunderstanding, rather, it is a universal problem such as response e in **Making Friends**-"The American didn't recognize Liu Jun because he couldn't distinguish him from other Chinese students". Or, the explanation may indicate to the reader that a response is just plain wrong as in response c in **Having Dinner**-"In the United States, it is normal practice to confirm a plan before the arranged time. Since Khalid didn't do this, Ken didn't come".

Following the explanation itself there is an indication to the reader whether a particular response is the correct one or not. It also asks the reader to choose a different answer if the response is an incorrect one. Common statements of this type might be "Please try again" or "There is a better explanation for this misunderstanding".

Results

The explanation for response a in **Burp** (see Appendix C) was taken from the explanations of three of the students who commented that talk about other cultures is welcomed at the

dinner table. For response b, four of the students made comments to the effect that it is acceptable to express appreciation at anytime. One student commented for response c, that loudness is not the issue, the burp itself is, and the explanation was based on that comment. The explanation for response d was partly based on students comments, and partly my own. Almost all of the students who gave explanations for this response said that burping is rude and unacceptable in public and at the table (One student said that he thought burping was gaining more acceptance today). I added that it is unacceptable in any situation, and that covering one's mouth was acceptable.

For the **Phone** episode (Appendix D), the explanation for response a was based on the comments that the students made. Several said that hanging up was a good alternative, but that it was impolite. This explanation was also based on the comment in the incident that Armando didn't want to be impolite. For response b, the explanation was based on comments from the students such as, "Appropriate, but is too meek" or "He could be on the phone forever" or that this response was too polite because Armando's dinner was getting cold. The students made comments for response c such as "I think that this is a polite and quick way of getting rid of the salesperson" which were the basis for this explanation. Several students commented that for response d, it was unnecessary to give out this information or that this kind of information was none of the salesperson's business. One

student commented that, if Armando gives out this information, the salesperson would be encouraged to continue.

For the episode **Having Dinner** (Appendix E), the explanations for responses a and b are based on the text. Neither of these is indicated in the incident and for response b it is just logical that Ken would have been back during that time frame if he had gone to the parking meter. Several students commented on this as well. For response c, several students commented that they had never heard of this custom. All the students commented that punctuality was important to Americans. One student commented that anywhere from 6:50 to 7:15 was an acceptable time range and another student said that even latecomers are only 20 to 30 minutes late. The time 20 minutes was chosen based on these comments and my own experience.

In the **Making Friends** episode (Appendix F), the explanation for response a was based on the text. The incident does not indicate to the reader that the American is talking to someone else. The students also provided this as the explanation for this response. The explanation for response b was based on the comments of the international students from the generating responses section. The validation sample was the source for the first part of the explanation for response c, but the second part is based on the incident itself. The American did not have a hard time being nice the first time they met. Again the explanation

for response d is based on the incident. I formulated the explanation for response e.

In the episode A Hug (Appendix G), the explanation for response a was based on comments by the students. Several of them commented that only brothers would be close enough to hug. The explanation for response b is based on the episode. There is no indication in the incident that Bob had bad news. For response c, Most of the students responded to this response with examples in which people do shake hands and hug at the same time. The explanation for d was based on my personal experience and comments from the students. Several students commented that hugging is much more common among women and between women and men intimately involved.

Discussion

As with validating responses, the explanations that the validation sample provided for the responses are valuable in generating explanations. I had many of the explanations in mind based on the work done in the validation part of the study. The explanations that the students provided also gave perspectives on the responses that I as one representative of the culture may not have had. For example, I was a bit surprised that the students explained that Americans have a hard time being nice to international students. This type of additional information helps in the process of generating explanations. The responses in which

the student responses were not particularly helpful were the responses that were testing the reading of the incident.

Discussion

This section of the chapter will contain a discussion of the effectiveness of the methods used in the development of the assimilator episodes for this study: generating incidents, generating responses, validating responses and generating explanations.

One of the goals of this study was to discover whether the methods and steps used would be useful for the ESL teacher interested in teaching the episodes in the classroom. Because the ESL teacher does not always have access to "experts" like Brislin's (1986, pp. 42-44) who have had extensive cross-cultural experience, I went to another group of people who have had some: the students themselves. Using the students to generate material also gave me an idea as to what kind of experiences the students have here. This was important because the episodes were designed specifically for them.

The material generated by the students was useful for the creation of these episodes. In spite of this, I think that the students should have an idea of the type of material that is requested of them. Showing them an assimilator episode and an explanation that cross-cultural miscommunication is what this is all about would help the teacher get more useful material.

Asking the validation sample to provide explanations for their responses was helpful in developing explanations for the episodes. I think that it is necessary that the validation sample write explanations for each response. This is more useful than the evaluation itself (circling 1-5) because the researcher can establish why the subjects answer the way they do. The explanations of the subjects also help to show the variability of culture.

I would suggest that the teacher is the best source for the explanations of the episodes, because he or she knows best what each response represents.

Having said that the whole process is useful, I have to say that once the first set of episodes is generated through this whole process which can be time consuming, new incidents, responses and explanations can be generated by the students who are being taught the assimilator episodes. The exercise of having the students develop the episodes can be as useful as doing the already developed episodes.

Alternatively, a teacher could save time by generating episodes and responses him or herself. Another way of saving time would be simply having the validation sample comment on or give an explanation for each response instead of evaluating by indicating how correct or incorrect the answer was. This would reduce the number of steps a classroom teacher would have to go through to develop the episodes.

CHAPTER IV

TEACHING THE CULTURE ASSIMILATOR

EPISODES

One of the questions that this study addresses is whether culture assimilator episodes can be effectively used as a tool for teaching culture in the ESL composition classroom and at the same time develop writing skills. Following the development of the culture assimilator episodes discussed in Chapter III, the episodes were incorporated into an international composition course at Oklahoma State University. This chapter discusses the method that was used to teach the assimilator episodes and evaluates the effectiveness of the assimilator episodes based on student responses to the episodes and instructor feedback.

Subjects

The students that were taught the assimilator episodes were English 1013 students enrolled in the Fall 1992 semester. English 1013 is the first semester of a two semester composition component that international undergraduate students are required to take at Oklahoma State University. This group was chosen to participate in

this study because most of these students would have had limited exposure to American culture. Many of them would have been in the United States for only a matter of weeks. The second reason for choosing this group was that the content of the essays that the students write in 1013 are based on both culture and personal experience.

Four sections, a total of 80 students, of English 1013 participated. There were a number of cultures represented in this group including Chinese Malaysian, Indonesian, Pakistani, Nigerian, Spanish, Japanese, Swedish, Russian, Thai, and Egyptian to name a few.

Background

Before discussing the method of teaching the assimilator episodes, it is necessary to discuss the 1013 curriculum. The students are required to write five essays during the course of a semester. Two of the essays, the first, a diagnostic essay, and the last, the final, are written in class. All essays are revised two times, that is, the students write three drafts of each essay. The goal of the course is to develop the students' ability to write an English essay. The students are taught the basic elements of an essay and the essays are evaluated analytically based on the quality of content, organization and grammar.

The course is content-based, using an introductory anthropology textbook Conformity and Conflict (Spradley and

McCurdy, 1990) and the novel Iron and Silk (Salzman, 1985) which relates the experiences of an American English teacher in China. So, culture and cross-cultural experience are the focus for the content of the course.

Preparation for writing an essay would normally include reading chapters from a section of Conformity and Conflict and/or Iron and Silk and discussing the cultural concept that is introduced in that material. This material is also used to teach reading skills such as scanning and skimming.

The students are then given the essay topic which would ask them to write about the particular cultural concept that had been discussed in preparation for the essay and use personal experience and examples from Iron and Silk to illustrate the concept. For example, the students may read the chapters in the magic and superstition section of Conformity and Conflict and then be asked to describe a superstition from their country.

Because the culture assimilator deals with situations of cross-cultural behavior, the assimilator episodes were easily incorporated into the 1013 curriculum. The assimilator episodes were introduced as preparatory/prewriting material for essay two. The topic for essay two was:

Think of an incident which has occurred between you and a person from another culture in which a misunderstanding has resulted. Describe the incident

in detail, and discuss at least 2 possible reasons for the misunderstanding.

The students had read the introductory material on language and communication and one chapter on non-verbal communication from the language and communication section of Conformity and Conflict before the assimilator episodes were introduced.

Method

Two class periods were set aside to teach the culture assimilator episodes to the students. The researcher taught these two class periods and the instructors observed. The first day of class was used to introduce the episodes and explain to the students the tasks that they would be performing in groups to do the episodes. On the second day of class, the episodes were done in groups.

The first day verbal and non-verbal communication were discussed. We discussed what sociolinguistic rules were, based on the definition from the textbook. The definition from the textbook was that sociolinguistic rules combine meaningful utterances with social situations into appropriate messages. An example was given of inappropriate use of a sociolinguistic rule: if I am at the Student Union and I am having a conversation with a friend, but realize that I need to leave for class, I get up and say hello and walk away. Of course this is an inappropriate situation in which to say hello and this was discussed with the students.

The second point about verbal communication that was addressed in the text was that language can affect our perception of the world and vice-versa. I used the example of snow: some cultures do not have snow and some cultures experience a lot of snow. Eskimos have many words for snow because they have much snow and it is useful for them to distinguish between different types of snow. In the United States, we use the word snow, but we also have sleet and hail. In Urdu, there is one word for both the snow that falls outside and the ice that forms outside and the ice that you put in a cold drink (a large part of Pakistan gets very little to no snow).

The discussion of non-verbal communication was more open because the chapter that discussed the topic in the text (Hall & Hall, 1991) was easier for the students to understand than the introduction to the section, which was more abstract. Because of this, this section of the class contained more discussion and less lecture. The students were able to discuss several types of non-verbal communication: eye contact, use of space, and time. The other reason that students participated more on this topic was that it had been briefly discussed in a previous class period. This lead naturally into a discussion of differences in how cultures treat these types of non-verbal communication, because different cultures in the class had different examples of each; some cultures see the lowering of eyes while speaking to an elder as a sign of respect

while other cultures demand that there be eye contact with an elder while speaking. Greetings produced very interesting discussion in all four sections of the course. Greetings ranged from rubbing noses to bowing to kissing to waving.

Through the discussion of non-verbal communication, the point was made that the type of communication used was dependent upon the receiver of the communication, For example, although you may lower your eyes when speaking with an elder, you would not do this when speaking with a contemporary. Because these concepts were very important to understanding the culture assimilators, they were emphasized in the discussion.

At this point in the class, the idea of the culture assimilator episodes was introduced. It was explained that the episodes were examples of cross-cultural interaction that became misunderstandings. They were also told that the episodes that they would be doing in class represented different cultures, but were not designed to promote stereotypes of the cultures represented and that the episodes were designed to help them understand how certain behaviors are understood through American culture.

At this point, a sample assimilator was shown to the class on an overhead transparency. In the first section (8:30), the group tasks that the students would be performing were not explained at this point in the class; because the task was not clear in this first class period,

this was modified with the following class periods. The **Burp** (see Appendix C) episode was the episode that was done as a class in all four sections. The students were given the opportunity to read the episode with the distractors covered. Then the distractors were uncovered. The students were then asked to choose what they thought was the best answer. Each answer was explained in conjunction with the explanation that went with each answer.

In the three sections of the course other than the 8:30 section, the **Burp** episode was introduced along with an explanation of the tasks of the group work that the class would be doing with the other four episodes. The 8:30 section was presented with the episode first and then the tasks were briefly explained before they went on to the next episode. The group work activity was developed based on Ilola's (1991) cooperative learning technique. There are three group members. The three roles include: summarizer, elaborator and monitor. The role of the summarizer is to summarize the critical incident in his or her own words. The elaborator explains the incident and provides an example, if he or she can, from his or her own experience. The monitor follows the summary and the elaboration to be sure that they are accurate and his or her job is also to keep the group on task.

The students were asked to do the roles for the **Burp** episode. For example, the **Burp** critical incident was shown on the screen and a student from the class was asked to

summarize the incident after reading it. The researcher gave feedback on the summary, either correcting it if it was inaccurate or more often, explaining that the summarizer only had to summarize not elaborate. Then another student was asked to elaborate on the summary. The researcher would also expand on the summary if necessary. The students were then shown the distractors and asked to choose the correct answer. The explanations were then discussed with each distractor.

The three sections that had the roles explained to them with the **Burp** episode as a class were more comfortable with the task than the 8:30 section. Because the task was more briefly explained in the 8:30 class, there was time for the groups in the 8:30 class to do one episode (in addition to the **Burp** episode) the first day.

On day two, the classes were divided into groups of three. If the class could not be evenly divided, groups of four rather than groups of two, were made with the extra students. The extra person in the group was made a second elaborator. Each student was given a slip of paper with his or her role explained on it. The summarizer role slip said, "Your job is to read the episode and then tell the rest of the group **in your own words** what the episode is about." The elaborator slip of paper said, "Your job is to explain the episode to the group. What does it mean? Also, bring in examples of personal experience to help explain the episode." And the slip of paper the monitor received read,

"Your job is to make sure that the summary and the explanation are correct. You must make sure that the group stays on task (Be sure that the group does not get off the topic at hand and that it is focused on what it is supposed to be doing)."

The students were given the episode with the distractors, but without the explanations. The order in which the remaining episodes were given to the groups varied with each section so that each episode was done in at least one class. The 8:30 class had already done part of the **Phone** (Appendix D) episode in class on day one so they finished it on day two and quickly moved to the **Dinner** (Appendix E) episode. The other three sections started with either the **Phone** or the **Hug** (Appendix G) episode. The order of episodes for the 8:30 and 11:30 sections was: **Phone, Dinner, Friends** (Appendix F) and **Hug**. And the order for the 10:30 and 2:30 sections was: **Hug, Friends, Dinner** and **Phone**. The 10:30, 11:30 and 2:30 sections finished two episodes in class and had two episodes to take home as homework. Since the 8:30 section had already finished most of the **Phone** episode on day one, these students only had to take one episode, **Hug**, home.

After the students were given the episode with the distractors, but without the explanations, they were asked to read the critical incident and then start on their group task. They were given time to do this (about 10 minutes) and then were told to stop and choose what they thought was

the correct answer and circle it in pen. They were asked to use pen so that they would not be able to change answers when explanations were discussed. It was stressed to them that they could answer individually; they did **not** have to agree as a group what the correct answer was. While they were doing their group work, the researcher went from group to group to answer questions about the task and to monitor the progress of each group.

After the students had chosen their answers, the researcher handed out the explanations. The explanations were also shown on an overhead. Each distractor was discussed with each explanation. The class was asked to raise their hands at the distractor that they had chosen and were often asked why they had chosen a particular answer. This part of the class took about 10 minutes.

The students were then asked to pass their role slips to the person to the right of them in their group so that each student was able to perform a new role in the group. They were then given a new incident with distractors and the process was repeated.

At the close of day two, the students were given two homework assignments. The first was a journal assignment in which they had to write several incidents that they had experienced and provide explanations:

On a plain piece of paper, write 3 situations (1-3 paragraphs each) in which you have experienced miscommunication either verbal or nonverbal (These

situations may have happened here or in your country) with a person from another culture. List 2 or 3 explanations for each situation as to why this misunderstanding may have happened.

The second homework assignment that the students were given was to do the remaining episodes at home (read it and choose the correct response). The explanations for the episodes were sent home with the students, but they were asked to explain why they answered the way they did for each response **before** looking at the explanations.

The students were given double points for both of these assignments. They could earn 8 points instead of the usual 4 for each assignment. The first reason for this was because it was very important for this study that the students do the assignment for this study. Secondly, it was very important that the students write the situations as prewriting for their essay topic.

I graded the homework. The three situations that the students were required to write about were evaluated on whether the situation illustrated a cross-cultural misunderstanding and whether the situation described was adequate material to write an essay from. Comments such as o.k., good, very good, This one would make a good paper topic or You will need to go into much more detail to write an essay on this or This is not a cross-cultural misunderstanding were typical comments given to the students. Day two of the assimilator episode class was

Friday. The journal homework was returned on Monday when the topic for the essay was introduced to the students (the classes had been returned to the instructors) so that the students had the feedback and could start writing their essays.

The essay topic was virtually the same as the journal assignment. The students were given the option of discussing a situation that they had experienced in their own country because of their limited experience here.

The second homework was not returned to the students. They had immediate feedback for their responses to the episodes in the form of the explanations. Each student who did the assignment received full points for it. The researcher evaluated the responses that were provided for each episode for the purpose of discovering whether the episodes were effective.

Results

The section will discuss the results of the student responses for the episodes presented in class and the episodes that were assigned as homework. Evaluation of the method of teaching the episodes will also be included.

The Episodes

The **Burp** episode is not included in the following table because the responses were given by a show of hands not counted by the researcher because the group task was also

being explained and it would have been awkward to stop and count hands. Most of the students chose the correct responses to that episode which was that Americans find burping offensive when in the company of others. Two students, one from the 8:30 section and one from the 2:30 section said that guys in the dorm often burp in the company of others. The researcher responded that guys together in the dorm is a unique situation where burping is concerned.

The responses to the remaining episodes, both those presented in class and those done at home, are combined and illustrated in Table VII. The items with the parentheses are items for which one or more students had crossed out another response and then chose that response (The response that was crossed out is in parentheses). N/A indicates that there was no response circled. The items with the asterisk are the responses that the researcher chose as the correct answer. The hyphen indicates that this response does not apply to the episode.

For the Hug episode (Appendix G), the correct response is d. Thirty-five students of the 38 who responded in class to this episode chose d as the correct answer. Most of the students who did this episode as homework also chose d as the correct answer. The explanations that the students gave for choosing or not choosing a specific response in the homework were pretty close to the explanations given on the explanation page. Several students commented that they had seen Americans shake hands and hug at the same time when

commenting on response c. The comment about Bob thinking that Ahmed was gay came up quite often with these students, as it had with the response-generating students and the validation subjects. Perhaps in the future it would be useful to have a response that expresses this or include it as part of the explanation.

TABLE VII
STUDENT RESPONSES TO EPISODES

Resp.	Hug		Phone		Friend		Dinner	
	Class	H.W.	Class	H.W.	Class	H.W.	Class	H.W.
a	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
b	0	0	3	2	26*(e)	14(e)	0	0
c	2	1	30*	35	0	0	1	0
d	35*	35(c)	0	0	0	0	24*	33(c)
e	-	-	-	-	11	7(b)	-	-
N/A	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-

*Indicates the correct response

In the **On the Phone** episode (Appendix D), a majority of the students chose c as the correct answer both in class and as a homework assignment. The comments in the homework indicated that, again, the students were familiar with the explanations for each response because the explanations were very similar to the official explanations.

The **Making Friends** (Appendix F) episode indicated some interesting results. The majority of the students in both the in-class responses and the homework responses chose the correct answer b. But, one third of the homework responses and one third of the in-class responses chose e as the correct answer. In the explanations that the students gave for homework, many of the students who chose b as the correct answer still said that they thought that e could also be correct. Perhaps a more lengthy explanation of e would be beneficial to the students.

The **Having Dinner** episode (Appendix E) yielded the most correct answers with only one student from both the in-class and the homework responses choosing another answer. With such widespread agreement on the correct answer, perhaps the students have acquired the fact that Americans are punctual.

Because of the overwhelming correct responses to all the episodes, I have considered other factors that may have influenced the students' decision-making. First of all, the episodes might represent cultural differences that the students have already acquired. This means that the episodes were too easy for the students, in which case new episodes should be developed and tested. Another explanation may be that the students influenced each other when responding. For example, one student in the group may have known the correct response and persuaded others in the group to circle that answer. This would be beneficial to the students, but does not give an accurate assessment of

how many could answer correctly on their own. One student commented that on the **Burp** episode the students looked around the room before raising their hands to respond to an item. But this student also said that for all the episodes, the students could usually narrow it down to two items and then look around to see what the correct answer was when the item was discussed in class.

The comments of this particular student point to the fact that the problem may be in logistics. In class, the episodes remained in the hands of the students while the explanations were being discussed. Even though the students were asked to write in pen, many of them may not have circled an answer until the explanations were discussed as a class.

For the homework assignment, the explanations were sent home with the students. This was a mistake. Many of the explanations that the students gave for responses, which they were supposed to do before looking at the explanations, were thinly veiled paraphrases of the official explanations. The peer pressure in class and the fact that the students had access to the explanations at home would explain the high percentage of correct answers for the episodes.

When we discussed the answers in class, I think that the students felt as if they needed to get the right answer. Perhaps because I was there, some of them seemed to hesitate a bit before raising their hands. For the **Burp** episode, I may not have given them enough time to think about the

episodes before having them answer, thus pressuring them into agreeing with the pack. Following the teaching of the episodes, though, I was disappointed because I felt that the episodes, even the friendship episode which seemed to me as if it was more difficult, were too easy for them.

However, even if the episodes were too easy, the whole exercise of doing the episodes was still extremely useful for the students. There was much discussion in the groups as they did the episodes and they had to think about their own experiences through the elaborations that they were required to do. The purpose of the episodes was to teach the students about cross-cultural communication and though the incidents themselves were easy for the students to figure out, the concepts that they represented lead to useful discussion.

The Teaching Method

The teaching method was evaluated based on the observations of the researcher and the comments of the instructors of the 1013 course. The following section reports the observations and comments and discusses the effectiveness of using the assimilator episodes in the composition classroom.

I was a bit disheartened after the 8:30 section on day one because the students did not readily respond to questions that were asked of them about the material they were to have read. The instructor informed the researcher

following the class that the material had not been discussed very thoroughly in previous class periods so the students were not very familiar with the material. The researcher had assumed that since the students were asked to read the material, they would be familiar with it and had geared the discussion for that. The instructor also commented that the background material, as it had been presented in the 8:30 section, had been too abstract. Based on these comments, the researcher did not assume as much familiarity with the material in the other three sections and gave more concrete examples of the concepts to make the material easier to understand. The discussion went much more smoothly in the other three sections.

Once the group work started, the atmosphere in the classroom relaxed and day two of class went very smoothly. The students followed instructions of their tasks well and there was much discussion of the topics at hand.

The journal homework indicated that the students had understood the task and had benefited from the assimilator episode group work. The situations that they wrote about were, for the most part, well suited for the topic that they would be asked to write on. Almost every student wrote about at least one situation that would be suitable for the topic. Only one student wrote about three situations that were not suitable.

The instructor of the 10:30 and 11:30 sections felt that overall, the students benefited from the culture

assimilators. She reported that there were several reasons for the success:

First, Mrs. Damron did an excellent job giving background information regarding communication and explaining the concept of culture assimilators. Secondly, the in-class group work provided an opportunity for students to interact with each other and gain some experience with analyzing cross-cultural communication. Thirdly, the homework and prewriting assignments allowed them to generate and focus their ideas before they began writing. And finally, a number of students commented that they were very interested in the topic of cross-cultural communication because it is personally relevant for each of them.

These comments indicate that the assimilator episodes were of value in and of themselves, meaning they teach cross-cultural awareness and that they are useful in developing writing skills.

The instructor of the 8:30 and 10:30 sections wrote notes during the two days that the episodes were taught. His notes reflect that the 2:30 class went much more smoothly the first day than did the 8:30 section. He did make the comment that discussing sociolinguistic rules was not useful in either section. He made several comments for both sections on the second day of class that the students were enjoying the group work.

In general, this instructor said that the assimilator exercise made the students feel more comfortable about writing from their own experience. It also got the students who were anxious about writing to put their thoughts on paper as well as being "good practice" for essay two. He also commented that group anxiety was lessened through this exercise.

My observations and the observations of the two instructors indicate that this method of teaching culture assimilator episodes was an effective way to introduce cross-cultural interactions into the 1013 class. The group work itself was an exercise in cross-cultural communication. The group dynamics were positive. The culture assimilator episodes were also beneficial for the students' writing by getting them writing, making them more comfortable writing about their own experience, and helping them to focus on a topic for their essay.

Discussion

This section will discuss the results of the culture assimilators as they were taught in class. This section will also discuss the effectiveness of the method of teaching the assimilators in international English composition 1013.

The majority of the responses for the assimilator episodes that the students gave were correct, which could be an indication that the episodes were too easy for the

students. I can't be sure of this because of the problems discussed earlier. In order to determine whether the episodes are too easy for the students who enroll in this course, I think it would be beneficial to give just the incidents and their responses as a test to another group of 1013 students. If they are too easy, perhaps it would be necessary to develop new episodes. Perhaps using a more sophisticated group for generating incidents and responses is necessary.

It may not be necessary to write new episodes, though. The observations made about the teaching of the episodes indicates that, even if the episodes were easy, the students benefited from them both in cross-cultural communication and in their writing.

The observations of everyone involved, instructors and students, indicate that the culture assimilator episodes were an enjoyable and instructive activity. I think that this in itself is a benefit that would recommend incorporating the assimilator episodes into the 1013 curriculum.

CHAPTER V
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ESL CLASSROOM
AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURE
ASSIMILATOR EPISODES

This study has indicated that assimilator episodes can be developed through student generated input. There are several things to be taken into consideration before future episodes are developed.

First of all, the students should be aware at all stages that the purpose of the episodes is to introduce a cross-cultural misunderstanding. I have suggested allowing the students to do an episode before having them generate incidents or episodes or even validate responses. The subjects who participated in the validation portion of this study were more aware of the type of responses that were required than the students who generated incidents and responses because the instructions were more specific.

The other problem with the development of the episodes is that this process is still time consuming for the busy ESL teacher. Having the students develop their own episodes as a class project may help solve the time problem.

This study has also shown that the episodes can effectively be incorporated into the ESL composition

classroom. Perhaps part of the reason that the assimilator episodes were so successful in the 1013 course was because the content base of the course is culture. Further study is needed to see if the assimilator episodes can be successfully implemented into an ESL classroom that does not have culture as the content.

One problem with teaching the episodes was that I was not able to determine conclusively that the episodes were new information for the students. Because the students consistently chose the correct responses, I might conclude that the episodes were too easy, but there were potential problems with peer pressure and the fact that the students had the explanations available when they were doing the episodes as homework. If the difficulty of the items is a concern, more care should be taken in the future to determine the difficulty of the episodes. However, difficulty may not be an issue since even the "easy" episodes elicited valuable discussions of cross-cultural communication and miscommunication.

Further exploration of the effect of the episodes on the students' writing needs to be done. According to the instructors of the 1013 course, the assimilator episodes were effective in helping the students with their writing. The students were reported to have felt more comfortable with writing, and more focused in their topics than they had been earlier in the semester. One instructor reported that the content of this essay, on the whole, was better than

essay one. This may be explained, in part, by the fact that there was no preparation/prewriting for the first essay.

Despite these problems, the assimilator episodes appeared to benefit the students in this ESL composition course. The group work was one method of incorporating the assimilator episodes. This method involved using all skills. The students were required to read the episodes with certain responses testing their reading skills. They had to discuss the episodes, thereby using their listening and speaking skills. They were asked to write journal topics that required them to practice their writing and also helped them develop the content of their essays.

The students that participated in this study were advanced ESL students. It is also possible to use these episodes in beginning or intermediate classrooms because the reading level of the episodes is not high.

The critical incidents used in this study may also be adapted to teaching in ESL reading, listening or speaking classrooms. For the reading classroom, episodes written for different levels of reading ability could be developed using responses that test reading included with the responses.

For the speaking and/or listening classroom, the critical incidents could be presented as a dictation exercise that would test the students' listening ability. Or the incident could be presented in the form of a skit that would require the students to listen and speak. Discussion of the responses and explanations requires

listening and speaking skills. The episodes can also be used as material that would be a take-off point for role-plays on cross-cultural interactions.

In short, there are endless possibilities for the use of the assimilator episodes and there are as many episodes as there are students with cross-cultural experiences.

The most important thing about the culture assimilator episodes is that they are enjoyable. In the development and administration of the culture assimilator episodes, the researcher found the cross-cultural experiences to generate many stories and much discussion about attributions of behaviors across cultures.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

**COVER SHEETS FOR GENERATING RESPONSES
AND VALIDATING RESPONSES**

Questionnaire for Response Generation

Name:

Age:

Student status:

English course number:

Native country:

Native language:

Length of stay in the United States:

TOEFL score:

These are five situations that may occur when there are interactions between International Students and Americans. Please give a response to each question following the situation. When you are finished answering the questions, please write about a situation that you have encountered here in the United States that may have confused, embarrassed or upset you. Thank You.

Questionnaire for Validation Sample

Age:

Amount of contact with international students (what do you usually do?):

- 1) I don't interact with internationals at all
- 2) I interact with internationals once a month
- 3) I interact with internationals once a week
- 4) I interact with internationals several times a week

These are episodes that happen often when Americans and international students interact. When interactions such as these occur, there can be misunderstandings. For each of these situations, you have been provided with 4 or 5 possible answers. To the left of each possible answer there is a scale from 1 to 5. The 1 means that you are certain that this answer is the most appropriate answer for the situation. 5 means that you are certain that this is **NOT** the most appropriate answer for this situation. The remaining 2-4 would indicate the degree to which you feel the answer is appropriate or inappropriate. Please circle the number that best explains your feeling about each answer. In addition, explain why you felt the way you did about each answer at the bottom or on the back of the page. These situations are designed to help international students understand how American culture works, so the appropriateness of the choice should depend on how well it

would describe most responses in that situation. Thank you
for your help.

APPENDIX B

**SPEAKING OUT AND PAYING
THE BILL INCIDENTS**

Speaking Out

Liu Jun is taking a political science class. There are about twenty students in the class and all of them are Americans with the exception of Liu Jun. Today the professor is lecturing about the origins of democracy. Liu Jun turns to the student sitting next to him and starts explaining to that student about communism in China. The American student becomes a bit uncomfortable as Liu Jun continues. Soon the professor stops talking and starts looking at Liu Jun. Liu Jun becomes very confused when the professor does this.

Why has the professor stopped lecturing and started looking at Liu Jun?

Paying the Bill

Bob and Ahmed have been very busy with their schoolwork and have not been able to see very much of each other. Bob thinks it would be fun to go out to dinner with Ahmed where they would have a chance to talk and enjoy themselves. So, Bob calls Ahmed and asks him if he would like to go to the pizza place near campus for dinner. Ahmed says that he would be very happy to go.

The two friends meet at the pizza place that evening and have a very good time talking and giving each other news about themselves. When they finish eating, the waitress brings the check to the table. Bob looks at the check and takes out enough money to pay for his own meal. Ahmed looks at the money that Bob has laid out on the table and becomes upset

Why is Ahmed upset?

APPENDIX C

BURP EPISODE

Burp

Hendrick has recently arrived from Indonesia to study at a university in the United States. When he was enrolling for classes, he met Ken, an American student. Ken, after learning that Hendrick was alone in the States, invited Hendrick to dinner at his apartment. Ken also invited several of his American friends so that Hendrick could meet some more Americans. Hendrick was happy to have met such a nice person and was looking forward to the dinner.

During dinner, Hendrick was telling the Americans about Indonesia and about the differences he noticed between American and Indonesian culture. When he finished his dinner, Hendrick burped loudly. The Americans looked shocked and Hendrick became uncomfortable, wondering if he had said anything to offend anyone.

How would you explain this to Hendrick?

- a) Americans are offended by this kind of talk at the dinner table.
- b) He should have expressed his appreciation of the meal while he was eating, not afterwards.
- c) He didn't burp loudly enough, so the Americans thought he didn't like the food.
- d) Americans find burping offensive when in the company of others.

Explanations for Burp

- a) This kind of talk is very normal and often welcomed at American dinner tables. There is a more appropriate answer. Please choose again.
- b) Normally, a guest would express his/her appreciation after the meal, although it would not be unusual to express their appreciation during the meal. This would not account for the shock that the Americans expressed. Please try again.
- c) The loudness of a burp has no particular mean for the reaction of the American hosts, but the burp itself does. Please see answer 4 for a complete explanation.
- d) This is the best answer. Burping is a habit that is considered rude in any situation in American culture, but it is especially rude at the dinner table. Americans are taught from an early age that burping in front of others is unacceptable. If it is necessary to burp, a hand covering one's mouth while burping is acceptable.

APPENDIX D
ON THE PHONE EPISODE

On the Phone

Armando is at home in the evening after coming home from the library. He is fixing dinner because he is very hungry and hasn't eaten since early that morning. When dinner is ready, he sits down at the table and takes his first bite. The phone rings. Thinking it might be his friend, Fred, he picks up the receiver and hears a voice say, "Is this Mr. Armando Garcia?" Armando answers, "Yes" and the voice at the other end of the line immediately starts speaking very quickly, "Mr. Garcia, You are a very lucky man. I am with the American Gift Company and we are offering you the chance to buy a baby carriage at a price that is less than half of what you would pay in any department store. But this offer is for this evening only. We take any major credit card and you may purchase this item at this very moment. Doesn't this sound like a wonderful offer?"

"Yes", says Armando. Without another pause, the voice at the other end of the line starts speaking again. Armando is very upset because his dinner is getting cold and he is very hungry. He is an unmarried student so he is not interested in buying the baby carriage, but he doesn't want to be impolite.

Armando wants to get off the phone, what should he do?

- a) Hang up the phone
- b) Wait until the speaker at the other end of the line is finished and politely say, No, thank you."

- c) At the first possible opportunity,
politely inform the speaker that he is not
interested.
- d) Interrupt the speaker and explain that he
is not married because he is a student and
his parents won't allow him to get married

Explanations for Phone

- a) This is a possible solution, but remember, Armando did not want to be impolite. To hang up the phone on other speaker would be very impolite so this is not the best answer for this situation. Please try again.
- b) This is a pretty good solution for the problem, if Armando is patient enough to listen to the whole speech that the person at the other end of the line wants to give. Sometimes, though, the person at the other end of the line gets annoyed if they have to give their whole speech only to find the potential customer uninterested. There is an even better answer for this situation. Try again.
- c) This is the best answer for the situation. Armando can very politely make his wishes known and at the same time spare both he and the person at the other end of the line from wasting valuable time.
- d) There is no need to give such personal information out over the phone to a stranger. In fact, giving this kind of information may encourage the person at the other end of the line to draw Armando into a conversation that would prevent him from getting back to his dinner and Fred from getting through on the phone. Please try another answer.

APPENDIX E
HAVING DINNER EPISODE

Having Dinner

Ken and Khalid are students at State University. Ken is an American studying physics. Khalid is from Pakistan and he is studying chemical engineering. Ken and Khalid have recently become friends, spending quite a bit of time together. One Friday afternoon Ken called Khalid and asked him if he would like to go out to dinner that evening. Khalid enthusiastically accepted the invitation to meet at the restaurant at around 7:00. Khalid, after returning home at 6:00, discovered that his roommate and several other Pakistanis were having tea and enjoying an animated conversation. Khalid joined in. At 7:00, the others decided to go out to a movie and asked Khalid if he would like to come along. Khalid said that he couldn't because he had to meet a friend for dinner. Khalid took a shower and left the house. He arrived at the restaurant at 7:45, but didn't see Ken. Khalid was seated at a table and waited an hour before going home. Khalid was hurt that Ken was not there.

What would explain this situation?

- a) Ken had a test on Monday and decided that he should stay at home and study instead of going out.
- b) Ken had come to the restaurant , but realized that he had forgotten to put money in the parking meter when he parked

near the restaurant so he had gone out to put money in the meter.

- c) In the United States, it is normal practice to confirm a plan one hour before the arranged time. Since Khalid didn't do this, Ken didn't come.
- d) Ken had come to the restaurant, but had left after waiting for 20 minutes because he thought Khalid wasn't coming.

Explanations for Having Dinner

- a) There is no indication from the incident that this was the case. If Ken had made this decision, he would have either called Khalid before the appointed time or waited at the restaurant to tell Khalid. Please choose again.
- b) If Ken had gone out to put money in the parking meter, it would not have taken him an hour to get back to the restaurant. Please try again.
- c) There is no such social rule in the United States. If a confirmation is made, it would be made earlier in the day. Unless a date is made weeks in advance, a confirmation is unnecessary. Please try another answer.
- d) This is the correct answer. Each culture views time in its own way. In American culture, 45 minutes is much too long to wait for another person in this situation. In Khalid's culture, waiting for an hour would not be unusual. This is the cause for misunderstanding between the two men. Ken left after 20 minutes because a 10-15 minute wait would be acceptable.

APPENDIX F
MAKING FRIENDS EPISODE

Making Friends

Liu Jun is looking at the announcement board in the Student Union and sees an announcement to sell a mountain bike. Since Liu Jun is very interested in buying a bike, he starts reading the announcement. It sounds like a good deal, but he's not sure what a mountain bike is. He turns to an American next to him, who is also reading the announcement board, and asks the American what a mountain bike is. The American, in a very friendly way, explains the mountain bike and its advantages and disadvantages compared to a regular bicycle. Liu Jun and the American discuss the topic of bicycles together for 20 minutes and then they go their separate ways. A few days later Liu Jun sees the American at the library and the American looks right at Liu Jun, but does not indicate that he knows who Liu Jun is even though Liu Jun smiles and waves at the American. Liu Jun is puzzled by the American's behavior.

Why did the American act this way towards Liu Jun?

- a) He was busy talking to someone else.
- b) For Americans, a single conversation of an impersonal nature does not constitute a relationship.
- c) Because Americans have a hard time being nice to international students.
- d) Because he didn't feel like talking about bikes at that time.

- e) The American didn't recognize Liu Jun because he couldn't distinguish him from other Chinese students.

Explanations for Making Friends

- a) There is no indication in the situation that the American is talking to someone else. Please try again.
- b) This is the best answer. Americans do not consider a person with whom they have had a single brief conversation of an impersonal nature a friend. Internationals are often confused by the friendliness with which Americans greet them initially, and then are reluctant to follow up.
- c) American college students report that this may be the case, that American students may have a hard time being nice to international students, but this is not always the case and may, in fact be just the opposite. In this case, however, the American did not seem to have a hard time being nice to Liu Jun the first time they interacted so it is unlikely that this is the problem. Please try again.
- d) We have no way of knowing whether the American wanted to talk about bikes or not. Please try again.
- e) This answer may be an appropriate answer, although in the context of this assimilator it would not be because recognition of another group of people is a universal problem often solved by extensive interaction with the other group, in this case, Chinese or Americans. Please try again.

APPENDIX G
A HUG EPISODE

A Hug

Bob's friend Ahmed is returning from his home country of the Sudan after Christmas vacation. Ahmed has telephoned from the airport and asked Bob to pick him up. Bob and Ahmed had gotten to be good friends before Ahmed had left for Christmas vacation and Bob is looking forward to Ahmed's arrival. When Bob arrives at the airport, he sees Ahmed waiting for him at the gate where Ahmed's plane has arrived. As Bob approaches Ahmed, he holds out his hand in greeting. Ahmed takes Bob's hand and also gives him a hug while greeting him with a friendly hello. Bob backs away from Ahmed, appears very uncomfortable, and starts telling Ahmed about the weather.

Why does Bob feel uncomfortable with Ahmed?

- a) Bob didn't feel that they were close enough yet to hug.
- b) Bob had some bad news for Ahmed and was afraid to tell him.
- c) Americans don't shake hands and hug at the same time.
- d) Bob didn't feel comfortable hugging another man.

Explanations for A Hug

- a) In some cases, this would be an acceptable answer. A close friend or relative may hug in greeting. If Bob and Ahmed's friendship was a very very close one they may have hugged, but this is not the usual greeting. There is a better explanation for this misunderstanding. Please try again.
- b) There is no indication in this incident that Bob might have some bad news for Ahmed. In fact, the episode states that Bob is looking forward to Ahmed's arrival.
- c) There is no rule in American custom that says that one cannot shake hands and hug at the same time.
- d) This is the best answer. Although there are certain situations, as in a close relative or friend where men may hug, these cases are unusual. In American society, men do not usually hug each other in greeting. The more usual way to greet is to shake hands. On the other hand, women with often greet each other with a hug and not a handshake. In the case of men and women greeting each other, it depends on the type of relationship. Husbands and wives will hug, as will brothers and sisters and other close relatives or friends.

VITA²

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