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Folklore or Britney Spears: EFL Decisions in an Increasingly Global World

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Folklore or Britney Spears:

EFL Decisions in an Increasingly Global World

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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Abstract

This paper explores my decisions concerning texts in the EFL classroom in the post-communist cities of Bruntál, Czech Republic in 1993 and Bila Tserkva, Ukraine in 2005. By examining my use of Slavic folklore in these EFL contexts, through the lenses of post-colonialism, folklore studies, and globalization, it is apparent that what has motivated my students has not necessarily been consistent with the goals of post-colonialism, i.e., the development and maintenance of national cultural values. In fact, students have been found to be most motivated by the use of texts they share a fondness for and a familiarity with, regardless of the origins of these texts. This discussion includes the following: a discussion of current post-colonial theory and how that relates to EFL teaching; a rationale for using folklore to establish national values; a contextual description of Bruntál in 1993, including linguistic history, a description of the educational institution, a comparison between Czech and Russian language and folklore, and a discussion of attempts to use folklore; a contextual description of Bila Tserkva in 2005, including linguistic history, a description of the educational institution, a comparison between Ukrainian and Russian language and folklore, a discussion of attempts to use folklore, and a discussion of attempts to use products of global mass culture; an update on Czech attitudes toward global mass culture and the current foreign-language curriculum in Bruntál; and finally, a conclusion.

Educational Resources Information Center Descriptors

Bila Tserkva

Bruntál

Culture

Curriculum

Czech Republic

EFL

Folklore

Global Mass Culture

Post-communist

Post-colonial

Songs

Ukraine

National Identity

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Folklore or Britney Spears: EFL Decisions in an Increasingly Global World

In today's climate of post-colonial awareness, it is difficult for EFL teachers to feel confident that they are not engaged in cultural imperialism. Also, as an American native speaker, specifically as a volunteer in post-communist countries, it has been my experience that host institutions have given me more or less free rein to choose my teaching materials and methods. In addition, my foreign colleagues have invested a great deal of hope in what I can accomplish in the classroom. In their eyes, I have held the keys to advanced economic and political development, all of which, including the language itself, is believed to be transmittable in the EFL classroom. The truth is that I often have many more doubts about the value of the American assumptions inherent in my teaching methodologies and materials than do my host-country colleagues. The theorists of post-colonialism and post-modernism have taught me to question and even challenge assumptions native to American culture, i.e., individualism, commercialism, and novelty. I have learned that other values such as collectivism and tradition, not dominant in American culture, but which form the fabric of other cultures, should be encouraged.

Culture teaching has been "part of what Michael Byram (1989) has called 'the hidden curriculum,' indirectly seeking to create in the learner an empathy toward and an appreciation for the culture of the target language community" (as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 268). This contributes to an imperialism of values, a hegemony of Western values over non-Western values. An imperative to examine the culture hidden in center-created materials and methodologies is further stressed by Canagarajah (1999), who has stated that teachers need to raise "questions about the

relevance and appropriateness of the teaching material, curriculum, and pedagogies developed by the Anglo-American communities for periphery contexts" (p. 12).

After an analysis of center-developed pedagogical materials, an examination of the students' context is also necessary, according to Canagarajah. Teachers need to "relate learning to the larger socio-political realities, and encourage students to make pedagogical choices that offer sounder alternatives to their living conditions" (p. 14). Thus, EFL teachers need to question both the cultural values inherent in pedagogical materials developed in the U.S., Canada, Britain and Australian English-language centers *and* examine the historical and political contexts in their students' home countries as well.

Further complicating this attempt to be socio-politically aware is the spread of global popular culture. "There is of course a quite popular intellectual view which would have it that the entire world is being swamped by Western--more specifically American--culture" (Robertson, 1995, p. 479). The fact that global culture has become so pervasive as to require resistance is evidenced by the many anti-globalization movements around the world (Starr & Adams, 2003).

The idea that popular culture was intruding into the educational process was an issue decades before the spread of popular culture around the globe. It was of enough concern in 1960 in the United States that the following resolution was passed at the National Union of Teachers Annual Conference:

Conference believes that a determined effort must be made to counteract the debasement of standards which result from the misuse of press, radio, cinema and television. . . . It calls especially upon those who use and control the media of mass communication, and upon parents, to support the efforts of teachers in an

attempt to prevent the conflict which too often arises between the values inculcated in the classroom and those encountered by young people in the world outside. (as cited in Storey, 1998, p. 63)

While it is not the purview of this paper to examine all the ways that media creates a “debasement of standards,” it is mentioned here as another feature of context analysis that an EFL teacher can examine when making decisions concerning classroom materials. So, included in an examination of messages inherent in Western materials, the EFL teacher should also examine the messages spreading in global media forms that the EFL student has access to outside of the classroom. These three factors--center-dominant values inherent in pedagogical materials, students’ historical and social contexts, and global mass culture—all influence how a student interacts with texts and should be taken into consideration by the EFL teacher who strives to be ever more socially aware.

The remainder of this paper explores principles of folklore studies, popular culture theory and my teaching experiences in the post communist countries of the Czech Republic in 1993 and Ukraine in 2005. By examining the use of Slavic folklore in these EFL contexts, it is apparent that what motivates students is not necessarily consistent with the goals of anti-globalization or post-colonialism, i.e., the development and maintenance of national cultural values in opposition to previous colonial or imperial control. Students have been found to be most motivated by the use of texts they share a fondness for and a familiarity with, regardless of whether those texts came from their national folklore, the folklore of a former imperialist power, or from current global mass culture.

Rationale for Using Folklore

The use of folklore to create a national identity began in Europe in the early nineteenth century in an age when imperial control in Europe was entering its final century. Buoyed by the nationalistic values of the French Revolution of the eighteenth century, ethnic groups throughout Europe began to engage in the ethnographic practices of writing down legends, proverbs, songs, and fairy tales. This ethnography helped to shape new nations. The “national folklorist sees in a proverb of common coin the indelible stamp of his people’s wit or sentiment” (Dorson, 1963, p. 96).

In the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, this ethnographic work was carried out by Božena Němcová, among others, after she was encouraged by the nationalist movement to compile fairy tales from Czech and Slovak sources. She was among many in Prague who "worked to redraw Europe's borders--according to the language of those who lived there, not political expediency" and she "recognized the importance of promoting native culture" (*Encyclopedia*, 2005, para. 8). Thus, Němcová actively worked to create a national ethos through the literature of folklore, a necessary component in the formation of post-colonial societies. As Edward Said has pointed out:

The concept of the national language is central, but without the practice of a national culture--from slogans to pamphlets and newspapers, from folk tales and heroes to epic poetry, novels, and drama--the language is inert; national culture organizes and sustains communal memory, as when early defeats in African resistance stories are resumed ('they took our weapons in 1903;

now we are taking them back'); it reinhabits the landscape using restored ways of life, heroes, heroines, and exploits; it formulates expressions and emotions of pride as well as defiance, which in turn form the backbone of the principal national independence parties. Local slave narratives, spiritual autobiographies, prison memoirs form a counterpoint to the Western powers' monumental histories, official discourses and panoptic quasi-scientific viewpoint. (Said, 1993/2007, p. 95)

This belief that cultural values are revealed in folklore was particularly important in the contexts in which I taught--the Czech Republic and Ukraine, countries that have had centuries of experience maintaining their cultural identities. In the nineteenth century, they attempted to form national identities in opposition to the absolute monarchies of the Austrian-Hungarian and Russian Empires. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, they have attempted to strengthen their identities after the fall of Soviet communism. Thus, I have considered myself part of nation-wide efforts to reformulate national identity independent of the former center of the Soviet Union.

Exploration of Context in Bruntál

There was a long history of colonization and linguistic imperialism in the Czech town of Bruntál, in former Silesia, north of Moravia. In the thirteenth century, German-speaking colonizers were invited to this area by the reigning Catholic administrative center (Čepek, 1998, p. 5). Consequently, the scattered Slavic settlements present at that time moved away and Germanic culture consolidated, with only a minority of Czechs remaining in the area. As part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, German remained the *lingua franca* throughout the nineteenth century.

Němcová's nation-building work in the recording of folk tales was part of the successful creation of the nation state of Czechoslovakia, which came into being after WWI in 1918. But Czechs in Bruntál remained a minority, struggling to establish themselves. A social organization named Pradyed (which means great-grandfather in Czech and is also the name of the highest peak in the nearby Jeseníky Mountains) began to establish a nursery school in Bruntál for Czech children due to the fact that the children had become partially "de-nationalized in German schools and during games with German children" (my trans., Čepek, 1998, p. 93).

In this process of decolonization from the Austrian-Hungarian Empire to the creation of Czechoslovak nationalism, tensions arose. For example, on the fourth anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia, two German-language newspapers did not send representatives to cover the visiting Czech-language theater troupe, and during the performance, the electricity was cut, so the remainder of the show had to be illuminated by candlelight. The fact that the electricity was cut the following day during

continued festivities was an indication that this was not an accident (Čepek, 1998, p. 52).

After WWII, Germans were forcibly expelled from the area and Czechs were brought in from the interior to populate the town. Twenty-two years later, Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1968, and Bruntál became a barracks town, housing five thousand occupying soldiers. Instruction in Russian became a mandatory part of the school curriculum. As one of my colleagues said, "Our teachers pretended to teach us Russian, and we pretended to learn it." Communism fell in November of 1989, Soviet troops were expelled, and Vaclav Havel was elected the 10th president of Czechoslovakia and later the first president of the Czech Republic.

The fact that Czech culture had been suppressed by Soviet culture during those twenty-one years of occupation became apparent to me when I was invited to attend a trip to the National Theater in Prague with a busload of teachers. The play we watched had not been publicly performed during either Soviet occupation or Nazi occupation. Thus, early in my stay in the Czech Republic, I witnessed firsthand, a culture reclaiming its pre-colonial past.

Educational Context

I arrived in the Czech Republic in August 1993, through a volunteer organization called Education for Democracy, eight months after Czechoslovakia split into the two countries of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. I was given a full-time teaching job in a college-preparatory secondary school known as the Gymnazium, whose impressive Baroque architecture hailed from the early eighteenth century. The main building of the school, with marble floors and high ceilings, had previously been a German-language secondary school (Čepek, 1998, p.33).

My job was to teach students who had been tracked in the physical, natural and social sciences to speak English well enough to converse for fifteen minutes during an oral exam as a requirement for graduation. The content of this discussion was based on a short text they were given fifteen minutes prior to the exam and one of twenty-five general topics they picked at random from a list. Topics included the following: my town, a trip to the doctor, a trip to the theater, in a restaurant, in a hotel, winter sports, summer sports, etc.

This exam was part of the "school leaving exam," which was conducted in all major subjects over the course of two weeks at the end of the final school year. It was a comprehensive exam covering the main information learned in the course of secondary school instruction.

All English classes received English instruction conducted by a Czech teacher who used a Cambridge series textbook. Thus, I did not plan my ninety-minute lessons per week to introduce and explain new language and structures to the seniors who comprised the majority of my classes, but to facilitate the activation of what they had already been exposed to by Czech teachers. In other words, I was mostly concerned with stimulating my students' output. Merrill Swain (1995) has carefully explored the three overall functions of output in the acquisition of second language, i.e., noticing, hypothesis-testing, and metalinguistic reflection on one's language use (p. 128). At that time, however, I was simply concerned with getting students to speak in order to eventually complete the oral component of their school-leaving exam.

There were two major challenges to the accomplishment of this goal. The first was the fact that my students had a lack of personal experience with many of the topics

and functional scripts covered in the Cambridge textbooks. For example, one of my students had never been in a restaurant. Others had only been in a restaurant on very important social occasions such as family celebrations and therefore had not internalized the script of individually ordering from a menu even in their native language. (On hiking trips with colleagues, it quickly became apparent to me that any food that was to be eaten during the day was to be prepared at home and carried during the excursion, and not to be ordered in a roadside pub.) Many students had also never been to the theater or stayed in a hotel. When people traveled, they stayed overnight with friends and relatives if they did not return home the same evening.

This context was still non-consumer-oriented. My sixteen- and seventeen-year-old students were twelve and thirteen years old when the political structure of their country changed, but it took time to change infrastructure and consumption habits, however actively those changes were sought. And sought they were. Even before English-speaking Western teachers had come to this town, models of Western consumption had been playing on government-owned television stations. For example, several seasons of *Beverly Hills 90210* and *Dallas* had been viewed by the inhabitants of this town before I arrived. One of my students said that at family gatherings it was more important to update family members on the most recent episode of *Dallas* than it was to update each other on the lives of other family members. Nonetheless, my students had minimal consumer-oriented experiences to match the scenarios depicted in their English language textbooks.

I addressed the first challenge of my students' lack of experience with realia such as large laminated color menus from a Big Boy Restaurant, which I had brought from the U.S. But I also tried to create classroom experiences that did not capitalize on the

consumption of popular culture. For example, I played European classical music on my flute in a mini concert in the classroom so that we could have a shared experience about which to talk in English. I also took students to the Baroque castle across the street where we went on a guided tour, during which I interrupted the tour guide and called on individual students to translate sentences into English.

The second challenge in getting students to generate their own dialogues was the fact that they came from a culture where being an "egoist" was frowned upon. Most students were too shy to speak up in class, especially in response to Western-style conversational prompts which elicited personal opinions and personal anecdotes. This was alien to the dominant cultural value of modesty. Inevitably, however, a "leader" appeared in each class to answer questions, while the majority remained quiet. While I felt this leader was unfairly monopolizing classroom time, I came to see how relieved all the other students were that the leader had taken it upon himself or herself to bear the burden of linguistic responsibility. To get students to overcome their reticence, I used the structure of competitive games, but this did not serve the needs of the naturally shy students, who ended up not scoring points for their teams.

In order to give quiet students opportunities to increase their language awareness, I violated the reigning philosophy of communicative methodology and attempted a grammar-translation lesson. The text I chose for this came from Czech folklore.

A Comparison of Czech and Russian Language and Folklore

It is important to note the significant differences between Czech and Russian folklore and languages. While they are both considered Slavic languages, Czech is classified as a Western Slavic language, while Russian is an Eastern Slavic language. In

addition to differences between the alphabets, i.e., Czech uses the Latin alphabet, while Russian uses the Cyrillic, there are many different morphemes. Thus, even though the grammatical case endings are similar between these two languages, it is difficult for Russians to understand Czechs.

Fairy tale characters differ considerably. The Czech hero is a milder version who uses more cooperation and less magic to accomplish his goal. The Czech hero, for example, might help a stranded fish back into a pond early in the tale. Later in the story, the fish retrieves a pearl from the bottom of the ocean and gives it to the hero as repayment for his earlier kindness. The hero then gives this to the princess as one of the tasks assigned him in order to win her hand. In contrast, the Russian character will capture a fish and be granted three magic wishes, which he uses to accomplish otherwise irksome tasks. For example, he makes the buckets of water he has been sent to fetch walk back to the cottage by themselves. In addition, Russian tales feature a witch who lives in a hut that stands on two chicken legs in the woods. This character is not found in Czech folklore.

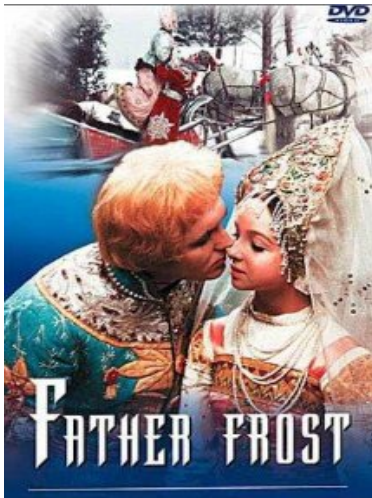
Using Folklore

For my lesson, I planned to read a few sentences in Czech out loud, they would translate, and then they would finish writing out the story in English from their memories. I wanted to use folklore because it was already a shared experience and it was from their local culture, not from the West. And so, I began in Czech with "Once upon a time there lived a widow whose only fortune was her two goats." When the class burst out laughing, I assumed it was a reflection on my poor accent, but later I learned that "goat" was a slang word for a woman's breast. That was the end of my using Slavic folklore to teach

English, or so I thought.

In December, I asked one class if there were any favorite seasonal movies in Czech. I was simply looking for movies that would help me learn more about Czech culture. After a student answered, I asked for more details, and a heated debate occurred. Students began to correct each other, clarifying details. Then some students seemed to be quoting complete sections of dialogue from the movie in Czech. Others translated the dialogue into English for me, and others refined the English translation. Two forces seemed to be at work. All of the students had a thorough knowledge of the same text, and they were all concerned about accurately communicating the details, especially when I began to deliberately get details wrong with subsequent classes. "Isn't there a little man with a strawberry on his head?"

"No! A mushroom!" students would shout back at me, erupting in outrage at the audacity of this inaccuracy. I seemed to have tapped into a very powerful relationship my



students had with this text, similar to the way small children respond to a favorite bedtime story, intolerant of any variation.

This movie, *Father Frost* in English, became the basis for lessons in other classes and the stimulus for exposing unexpected talents. For example, in one of my smallest classes--eight students--Sharka spoke the least of

her classmates. She sat quietly, with what could be interpreted as a somewhat sullen expression. On the day when I asked about the movie *Father Frost*, hoping to get the same chaotic eruption of language I'd gotten with my class the previous day, not only did

Sharka remain silent, but the other seven students as well. This was a ninety-minute morning class divided by a twenty-minute break at nine o'clock. After the first forty-five minutes, I left the classroom to join my colleagues. After the break, I returned to class with some other ideas for finishing up the lesson. When I walked into the classroom and saw the chalk board--one central panel with a hinged panel on either side--I got goosebumps. The two side panels had been opened and the entire surface of the board was covered with chalk illustrations. At first I could not make out what I was seeing. My students saw my confusion and explained, "It's *Father Frost*. We wanted to show you." They had drawn all the major scenes from the movie.

Their need to communicate this story was so strong that they had overcome their lack of language by using their artistic ability, and the primary artist had been Sharka. Throughout the rest of the semester this class would always have a chance to "show" me the topics we discussed: Sharka's menu for her seafood restaurant featured the image of a shark curled up in the corner.

In a subsequent lesson, students worked in groups to write out the English for major scenes, which they dramatized in front of the class at the end of the lesson. And for a final lesson, a copy of the video was brought into class. We watched and translated major scenes.

Ironically, this was *not* a Czech movie. In fact, it was a movie that was not shown on Czech television at that time, despite the fact that Czech broadcast companies had a strong tradition of showing favorite fairy tale movies during every holiday. While the transcribing of Czech and Slovak folk tales during nineteenth-century nationalism might have contributed to the creation of a national culture, the most-loved Christmas movie of

my students did not come from this treasure-trove of lore. They loved a tale from the Soviet colonizers. This 1965 movie was based on Russian folklore, which had been excellently dubbed in Czech. Therefore it was a product not of their own folklore or of Western globalization, but of Soviet mass culture.

In the years immediately following WWII as mass culture developed, Soviet mass culture became a point in the debate about American mass culture. In the anthology *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, published in 1957, one of the editors, Bernard Rosenberg, maintains that mass “culture is nowhere more widespread than in the Soviet Union” (as cited in Storey, 1998, p. 36). In a comparison between Soviet and American mass culture, Dwight Macdonald goes so far as to say that Soviet mass culture is inferior to American mass culture because “it exploits rather than satisfies the cultural needs of the masses. . . for political rather than commercial reasons” (as cited in Storey, 1998, p.37). These judgments of Western intellectuals, however, on the extent and merits of Soviet mass culture, and by extension on the merits of a movie such as *Father Frost*, were of little concern to either my students or myself as I allowed them to include their beloved movie in our lessons. Also, as a foreigner who knew little of the subtext surrounding this artifact of imperialist culture, I seemed to be someone to whom my students simply wanted to share a beloved story, regardless of its cultural origin.

Since then, the spread of globalization has continued, creating an interesting hybrid concerning this text. I heard about the movie *Father Frost* twelve years later in a workshop during the 2005 Conference of the National Association of Teachers of English in Kazakhstan (NATEK). Actually, the movie was used as an example of international *miscommunication* by the presenter Saule K. Abdygapparova. She used comments

written by western viewers from the International Movie Date Base website (imdb.com) to show how easy it was for one culture to misunderstand texts from another culture. For example, the current plot synopsis on the website for the movie *Jack Frost* reads as

follows: "Strange Russian fairy tale dealing with a boy and a girl who go through the strangest situations to be with one another. The boy is transformed by a Mushroom Pixie into a bear, and almost baked by an evil witch who controls trees. The girl is given the Cinderella treatment by her mother and her sister who is jealous of her long braided



hair. Jack Frost himself doesn't appear until late in the movie" (Falcon, n.d.). More than characterizing this movie as "strange" can be heard in an episode of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, a program that makes fun of "B" films. In this version, the silhouettes of three movie viewers are seen in the foreground. While the movie plays, they constantly make fun of the long camera shots and the unattractiveness of some of the characters.

It is entirely possible that the moment has passed for using this text with contemporary adolescent Czech students, who are technologically savvy and have spent all of their lives in a consumption-oriented, capitalist economy. As a member of NATO since 1999 and a member of the European Union since 2004, the Czech Republic currently has other "centers" from which to negotiate its identity. However, according to a leading daily newspaper in the Czech Republic, *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, this movie, titled *Mrazik* in Czech, maintained its popularity a decade after the fall of communism when the young children watching it had never known Soviet-imposed cultural programming. "*Mrazik* has not attained such popularity in any other country, including Russia" (my

trans., Ciglerová, 1998, p.3).

Whether or not this movie still maintains its popularity, what can be extrapolated from this experience is the fact that students revealed a text they all had a positive, shared experience of. The twin features of their sharing a level of familiarity with this text and their affection for it were the foundation for creating communicative activities that engaged them. It is the teacher's task to illicit this type of text from students. It is possible that the more a teacher knows about students' consumption of cultural products—films, songs, books, and, yes, fairy tales—the easier it may be to find these texts. But perhaps not. This may simply require asking students questions and letting their answers help shape the development of classroom materials.

Exploration of Context in Bila Tserkva

The city itself is said to have been founded in 1032 by Yaroslav the Wise. His statue stands near the once-Catholic church, which is now a cultural center for concerts (organ and various other instruments). This area, fifty miles south of the capital city of Kyiv, received waves of conquerors from Mongols and Tartars to Lithuanians/Polish and Russians to Nazi Germans and then Soviet Russians. Ukraine became a country in 1991, but not until the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the subsequent election did Ukraine experience democracy.

Russian was still spoken in this city when I lived there. Stories in the local newspaper appeared in Russian or in Ukrainian, often side-by-side on the same page. By the time I left in Dec. 2007, however, all movies in the cinema were being shown in Ukrainian and less Russian was shown on television.

Educational Context

My duties as a Peace Corps volunteer at the Kyiv Regional In-Service Teacher Training Institute between 2005 to 2007 included conducting seminars for teachers on sociocultural issues, as well as teaching at the Humanitarian-Pedagogical College of Kyiv Regional In-service Teacher Training Institute. This program included two final years of secondary education and two years required for certification to teach in elementary school, which consisted of kindergarten through fourth grade. My students were completing their final two years of secondary school. Therefore, they were sixteen and seventeen years old.

The areas of specialty included the following: primary education and English; primary education and computer studies; primary education and sports clubs

organization; the fine arts and handicrafts; and social pedagogy (Kristtti, n.d., para. 6).

The twelve students in my class were working through a textbook with their Ukrainian teacher Natalia Benderets, who was also my Peace Corps sponsor. I met with these students once a week for a forty-five minute lesson. Again, I interpreted my pedagogical role primarily as a stimulator of output, not as an introducer of new information. And since these students were in a program specifically designed to train them to teach English up to the fourth grade only, I again tried lessons using Ukrainian mythology and folklore.

A Comparison of Ukrainian and Russian Language and Folklore

A note here is necessary on the intermingling of Ukrainian and Russian language and folklore. The Ukrainian language is considered an Eastern Slavic language and is much more similar to Russian than Czech is. Also, both Ukrainian and Russian use the Cyrillic alphabet. Differences appear in the similarities Ukrainian shares with other Western Slavic languages such as Slovak, Czech, and Polish.

Concerning folklore, it is very difficult to untangle similarities between Russian and Ukrainian fairy tales due to the historic nature of folklore itself, having originated as an oral text hundreds of years before it was recorded and due to the fact that Russian historians trace their cultural origins back to the city of Kyiv, the current capital of Ukraine. A split between Russian and Ukrainian culture appeared as Russians moved to the north, but fairy tales published in Ukrainian can also be found among those published in Russian. Thus, my use of folklore in this context was not an attempt to sharpen national identity in contrast to previous Sovietization. My use of folklore was an attempt to counter influences by global mass culture.

Using Folklore

I used an illustrated pamphlet in Ukrainian that tells the story of a fox and a wolf (a tale which appears in the folklore of several northern European cultures with some character variation, i.e., the wolf is replaced by a bear). Below is a brief rendition of the tale in the present tense. The original Ukrainian story was in the past tense and contained dialogue.

One winter day a fox sees a man driving a cart full of fish. The fox jumps onto the back of the cart. Then she throws the dead fish onto the side of the road. She jumps off the cart, sits by the side of the road, and starts to eat the fish. A wolf comes. He asks her to give him some fish. She tells him to go catch his own fish. He asks her how he can do this. She tells him to go to the lake, cut a whole in the ice, and put his tail in the cold water. He does this. The water in the hole freezes, and his tail gets stuck. When people see him the next morning, they run to him, scream at him, and beat him. He can't run away because his tail is stuck in the ice. He pulls and pulls until his tail falls off. He runs away. He is very angry at the fox. He goes to find her. Before he finds her, she breaks into a house and tries to eat some dough in a bowl, but the people in the house hear her and chase her away. Her head is covered with bread dough. When the wolf finds her, he threatens to kill her because she made him lose his tail. She tells him he should feel sorry for her because people beat her so badly that her brains are falling out of her head. He thinks the dough is part of her brain. He feels sorry for her. He lets her climb onto his back so he can carry her home. On the way, she makes fun of him and he gets angry again. She jumps off his back and runs into her den.

I removed the staples from the Ukrainian version, separated the pages and cut the pages along the binding fold. Then I put students into pairs. The pages were distributed among the pairs so that each pair had the same number of pages. Students were required to write out the English translation for their pages. They had ten to fifteen minutes to complete their section. I circulated among the students to see what support was necessary, placing words on the board as needed. When everyone was finished, a presenter from each group presented their section of the story. Then the class discussed the proper order of the narrative elements. Again, this was a tale that all students knew in Ukrainian and words drew on core vocabulary such as fox, wolf, people, ice. New lexical items included the word "dough," which was presented on the board with choral repetition of the sound.

For this particular lesson, I told students that I would audio record their summaries of the tale. After giving them time to work on vocalizing their summaries with their partners, I called students individually to the back of the room where I taped their summary on a small MP3 player. Before the class met again, I transcribed their summaries. Their mistakes with the following corrections were marked in italics:

Student One:

The fox *eat [ate]* fish and the wolf *want [ed]* to eat fish too. And he said, "Give me some fish." The fox said, "No. You must go to the river and you must put your tail *on [in]* the ice water and then the fish *[will]* grab your tail." The wolf *going [went]* to the river and *sitting [sat]* on the ice all night. Then in the morning *to the river go many womens [many women went to the river]* and he *[they]* scream *[ed]* "Wolf, wolf! Hit him!" And then *[the]* wolf replied off his, ripped off his tail and

his, he going to, he went to the forest. He saw the fox and *say that womens [said those women]* hit him.

Student Two:

Firstly a wolf met with a fox and then *[the]* fox advised the wolf to go to the river and put his tail on *[in]* the cold water and said, “Catch fish, catch fish,” but it was fault *[wrong]* because *[the]* fox advised *[the]* wolf *[a]* mistake, it was *[a]* mistake. Then *a [the]* wolf put his tail *on [in]* the cold water and he sat and waited for fish, but there *isn’t [weren’t]* any one *[any]*. Then in the village people *looked [saw]* him and wanted to beat *[him]*. He *[got]* scared and ripped off his tail and ran out. And then he met with a *[the]* fox. She had *her head in dough [had dough on her head]* and he wanted to kill her maybe, but she tricked him and said it’s her head *[brains]*. “They hit me.”

“I’m very sorry, but it’s not my fault.”

Student Three:

Well, one winter’s day the fox come, came to the ice on the river to put *[catch]* fish. I don’t remember. The wolf came to the fox and he said, “Can you *gave [give]* me some fish.” She said, “No, you can go out and put *his [your]* tail in the water and say, ‘Catch, catch fish, small and big.’” After it, he *go [went]*, and I don’t remember, he put his tail in the water and his tail, and he sat in the river all day and his tail, well, *frozen [froze]* in *[the]* ice. And *[the]* next day the people came to the river and they said *[to]* the wolf, “Hit *[him]*” and the fox came to the wolf, too, and she said to him something else.

Since students had this folktale in Ukrainian, they were able to draw on a shared

experience, which allowed them to help each other complete the task, correcting and clarifying lexical items for each other. While Student Three's repeated use of the phrase "I don't remember" may have indicated a less than complete familiarity with this tale, this phrase may also have been a communicative stalling tactic to gain time to remember the English words needed to tell the story during the recording process.

Students otherwise had little opportunity, however, to use communicative strategies because they had to match English language to concepts illustrated in the story. This revealed their mastery of structures, making this task a useful assessment tool for further work. The fact that students were given a transcript with corrections of what they had said allowed them to see the areas they needed to work on. This was a form of feedback otherwise unavailable to them in their course. This showed how my work with folk tales had evolved from the Czech context when I was primarily concerned with students simply speaking with little or no follow-up.

While this lesson was also an attempt to model what they could possibly do with their future elementary-school-age students, this lesson did not generate the same excitement that had been generated in the Czech context. Perhaps the fact that now I was a teacher with an agenda, i.e., a determination to use folklore native to my students' culture, created a resistance in my students not present in the earlier Czech context which sprang organically from the students' desire to accurately communicate a story they loved.

Or perhaps for these students, having lived most of their lives in a consumer-oriented society, folklore did not seem to contain helpful or useful information. While I could see themes of resistance to power in this tale that could be useful in navigating

one's way through life, my students probably did not. For example, the wolf, a large and powerful animal, was being outwitted by a smaller, less powerful animal. The message to be gleaned was to maintain one's wily edge in the face of seemingly powerful entities. These were messages that could be subconsciously absorbed by young children but not easily apprehended or expressed in a foreign language by adolescents whose overriding concern was to fit in with adolescents around the world via global mass culture.

Using Materials from Global Mass Culture

In the balancing act between pushing my teacher agenda and allowing students the responsibility and autonomy to help shape class materials, I did end up using products from global mass culture. I created multiple lesson segments from the songs on a CD that one student brought into class. These lessons elicited more excitement from my students. Specifically, their joy was sparked by the likes of James Brown and his song, "I Feel Good." Every time he wailed "Wooo!" a ripple of embarrassed excitement passed through the class. (Since I always sang along with the tape, loudly enough to cover shy student voices, they were probably embarrassed by *my* "Wooooo!")

Perhaps this song simply communicated an uncomplicated joy and power that was attractive on its own terms. Regardless, this was always the song requested. Other Western music used in class included artists such as Spears, Madonna, Styx, and Blunt. Thus, in order to generate and maintain student motivation, I ended up exploiting global popular culture, this time not from the Soviet Union, but from the West.

While these songs triggered one of the elements I had found necessary for successful engagement with a text, i.e., fondness for the text, students did not understand the words. Therefore, while they were familiar with the melodies, the other element for

engagement with a text being familiarity, they did not have a shared experience of the meanings that they had had with folklore from their culture.

Nonetheless, the use of song became a strong thread throughout the course. Every week or so I would introduce another song from the CD. I would prepare a gap-fill sheet with the lyrics. Students would have the chance to fill in the gaps first. Then we would listen to the song several times to check their answers. Then we would sing the song at least twice. Finally, I would answer any questions about vocabulary or supply additional information and assign a creative writing prompt. One song on the CD was Britney Spears' "Born to Make You Happy." Below is an excerpt:

I don't know how to live without your love

I was born to make you happy

'Cause you're the only one within my heart

I was born to make you happy

Always and forever you and me

I don't know how to live without your love

If we compared the survival tactics of the fox from the folktale with the dependency of the narrator in the song, we see that the folklore offers a much stronger personality model. This was not a connection I thought of making at the time, but it would have been an interesting exercise. For example, I could have said to students, "Write a letter from the fox to Britney. What advice would the fox give her?"

I was able to find a different relationship model on the CD in the following song "You'll See" by Madonna.

Chorus:

All by myself

I don't need anyone at all

I know I'll survive

I know I'll stay alive,

All on my own

I don't need anyone this time

It will be mine

No one can take it from me

You'll see

I was able at that time to connect this song to the previous song with the following prompt: "What would Madonna say to Britney about losing her boyfriend? Write a letter between Madonna and Britney."

These two songs illustrated the paradox of relationship messages in global mass culture. Messages focused either on dependence on the love object or on independence from the love object. This pendulum swing of extremes, however, did not celebrate the value of interdependence or collectivism found in many cultures around the world. This was one of the reasons I valued using folk tales, which often depicted characters coping with conflicts in their relationships.

Below are lyrics from two additional songs from the CD:

Boat on the River--Styx

Take me back to my boat on the river. I need to go down. I need to come down.

Take me back to my boat on the river, and I won't cry out any more. Time stands

still as I gaze in the waters. She eases me down, touching me gently with the waters that flow past my boat on the river so I won't cry out any more. Oh, the river is wise, the river, it touches my life like the waves on the sand, and all roads lead to Tranquility Base where the frown on my face disappears. Take me down to my boat on the river and I won't cry out anymore. Oh, the river is deep, the river it touches my life like the waves on the sand. And all roads lead to Tranquility Base where the frown on my face disappears. Take me down to my boat on the river. I need to go down, won't you let me go down. Take me back to my boat on the river and I won't cry out anymore and I won't cry out anymore and I won't cry out any more.

During a class discussion of this text, I asked students what the singer was feeling and why. In further discussions about the symbolism of the boat and the river, students mentioned death and drugs. In this way, popular media could be a vehicle for allowing students to think about potent issues in the emotionally distanced mode of classroom analysis. This song also lent itself to clarifying the different meanings of "cry" and the phrasal verb "cry out." Many translations of Slavic languages into English showed an unclear distinction between the "cry" involving tears and the "cry" involving voice volume.

You're Beautiful-James Blunt

My life is brilliant, my love is pure. I saw an angel of that I'm sure. She smiled at me on the subway. She was with another man, but I won't lose no sleep on that because I've got a plan. You're beautiful, you're beautiful, you're beautiful; it's true. I saw your face in a crowded place, and I don't know what to do, 'cause I'll

never be with you. Yes, she caught my eye as we walked on by. She could see from my face that I was flying high, and I don't think that I'll see her again, but we shared a moment that will last till the end. You're beautiful. You're beautiful. You're beautiful; it's true. I saw your face in a crowded place, and I don't know what to do. 'Cause I'll never be with you. (la, la, la) You're beautiful. You're beautiful. You're beautiful; it's true. There must be an angel with a smile on her face when she thought up that I should be with you, but it's time to face the truth. I will never be with you.

I did not find Blunt's psychological position of a man pining for a hopeless love as destructive as that of Spears', whose narrator's identity consisted of making her boyfriend happy. Also, I could appreciate the appeal of fantasizing about a man who considers one beautiful. But this narcissism may not be something an instructor would wish to encourage. At any rate, it became part of the shared experience of the class' growing repertoire. Grammatical issues to be addressed concerned the double negative of "I won't lose no sleep" and the informal usage of 'cause.

By the end of the course, we knew several songs. In a lesson to recycle activities and vocabulary at the end of the term, I gave students copies of previously completed worksheets to be filled out again. While they did these exercises, I played a tape cassette that I had made with only the songs from the CD that we had studied. The music provided background noise and some loose structure. They were to finish the exercise by the time the song had finished. I passed out the next exercise to be completed before the following song was played. If they needed or wanted to hear the song again, I rewound the tape. If they finished their exercise early, they quietly listened to the song they had

learned, or sub-vocalized along with the tape.

For this particular lesson, my class was combined with another class due to a teacher's absence. I grouped the students so that the new students were paired with my students and continued with the lesson as planned. Despite the fact that the new students had not completed the exercises before, the music had a calming and focusing effect and one of the new students commented on how pleasant the lesson had been. In this way, the sounds of the music, the students' enhanced knowledge of the lyrics, as well as students' familiarity with exercises functioned as both a review and as a celebration of knowledge and skills acquired during the term.

After reflecting on and analyzing this class' reactions to my use of their folklore and songs from global mass culture, I had to admit that the text that engaged them the most came from neither of these sources originally. The text that they took as their own, modified to their needs, and actually performed in front of the student body was a pedagogical song from Western culture.

One of the decisions an American EFL teacher must make when working in cultures where more traditional classroom behaviors are dominant is whether to have students continue to stand up when the teacher walks into the room. This behavior is foreign to the American teacher. She or he may feel uncomfortable and wish to dispense with this practice all together. But to do so would run the risk of students not understanding the distance that still existed between student and teacher, and thus, classroom management problems might occur.

My decision was to continue to have students stand up when I entered the room, but instead of having them sit down immediately, I used their standing position to teach

them children's songs that incorporated body movements such as "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes," and "Put Your Right Foot In." In addition to allowing them to continue their traditional behavior of standing at the beginning of the lesson, this was also a way to familiarize students with songs they could use with their future elementary-school English students. After I had introduced these songs to them, one student found another version of "Put Your Right Foot In" on the Internet that used hip-hop movements. Thus, a hybrid had been created from a traditional pedagogical tool and global mass culture.

And so, a week before my students were scheduled to act out this song on stage in front of the entire pedagogical college, one student asked me if I wanted to see their version. As they performed, it was clear that their connection to this text had gone far beyond the walls of the classroom. This was the magic of owning a text so fully that one fairly burst at the seams in order to share it with others. Whether or not this type of miracle could be predicted or forced was not something I could say. At least, I did not know the secret formula. Perhaps the best a teacher could do was try as many ways as possible—methodological, ideological, and cultural—to model such strong relationships with texts and help students reflect on their own relationships to texts offered in class by both the teacher and other students.

An Update on Czech Context

I had the good fortune to be present in the Czech Republic before a backlash of disappointment would arise and the U.S. would not be hailed as a model of civilization. For example, twelve years later, in a 2005 textbook for secondary students on civics, the U.S. is used as an example of what *not* to emulate:

Material culture and intellectual* culture are, of course, connected. If the ability to create music and know how to listen to it is a part of intellectual culture, then the musical instrument or the CD player is a part of material culture. But beware: just because material culture and intellectual culture are somewhat related does not mean that both have to be on the same level. Many people who are proud of their high level of material culture manage to look with disdain on those whose culture is comparably poor materially speaking. In such situations we hear the words "primitive," "uncultured" and so on, which is, of course, a huge mistake. There exist civilizations on a very low material level which are able to boast an extraordinarily rich culture (religions, ceremonies, myths, folk sayings, art, customs). And there exist societies which are extraordinarily successful concerning material culture, whose members (fortunately only a few) could be considered really primitive from a cultural perspective. For example, how many resources of material culture of the highest level (computer simulation, etc.) are needed to create an entirely stupid and kitsch Hollywood blockbuster! (my trans., Dudak, Mareda, Stodulkova & Solc, p. 65)

[*The Czech word *duchovní* can mean spiritual, psychological or intellectual]

Despite this disparagement of Hollywood found in a Czech civics textbook, Czech television is currently dominated by American media. Or perhaps the inundation of Czech television by American media is the reason for the writers of civics textbooks to include such a caution. In November 2010, during a stay in Prague, I noticed the predominance of American movies in the local television listings. For the week of November 15 to 21, all three “picks of the week” were American films. Two starred Sandra Bullock, one a romantic comedy with Hugh Grant and the other a thriller about two prep-school murderers. The third movie starred Kristin Scott Thomas and Woody Harrelson in a film set in Washington, D.C. In the category of T.V. series, three of the four picks of the week featured British and American detectives, including the series *Prison Break II*. The fourth series featured a Czech saleswoman and was created in 1977 (“Naše Tipy,” 2010, p. 24).

Not only is Czech media dominated by Western products from global mass culture, but the curriculum of English instruction at the same high school where I worked in 1993 has now become dominated by these topics. This is especially clear when compared to the topics used for teaching Russian and German at the same school. Following are lists of topics taught in the final four years of instruction at this school in English, Russian, and German.

Foreign Language Curriculum at Bruntál Gymnazium [my italics and trans.]

	English	Russian	German
First Year	lifestyle home <i>film stars</i> careers <i>fame</i> food and drink money inventions	first contact family jobs town where we live housing/accommodation home food and drink free time	first contact family jobs town where we live accommodation domestic facilities food and drink free time
Second Year	<i>radio and television</i> <i>Internet</i> winter sports <i>dance</i> <i>music</i> creative art buildings and style	accepting and rejecting invitations daily routine interests school getting around town shopping and giving presents visiting the theater	health and illness weekdays orientation in the city shopping and giving presents German language and culture
Third Year	extreme sports films and books transportation <i>media</i> <i>advertising</i>	social contacts appearance <i>fashion and style of clothing</i> qualities of character interpersonal relationships nature and weather	personal descriptions appearance and personal characteristics schooling and education entertainment and culture jobs, profession and work life and relationships in the family
Fourth Year	people and relationships education work and careers culture shock civilization ("Anglický Jazyk," n.d.)	no topics listed ("Ruský Jazyk," n.d.)	weather and nature living environment Czech Republic and Germany traveling and foreigners electoral system and communication systems intergenerational relationships literature and reading ("Neměcký Jazyk," n.d.)

It is clear that in the first three years of language instruction, global popular culture is used more in the teaching of English than in the teaching of either Russian or German with topics such as film stars, fame, radio, television, Internet, dance, music, media, and advertising. This is, of course, assuming that all of these topics draw on

cultural products available via satellite and Internet technologies, i.e., global popular culture. In contrast, the majority of topics covered in Russian and German instruction recall the standard communicative lists for talking about oneself and for traveling in a foreign-language environment. German-language instruction in the fourth year also includes politics and literature, which are not listed in any of the years of English instruction, with the exception of the phrase “films and books” in the third year, which may or may not address the requirements of literature.

What may have happened around the globe is that popular culture has become so synonymous with English that the former cultural cache of cultural products such as Shakespeare, Dickens, Austen, Twain, and Hemingway, are falling out of the EFL curriculum all together. What was a cultural imperialism of language and values preceding WWII, has become a cultural imperialism of popular culture. Of course, every generation has decried an erosion of standards in contemporary culture. Even Shakespeare was considered popular culture in his day. But there is a phenomenon of English being seen only as a language of commodification, denuded of any other redeeming value, while other foreign languages retain their status as keepers of higher culture, i.e., literature in Russian and German.

Conclusion

In these contexts, there are no easy answers or universally applicable formula when creating materials for the EFL classroom. While I have attempted to honor students' historical and cultural contexts, as well as allow them to help shape the learning experience in the classroom by incorporating materials they liked, I have ended up perpetuating Western values and methodology with texts from global mass culture.

It has been argued, however, that individual cultures around the world will interpret global media through the particular lens of their own values. For example, Billington (1992), points out that in the diverse stagings of Shakespeare's plays around the globe, these texts "are in fact increasingly available for differentiated global interpretation and consumption" (as cited in Robertson, 1995/2007, p. 480). While this may be true, Shakespeare is not usually representative of popular culture, which is typically less complex and less open to a variety of interpretations. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that cultures have the power to resist, re-interpret, and incorporate cultural artifacts from the West. It is also important to remember that students retain their power to resist, interpret and incorporate cultural messages implicit in the materials chosen by their teachers and by their classmates. Ultimately, however, the goal is for the student to connect to a text in a foreign language so strongly that he or she wishes to communicate that text.

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