L2 – C2?

Teaching Culture within the Subject of English in Swedish Upper Secondary School

Jolanta Maria Eriksson
Jolanta Maria Eriksson

L2 – C2? Teaching Culture within the Subject of English in Swedish Upper Secondary School

The essay has been written in order to give a picture of culture teaching within the subject of English in upper secondary schools in Sweden. Although earlier research within this field is still not very extensive, a theoretical framework has been based on the results available and the syllabuses for the subject of English in the upper secondary school. A questionnaire with open question has been used as a tool for collecting data. The main focus is put on analyzing the contents of and ways in which teachers deal with cultural studies, considering the goals in the syllabuses. The results support the results of previous scientific investigations concerning culture studies in Swedish schools and show that culture teaching is often dealt with in the traditional ways where culture is viewed mainly as customs, traditions and history of the target language country, and where teachers mainly choose cultural elements from the UK and the US and seldom from other English speaking countries.

Various factors that influence teachers choices in their cultural studies are examined and alternative changes considering the teaching methods, for example ethnographic training, are proposed. The uncertainty about how to approach and what to include in cultural studies is reflected in the testing of students on cultural issues. The survey shows that half the respondents do not test their pupils on culture at all. The conclusion, based on the results of this survey and the previous research, is that no great changes have taken place within this field over the last decade and that further continuous study of culture teaching is recommended.

Search words: culture, upper secondary, syllabus, teaching, English

Postadress
Högskolan för lärande och kommunikation (HLK)
Box 1026
551 11 JÖNKÖPING

Gatuadress
Gjuterigatan 5

Telefon
036–101000

Fax
036162585
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................. 3

2 AIM ........................................................................................................................................ 5
   2.1 Goal.................................................................................................................................. 5

3 METHOD AND MATERIAL .................................................................................................. 5
   3.1 Approach and method ................................................................................................. 5
   3.2 Material and scope ..................................................................................................... 6
   3.3 Respondents ................................................................................................................. 6

4 BACKGROUND ...................................................................................................................... 7
   4.1 The definitions of “culture” and “language” and the relationship between them ........ 7
      4.1.1 Culture ................................................................................................................. 7
      4.1.2 Language and its relation to culture ..................................................................... 8
      4.1.3 English as lingua franca ..................................................................................... 10
   4.2 ‘Culture’ in the curriculum for the upper-secondary school (Lpf94) and the syllabuses for the subject of English ............................................................. 11
   4.3 Previous research ........................................................................................................ 13

5 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION ............................................................................................. 16
   5.1 ‘Culture’ in the subject of the English language ......................................................... 16
      5.1.1 Culture in theory .................................................................................................. 16
      5.1.2 Teachers’ choices of English-speaking countries .............................................. 17
      5.1.3 Culture in practice .............................................................................................. 19
      5.1.4 Cultural skills ....................................................................................................... 20
      5.1.5 Testing .................................................................................................................. 22

6 CONCLUSIONS .................................................................................................................... 23

7 WORK CITED ....................................................................................................................... 24

Appendix ................................................................................................................................... 27
INTRODUCTION

“Bringing a foreign language to the classroom means connecting learners to a world that is culturally different from their own” (Sercu 1)

Some time ago I wrote a paper on the artificial language Esperanto and I wondered why, despite being so easy and practical, this language was met by lack of acceptance. A language that carries many world languages with it and that nobody associates with suppression and imperialism died, in my opinion, because of its isolation from culture. There was no cultural background that could be explored during the learning of the language, there were no clear pragmatic and semantic rules to be investigated and there was no social discourse.

A German language pedagogue, Peter Doyé, says that if English was used exclusively as a lingua franca, without any reference and association to its original culture, it would be in danger of becoming superficial (8). That is why it is apparent to me that cultural studies should become the core of second- and foreign language teaching and not only, as it often is today, a kind of expendable ‘fifth-skill’ dealt with in addition to the classic four-skills-language teaching. This relationship is reciprocal because language is, in my opinion, the prime expression of culture. In order to understand how a society uses language it is necessary to understand this society.

Since the word ‘culture’ is mentioned several times both in the curriculum for the non-compulsory school system in Sweden (Lpf94) and the syllabus for the subject of English it must be considered as one of the essential elements in English teaching at this level. As with other goals in the syllabus, lack of a definition of ‘culture’ leaves room for both teachers, educators and pupils to interpret the concept themselves. On the other hand, it seems to be the main problem for the teachers when they have to decide what to include in cultural studies and what to test afterwards. Since teachers are not sure how to go about teaching culture they often rely on the old nationalistic view.
The other problem is that foreign language teaching has been formed on the first language bias when it deals not with first language but with second- and foreign language teaching. It is paradoxical that first language speakers, especially British and American speakers, have been the only acceptable models for second- and foreign language learning, in spite of the fact that most English teachers in Sweden normally speak English as a foreign language. Here arises the problem of interpreting the concept of ‘standard English’ because the choice of standard language influences the choice of ‘standard culture’. Together goes the issue of ‘global English’ and English as a ‘lingua franca’, where we must ask ourselves if global should not mean that English has the same position and the same associations everywhere. We can speculate that Anglo-American dominance reduces this ‘globality’ almost to zero.

After several of my school placement periods I asked myself if the teachers were language teachers or grammar teachers. Despite the fact that both the curriculum and the syllabuses say so much about ‘culture’, ‘intercultural awareness’ and ‘cultural communicative competence’, the teachers seem to see those elements as obstacles, while as a matter of fact they should be an aid to learning English. One of ten goals in the syllabus for the subject of English is ‘reflect[i]on over ways of living, cultural traditions and social conditions in English-speaking countries, as well as develop[ing] greater understanding and tolerance of other people and cultures’. Since English is a ‘global’ language spoken in many countries as a first or second language the problem of cultural background arises for English teachers who, in their limited time, must choose which English-speaking cultures to tackle. This often leads to a situation where ‘communicative’ methods dominate English teaching and language is a bearer of information, which in turn underrates cultural aspects.

This essay investigates how teachers deal with the teaching of culture considering the goals of the syllabuses for the English subject in the upper secondary schools in Sweden. First though, follows a presentation of the goals in the syllabuses and definitions of ‘culture’ and ‘language’, as well as a discussion of different aspects concerning the relationship between these two terms.
2 AIM

The aim of this essay is to investigate how English teachers interpret the curriculum and syllabuses for the subject of English in upper-secondary schools in Sweden concerning cultural matters, view their choices and methods when it comes to teaching English language culture and compare it with research within this field. In order to carry out my survey I will also discuss a number of concepts concerning culture and language. Due to the limited scope of this essay the point of view of pupils will not be investigated here. It is important to bear in mind that the results of this survey are not representative for all the teachers of English at the upper-secondary level in Sweden.

2.1 Goal

- How do teachers deal with the teaching of culture in regard to the goals of the syllabuses for the English subject in the upper-secondary schools in Sweden?

3 METHOD AND MATERIAL

3.1 Approach and method

This paper uses mainly a qualitative method because it answers the question ‘how’ and contains both a theoretical study of research on culture, an analysis of the curriculum and the syllabus for the upper-secondary education in Sweden, an examination of a number of concepts, as well as a result of a practical survey. However the reader should bear in mind that a qualitative research is, according to Marshall and Rossman, subjective, pragmatic and simply influenced by the researcher’s background (2). The quantitative method is also used since some of the answers show ‘how many’ teachers have a certain attitude and they are presented in the form of numbers conveyed as percentage value. Therefore the paper is a hybrid of different methods (Punch 247).
The first step is an analysis of a number of concepts such as ‘language’ and ‘culture’, and other related concepts. In order to make the analysis credible I have chosen not one definition of ‘culture’ but several definitions to illustrate the complexity of this concept. Next follows a presentation of how culture is treated in the curriculum and syllabuses for the subject of English. Thereafter a theoretical framework in the form of a study of previous research concerning cultural matters in English education in Sweden is presented. The study describes different points of view regarding cultural matters, which increases its credibility. Thereafter follows the analysis of and discussion about the results of my survey.

3.2 Material and scope

The theoretical part of my essay consists of the curriculum, syllabuses and previous research, while the practical part of my survey consists of a questionnaire (see appendix) containing eight open questions. I used this form of collecting data in order to maintain full anonymity of the respondents and also to interview teachers from more than one school. I studied how such researchers as Gagnestam (2005) and Lundgren (2002), who carried out similar surveys, approached this topic. They both used questionnaires and telephone interviews.

I received 14 complete answers which I compiled and presented in tables. Some of the results are given in percentage in order to better see the relationship between different answers. Unfortunately there was no time available to interview pupils and analyse their point of view, which could have created a more complete overview of teaching and learning of English language culture.

3.3 Respondents

The respondents are upper-secondary English teachers who have been chosen randomly. The teachers’ e-mail addresses were found on the official websites of the schools where they are employed. I sent the questionnaire by e-mail to 50 teachers and 14 (both male and female) teachers answered my questions. 7 replied that they were unable to answer for a number of different reasons.
4 BACKGROUND

4.1 The definitions of “culture” and “language” and the relationship between them

4.1.1 Culture

In order to carry out a fruitful discussion concerning the relationships between culture and language, both concepts must be defined. It is important to distinguish between ‘language’ which, according to Salzmann, is a part of human genetic endowment, and ‘a language’ which is one of the many systems of communication used by different groups (155). The same is valid for ‘culture’, as a general concept and ‘a culture’ as referring to a particular group.

The anthropological culture, which this paper is mainly concerned with, is the object of study of a number of different disciplines, e.g. anthropology, ethnography, cultural studies or applied linguistics. That is why I will present a number of views because it is not easy to give one universal definition. A culture may be synonymous with a country, or a region, or a nationality or it may cross several countries or regions. It is important to remember that not everybody is the same and that we should not be prejudiced.

Edward Burnett Tylor, an Englishman regarded as the founder of cultural anthropology, is best known today for providing one of the clearest definitions of culture that is still widely accepted and used. Tylor saw culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Encyclopædia Britannica). According to structuralist concept, culture is a whole made up of symbolic systems, where language, matrimonial rules, economic relations etc. are the most vital ones (Risager 46-47).

Connor says, however, that culture is not a material phenomenon which consists of things or behaviours, but it is “the forms of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them” (101). We may wonder if teachers are responsible for transmitting some kind of ideology to their pupils in case culture is a set of social practices and beliefs.
When it comes to culture we do not usually look at the universal and widespread forms known to and common for all societies, but we tend to concentrate on the differences, on what is typical and exclusive for a culture, e.g. we usually greet each other in all cultures, so we do not teach our pupils that people in England greet each other but we tell them what the differences between the Swedish and the English ways of greeting are. This differential concept of culture is the most common (Risager 46).

4.1.2 Language and its relation to culture

In this paper the subject of the English language is treated both as second- and foreign language. The difference between second language and foreign language is that second language is taught in the country where it is an official language while foreign language does not have an official status in the country where it is taught. Modiano claims that English-speaking living in the European Union, especially non-native speakers, use English as a second language, a lingua franca of the EU called Euro-English (86). Risager also points out that since English functions as the language of international communication, it may cease to function as a foreign language and become a second language for most of the world, both at local and global levels (9). She reminds us that English occupies its particular position today in the global linguistic society because of the history of British colonisation (175).

Risager quotes J.A. Fishman, a sociolinguist who has dealt a great deal with the relationship between language and culture. He sees language as ‘an inevitable part’, ‘a major and crucial part’ of culture, and claims that “all those who seek fully to enter into and understand a given culture must, accordingly, master its language”. He points out that this relation is reciprocal and talks about culture-bound language (Risager 12). Loveday states that culture involves the unspoken conventions of a society and its methods of ‘going about doing things’ (Corbett 20).

Claire Kramsch, one of the most important more recent researchers within the area concerned, says that language expresses, embodies and symbolises cultural reality (Risager 13-14), while American linguist Michael Agar introduces the concept of ‘languaculture’ which refers to “the necessary tie between language and culture” (Risager 111). According to those linguists language is a bearer of culture. Also John says that without a genuine attempt to study the cultural dimensions of the corresponding foreign language situations, there is a risk that FL learners will transfer their own culturally-conditioned concepts to the target language. Danger of misunderstanding in cross-cultural interaction is therefore great (John 53-54).
Karen Risager represents the opposite view and claims that language and culture can be separated in certain respects. She is critical of the linguistic tendency to focus mostly on the analysis of languages as first languages and not as second and foreign ones and the fact that culture pedagogy has been characterised by the idea of culture-bound language (xi). It is a paradox, according to Risager, that language and culture pedagogy build on the first language bias while dealing with language as foreign- and second language competence, and that it is the first language speaker who counts as the only acceptable model for language learning (10; Kramsch 79-80). According to Corbett the ambition of an intercultural approach to language education is not ‘native speaker competence’ but rather an ‘intercultural communicative competence’ (1). It is also vital to bear in mind that English teachers in Swedish schools, who are perhaps the only real models, normally speak English as a foreign language.

There are also linguists like Stephen Pinker for whom language is not linked with human culture but is a result of a biological evolution. As Corbett puts it, for Pinker language is “an instinct that is no more or less remarkable than the instincts which allow bats to navigate at night or migratory birds to fly home.” Pinker claims that “[l]anguage is no more a cultural invention than is upright posture. It is not a manifestation of a general capacity to use symbols: a three-year old…is a grammatical genius, but is quite incompetent at the visual arts, religious iconography, traffic signs, and the other staples of the semiotics approach” (Corbett 7).

Since the 1990s many linguists have highlighted the relationship between language and culture, which in turn has led to intensified exploration of how cultural differences are expressed through various forms of linguistic practice, discourse and semantic and pragmatic systems of the various languages (Risager 1). Risager quotes a German culture pedagogue Doyé who claims that “the very nature of language forbids the separation of language from culture. … And as the content of a language is always culture-bound, any reasonable foreign language teaching cannot but include the study of a culture from which the language stems” (9). Lately there have been linguists who have turned against these theories although none of them denies that human culture always includes language and vice versa and that culture-free communicative competence is impossible (1-2, 4).
When it comes to teaching English there are always the issues of defining the standard and, at the same time, criticism of the syllabus that, in the era of globalisation, it still treats the English language with first-language bias. Whose English is ‘standard English’? According to Laurie Bauer we should talk about standard ‘Englishes’ not ‘one English’. She says that a standard is simply a variety which people want teachers, politicians, broadcasters and other public persons to aim at (3). We could say that there are almost as many standards as English-speaking people, so what is standard for me is not necessarily standard for my friends living in the US or people much older/younger than I. Standard Englishes change.

4.1.3 English as lingua franca

Lately it has been very popular to call English a ‘lingua franca’ or a global language. A good example of problems that may arise is Modiano’s account of Svartvik’s experiences during a trip to Hong Kong where he could not understand a Chinese guide speaking English. Svartvik claims that “both teachers and learners of a foreign language need a model”. Since English functions today as a lingua franca, it should be understood globally, because if we all begin to form our own local Englishes, the function of lingua franca will be lost. What we witness today is the fact that many non-native speech communities are forming English to fit their local reality, culture and life (Modiano 81-85).

Doyé points out an interesting thing, namely that if English was primarily used as a lingua franca, one day it could become a culture-free language that is cut off from its base. According to Doyé a “language that is used without association or reference to its original culture is always in danger of being superficial” (8). Furthermore, Werner Hüllen points out that “[a] lingua franca must be taught as lingua franca” (Decke-Cornill 59). Decke-Cornill points out one problem which is that teacher trainers have doubts about the concept of English as lingua franca. That is why in the education of English teachers the main focus is still put on British and American English language and culture, which is contradictory to the goals of the English subject in upper secondary schools (59-60).
4.2 ‘Culture’ in the curriculum for the upper-secondary school (Lpf94) and the syllabuses for the subject of English

John Willinsky's *Learning to Divide the World* asks us to think, and re-think, how "five centuries of studying, classifying, and ordering humanity within an imperial context gave rise to peculiar and powerful ideas of race, culture, and nation that were, in effect, conceptual instruments that the West used both to divide up and to educate the world" (2-3). The Swedish curriculum still seems to be stigmatized by the inheritance of imperialism and there is an apparent division between the Western world and the rest of the world. Although it says that the school is a cultural meeting place with an obligation to strengthen pupils’ ability to live together, appreciate the values found in cultural diversity, take in Nordic, European and global values, pupils are to have good insight into *Western* cultural heritage and words like ‘tolerance’ and ‘acceptance’ are mentioned several times, which in turn presupposes that there is an evident lack of those two in Swedish society (Lpf94, my italics).

The general syllabus for the subject of English in upper-secondary school states that pupils should develop their ability to:

- reflect over ways of living, cultural traditions and social conditions in English-speaking countries, as well as develop greater understanding and tolerance of other people and cultures;

and also be able to:

- interact in English in a variety of contexts concerning ...different situations ...and take part in conversations [and] deepen their understanding of English as spoken in different parts of the world (it might be a cross-cultural context where pragmatics is an important cultural element);

(Syllabus for the subject of English)

The subject of English is divided into three courses - A, B and C - where C is the most advanced course, and A is a core subject for all programmes, B is not obligatory for vocational programmes and C is an optional course. Familiarity with English-speaking cultures should be developed at all three stages.

On completion of the A course pupils should:

- ... through literature acquire a knowledge of cultural traditions in English-speaking countries;
- have a knowledge of social conditions, cultural traditions and ways of living in English-speaking areas, and be able to use this knowledge to compare cultures;

(Syllabus for the English A course)

According to criteria for ‘Pass’ pupils should be able to describe the position of the English language in the world and “on the basis of knowledge of societal conditions and customs in areas where English is spoken, make comparisons with their own cultural experiences.” Criteria for ‘Pass with distinction’ and ‘Pass with special distinction’ do not broaden these requirements.

On completion of the B course pupils should:
- have a knowledge of current conditions, history and cultures of the countries where English is spoken;
- be able to present aspects of their own culture and country to persons from a different cultural background;

and also to:
- be able to discuss in appropriate language … with respect to the audience and situation (pragmatics as a crucial element in cross-cultural conversations);

(Syllabus for the English B course)

According to criteria for ‘Pass’ pupils should be able to “describe different social conditions, cultural traditions, and ways of living in areas where English is spoken, and use this background to comment on and discuss literature, film and music, as well as specialist texts of different kinds.” Criteria for ‘Pass with distinction’ and ‘Pass with special distinction’ do not broaden these requirements.

On completion of the C course pupils should:
- be familiar with developments in one or more areas such as politics, societal life, religion, literature, film, art or music in an English-speaking country;

and also to:
- be able in different contexts to introduce and actively participate in oral communication of varying types, and be able to use English flexibly and purposefully, in both formal and informal contexts (pragmatics as a crucial element in cross-cultural conversations);

(Syllabus for the English C course)

According to criteria for ‘Pass’ pupils should be able to “make … comparisons between different cultures and cultural expressions”. Criteria for ‘Pass with distinction’ and ‘Pass with special distinction’ do not broaden these requirements.
Since pragmatics is a culture-bound part of linguistics, I have chosen to treat oral skills as a part of cultural skills. As Hymes puts it: “rules of use without rules of grammar would be useless” (Rose and Kasper ix). Many cultural issues, for example in face-to-face actions like casual conversations or greetings, are very subtle but in different cultures different behaviours are or are not acceptable (Ebsworth et al. 89-90). Sercu also says that communicative competence refers to pupils’ ability to act in a foreign language in a pragmatically suitable way in order to establish acceptance and create a positive social bond between parts (Sercu, 2005, 3).

4.3 Previous research

The rising number of publications on culture in foreign language teaching in the Swedish school system indicates a growing interest within this field. Ulla Lundgren’s dissertation focuses on opportunities and obstacles for developing intercultural understanding through the subject of English in Swedish comprehensive schools. According to Lundgren’s research a traditional view of cultural studies with the UK and the US in focus and lack of time for didactic cultural development are the greatest obstacles for English teachers, who, moreover, do not feel that the latest research reaches them. When it comes to testing pupils on culture the major problem is that national tests do not appraise intercultural understanding. Instead language proficiency dominates them (272-273, 276). Lundgren claims that the syllabus for the subject of English contradicts overall educational aims and is not up-to-date with the latest research on culture. This is caused by the fact that people who create the national guidelines for English language rely on former language teachers and reproduce a former understanding of culture (275-6). Although Lundgren’s survey deals with compulsory schools, in my opinion, it is valid for upper secondary education as well.

Language teachers have many alternatives how to teach cultural issues, claims Gagnestam. The most common way that has characterized foreign and second language teaching for decades has been to treat culture in the traditional way, as facts about the national culture, history, geography, school system, religion etc. Since English has a very special position among subjects that we learn in Swedish school we need to find new ways of teaching it, ways that will emphasize the central role of culture in language teaching (Gagnestam 7; Corbett 1).
Eva Gagnestam reports in her research paper how both teachers, teacher trainees and pupils see cultural issues in language education in Sweden. She mentions that lately there has been a change in attitudes towards culture and the curriculum for the non-compulsory school system in Sweden (Lpf 94) has as one of its main goals to develop pupils’ intercultural awareness and help them to understand other cultures (7).

According to Gagnestam the concept of culture as a product or object that can be taught has been present in language education since medieval times and influences it strongly even today. The texts that have been used by educators have discussed mainly history, geography, ways of living, traditions etc. in the target countries (15). Hinkel (2005) says that this has been the most criticized perception of culture in language teaching, where culture has been viewed as civilization (917). Gagnestam says that the only change in the syllabus for the English subject in the upper secondary school for 1996 and 2000 has been that the word ‘knowledge’ has been replaced by ‘awareness’, but under the criteria for grades pupils should still have ‘knowledge’ of cultures in English-speaking countries (17).

In Gagnestam’s opinion communication is not only sending and receiving messages, but also understanding how what someone says is interpreted in another cultural context (109). She also quotes Herlitz, who says that we react emotionally when somebody breaks the informal rules, i.e. pragmatics and semantics. Some linguists claim that up to 70% of what is transferred during a conversation is actually non-verbal (37).

Gagnestam’s research shows that the majority of the interviewed teachers say that there is a strong relationship between language and culture (39-40). 19 out of 49 teachers in her research do not think that their teaching contributes to a better intercultural awareness among their pupils (96). The majority of the teachers include mainly the UK in their teaching, many of them include the US and Australia, and only a few of them include New Zealand, India and South Africa (121). One third of the teachers say that the syllabuses do not influence their way of approaching cultural studies (126), partly because they feel unsure about their own skills within the field. Gagnestam quotes Robinson, who says that the less time we spend on culture, the more stereotypes we apply (147).
Risager points out a very important factor in the Swedish schools, namely that foreign language teaching is a complex cultural reality because there is always more than one language and cultural perspective involved which reflect differences in social, ethnic and national history (6). She mentions that foreign language teaching has moved in an intercultural and culture-comparative direction which is a positive development (169). Unfortunately there is an observable division between the linguists and, as a result of it, between teachers concerning the contents of language teaching. Savignon claims that communicative competence and communicative language teaching remain today fresh and provocative (71) while Sercu argues that communicative competence is no longer considered as comprising all the necessary elements and that is why it must be supplemented by sociolinguistic and pragmatic elements. As a result of this division teachers deal with cultural studies in the traditional way and wait for clear guidelines (Sercu, 2004a, 115).

The lack of time for culture is the biggest obstacle according to teachers (149). This corresponds to Geis’s and Harlow’s (1996) opinion that everyone who wishes to learn a foreign language faces two problems: learning the language system and learning to use the language. Since we always begin with learning the language most of the energy in foreign language education is devoted to this task, often forgetting the other one (129). Gagnestam also points out that it is impossible to learn all the world cultures in order to use English as a lingua franca (68).

Similar research has been carried out in other European countries. Decke-Cornill interviewed a number of upper secondary English teachers in German schools and her survey showed that those who had a university degree in English were more traditional and conservative concerning cultural matters and concentrated on Anglo-American language and culture norms. One of the teachers even said that although some of her pupils come from English-speaking African countries she still corrected their pronunciation. For those who did not have a university degree in English, however, accepting the lingua franca status of English and the cultural diversity of the English-speaking countries was easier (62).
In 2001 a European (+Mexican) investigation was carried out among foreign language teachers from 7 countries, including Sweden, in order to see to what extent teaching is directed towards the attainment of intercultural communicative competence. The survey was carried out with the help of questionnaires. There was a question on teachers’ perceptions on culture teaching where they had to rank 9 alternatives. Developing attitudes of openness and tolerance towards other cultures and providing information about daily life were ranked highest, while promoting the ability to handle intercultural contact situations came as sixth. According to the results of this study Swedish teachers are linguistically oriented (teach pupils for practical purposes) and spend 90% of language teaching on linguistics and only 10% on culture. Thus the main objective of culture teaching is to acquire knowledge (Sercu, 2005, 6-37).

5 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this part I will present the results of my survey in the form of compilation of all complete answers (14) I have received from the respondents and thereafter discuss them in relation to the syllabus and the previous research. Since I used open questions, teachers could give more than one answer alternative.

5.1 ‘Culture’ in the subject of the English language

The average number of years that the respondents have worked as English teachers is 8.7 (between 1 and 35 years).

5.1.1 Culture in theory

For the question about what ‘culture’ is for respondents as English teachers the following answers were given:

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Culture’ is for me:</th>
<th>The number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditions/customs/holidays/cuisine</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way people talk/vocabulary and pronunciation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every aspect of life/everything/everyday life</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Even though the concept of culture appears in the curriculum and syllabuses several times there is no discussion of what ‘culture’ means but only vague wordings such as that pupils should have knowledge of cultures in English-speaking countries. This means that teachers have much room for interpretation which in turn means that different teachers teach different things. Research shows that teachers’ behavior is strongly affected by their beliefs but also that teachers tend to define goals of English language teaching in linguistic terms, rather than cultural (Sercu, 2004b, 141). The results of my survey show how differently teachers interpret the concept of ‘culture’, which in turn leads to including very dissimilar elements in their cultural studies.

Research shows that mentality and behaviour are low-ranked cultural elements (Corbett 110). Teachers seem to be troubled when it comes to teaching how people think. It is a sensitive subject. We usually tend to teach stereotypes when it comes to people’s mentality. A change of teaching method could be a way out of the problem.

For the question if respondents agree that language teaching must be accompanied by teaching about cultural phenomena in the countries where the target language is spoken all 14 (100%) teachers answer ‘yes’.

### 5.1.2 Teachers’ choices of English-speaking countries

According to the questionnaire respondents choose the culture of the following countries while teaching English:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The countries chosen by respondents</th>
<th>The number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The UK/Great Britain</td>
<td>13 (93%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The USA</td>
<td>13 (93%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All of the teachers say that teaching language must be accompanied by teaching the culture of the countries where the language is spoken. In this case we have an enormous number of English-speaking countries, but only few of them chose any other country than the UK and the US, even though it is the aim of the subject of English to broaden “perspectives on an expending English-speaking world with its multiplicity of varying cultures” (Syllabus for the subject of English). Lack of time and familiarity with the target culture is the most often given explanation for this problem (Sercu, 2004b, 141). The results of my survey support Lundgren’s and Gagnestam’s research which also show that the UK and the US are the main choices and the lack of time is the main problem (Lundgren 2002, Gagnestam 2005). Loveday reminds us that the choice of countries for cultural studies dictates which norm for ‘correct’ spoken English is often standard in the classroom and the fact that few native English-speakers wholly conform to that standard in their own output (Corbett 39). Sercu claims that teachers need an adequate cultural knowledge of the English language community that can be gained for example by frequent contacts with it (Sercu, 2005, 5).

6 (43%) respondents say that a language cannot be understood if there is no link in teaching to the culture from which the language originates while 5 (36%) think that it is possible. 6 respondents answer “both yes and no”, 1 respondent does not know. 1 person wrote “I don’t understand the question”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Count (Percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>4 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>2 (14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>1 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>1 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Other English-speaking countries”</td>
<td>3 (21%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 5.1.3 Culture in practice

For the question about what respondents include in their cultural studies the following answers were given:

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I include in my cultural studies</th>
<th>The number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customs/traditions/holidays</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History/geography</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop culture/film/magazines</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily life/manners</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish traditions in comparison to other cultures/cultural differences</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foods/cuisine</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current events/news</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music/art</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working life/education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anything</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The answers given by respondents show a rather big inconsistency when it comes to teaching culture. There is a great difference between what teachers think should be taught and what they actually teach. Both previous research and my survey show that customs, traditions, history and geography are the most often included elements in cultural studies while English language learners should have tools to understand why other people do what they do. The syllabuses distinguish between “history and cultures”; while most of the teachers see history as an element of culture. According to Hinkel culture should absolutely not be reduced to “the 4 Fs” - foods, fairs, folklore, and statistical facts (1999, 5). Pupils are in the situation of someone who is outside the target language group, looking in. They may not wish to adopt the customs or values of the target culture, but they should be able to understand these habits and morals if they wish to comprehend the language that members of the target culture use. Teachers should make their pupils aware that they do not have to accept anything but just see different perspectives (Corbett 20).

An interesting thing is that one of the criteria for passing all three courses, A, B and C, is making comparisons between the Swedish and the English culture while, according to my results, only 3 (21%) out of 14 teachers include that element in their culture studies. Gagnestam’s research also shows that 33% of the teachers say that the syllabuses do not influence their way of approaching cultural studies (126).

For the question about what cultural approach we should use if we read a text in English from a 3rd country (neither Swedish- nor English-speaking) 7 respondents answer that we should use English approach, 3 answer Swedish and 9 persons answer that we should use the 3rd country’s point of view. Some chose more than one alternative.

### 5.1.4 Cultural skills

For the question about what skills pupils should have to understand other cultures the following answers were given:

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupils should have the following skills:</th>
<th>The number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good command of language</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being curious/interested</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance for cultural differences</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Skill</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open mind</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical/analytical thinking</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know their own culture/compare with their own culture</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of history</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of social science</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagination</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to learn and search for information and to be able to convey this to others</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My survey shows that teachers think that a good command of English and tolerance are far more important as cultural skills than openmindedness and willingness, which also supports the European research where tolerance is very highly ranked (Sercu, 2005, 6-37). Perhaps the problem is that some teachers lack knowledge about all the English-speaking cultures and, as a result of this, sureness of how to teach the intercultural competence, and that is the reason why they choose the traditional approach when teaching culture.

Since it is impossible to learn about all cultures maybe teachers should instead concentrate on teaching how to investigate and learn other cultures. Pupils would get a tool in their hands that they can use their whole lives, instead of a dose of chosen facts that will be forgotten after a short time. Corbett claims that language learners would benefit from training in ethnographic techniques and an American linguist, Damen, points out that the idea of teaching learners ethnographic skills is not new (Corbett 96). Unfortunately only 2 (14%) out of 14 teachers see critical and analytical thinking as an important cultural skill. Pupils should be seen as cultural observers and analysts, a kind of ethnographers with observational skills, able to perceive how people from different cultures communicate. Hughes also thinks that anthropological training for teachers could be useful in order to teach them about different approaches to (inter)cultural studies (Corbett 168). Pupils could become ‘diplomats’ who can view other cultures from different perspectives instead of striving towards learning facts only about British and American culture and towards native speaker proficiency, which is achieved by few if any learners.
5.1.5 Testing

For question if it is necessary to test pupils on culture 7 (50%) respondents answer ‘yes’ while 7 (50%) answer ‘no’. Here follow the ways in which respondents test their pupils on culture:

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The ways of testing on culture:</th>
<th>The number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home assignments/essays/reports</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral presentations/discussions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different ways</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written tests</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mock real life situations/mock conferences</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The uncertainty about how to approach and what to include in cultural studies is reflected in the testing of students on cultural issues. Half the respondents say that they do not test their pupils on culture even though it is one of the goals in the syllabuses. According to Sercu research shows that it is obvious among teachers that “what is tested is what is taught, and what is taught is what is tested. …teachers either do not test culture learning or, when they do so, they test culture solely in terms of the acquisition of cultural knowledge (2004b, 145-6)”. Both my survey and other research show that teachers are not sure if they should test culture simultaneously or separately with language. According to Corbett tests focusing only on language may downgrade the status of the cultural elements of a course (Corbett 191).
6 CONCLUSIONS

In this essay I have tried to present how teachers deal with the teaching of culture concerning the goals of the syllabuses for the subject of English in the upper secondary schools in Sweden. Culture is one of ten goals in the syllabus and all of my respondents agree that language teaching must be accompanied by teaching culture. My findings support previous research, which indicates the lack of greater changes in teaching culture over the last decade and a need for continuous research within this field. Most teachers see culture mainly as traditions and customs, and these elements, together with history and politics, are the most often included ones in cultural studies, even though the syllabus distinguishes between ‘history’ and ‘culture’ as two independent components.

Furthermore, both my survey and previous research show that the UK and the US are obvious choices while other English-speaking countries are dealt with only by a few teachers. According to the syllabus ability to compare the Swedish and the English culture is important, while both my and Gagnestam’s survey show that many teachers do not follow the syllabuses guidelines in their way of approaching cultural studies (126).

It is interesting that teachers think that a good command of English and curiosity are the most important cultural skills. Only 2 persons mention analytical thinking as a cultural skill, while research says that pupils need ethnographic cultural tools to be able to cope with intercultural contacts and experiences.

Another alarming fact is that half the respondents do not test their pupils on culture even though it is one of the goals in the syllabuses. We should ask ourselves why teachers and pupils should spend so much precious curricular time on something for which the pupils will not receive tangible credit (Corbett 191).

In the end I must agree with Kramsch who makes the point that the value of learning culture in school might not be realised until long after an English course has ended (Corbett 191). John claims that it is important to remember that learners should be able to continue learning outside the classroom and the curriculum also states this. We cannot become experts on all the English-speaking cultures that exist in the world during our school education. The crucial thing is the ability to learn ‘how to learn’ about other cultures (62).

Word count: 6860
7 WORK CITED


Decke-Cornill, Helene. “We Would Have to Invent the Language we are Supposed to Teach?: The Issue of English as Lingua Franca in Language Education in Germany”. In Byram, Michael. *Context and Culture in Language Teaching and Learning.* Languages for Intercultural Communication and Education, 6. Clevedon-Buffalo-Toronto-Sydney: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2002. p59-71


http://www3.skolverket.se/ki03/front.aspx?sprak=EN&ar=0708&infotyp=8&skolform=21&id=EN&extraId=

http://www3.skolverket.se/ki03/front.aspx?sprak=EN&ar=0708&infotyp=5&skolform=21&id=3199&extraId=

http://www3.skolverket.se/ki03/front.aspx?sprak=EN&ar=0708&infotyp=5&skolform=21&id=3014&extraId=

http://www3.skolverket.se/ki03/front.aspx?sprak=EN&ar=0708&infotyp=5&skolform=21&id=3015&extraId=

Appendix

Questionnaire

How many years have you worked as English teacher in upper-secondary school?

1. What is ‘culture’ for you as a language teacher?

2. Language and culture pedagogy has used the argument that language teaching must inevitably be accompanied by teaching about cultural phenomena in the countries where the target language is spoken. Do you agree?

3. Which country’s culture do you choose when you teach the English language?

4. Do you think that a language can be understood if there is no link in teaching to the culture from which this language originates?

5. What do you include in your cultural studies?

6. If culture is a way of thinking and living → if we read a text in English from a 3rd country (neither Sw nor Eng speaking), what kind of cultural approach should we use?
   a. English - because it’s an English lesson and the text is in English,
   b. Swedish - because we are Swedes and live in the Swedish culture,
   c. or maybe the 3rd country’s cultural point of view - because the text is about it?

7. What skills should pupils have to understand other cultures?

8. How do you test your students when it comes to the cultural issues? Do you think it’s necessary to test them on culture?