

## TEACHING CULTURE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMMES AT THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

This chapter deals with the following areas in foreign language teaching: negotiating what culture to teach, what aspects of this culture to focus upon, how much to teach of each aspect, when a programme demands revision, the importance and relevance of Web and INTERNET sources in teaching culture, autonomous learning and culture exposure. The main aim of this chapter is to reflect upon the reasons we may argue in favour of a specific culture element in a foreign language course as part of a university degree programme. I will call upon my own experience as a module-course designer in Spanish for different degree programmes at the University of Limerick.

It may seem an easy and obvious task for some to decide on what to teach as regards the culture element in a foreign language course. However, not even in mono-lingual countries should this task be taken lightly. Therefore, when we are dealing with a language spoken in many countries, the problem seems to raise a number of questions. I will not be dealing here with the decision-making process concerning what variation of a foreign language is to be taught. I also want to emphasise that the teaching of a foreign language, by no means, can be divorced from teaching culture.

### RESUMEN

Este capítulo trata de los siguientes ámbitos en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras: la negociación de qué cultura enseñar, qué aspectos de esta cultura procede destacar, cuánto enseñar de cada uno de estos aspectos, cuándo

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un determinado programa debe ser revisado, la importancia y relevancia de los recursos de la Web y de INTERNET en la enseñanza de la cultura, el aprendizaje autónomo y la apropiación cultural. La idea central del trabajo es la de reflexionar acerca de las razones que nos sirven para argumentar a favor de un elemento de cultura específica en los cursos de lenguas extranjeras como parte del contenido de un título universitario. Haré esta reflexión desde mi propia experiencia como diseñadora de módulos didácticos en Español en cursos universitarios ofrecidos por la Universidad de Limerick.

Para algunos la tarea de diseñar el contenido de un módulo cultural en un curso de lengua extranjera puede resultar algo muy fácil y evidente. Sin embargo, esta tarea no puede tomarse a la ligera ni siquiera en países monolingües. Por tanto, cuando tratamos con una lengua que es hablada en muchos países, el problema aumenta y plantea mayor número de interrogantes. No tendré aquí en cuenta el problema de toma de decisiones que tiene que ver con el modelo o variante de lengua extranjera que se va a enseñar. Mi énfasis se sitúa en el hecho de que la enseñanza de una lengua extranjera, bajo supuesto alguno, no puede separarse de la enseñanza de la cultura.

#### RÉSUMÉ

Dans ce chapitre on envisage les suivants éléments d'analyse pour l'enseignement des langues étrangères: la négociation sur quelle culture enseigner, quels aspects de cette culture convient-il de privilégier, combien de ces aspects faut-il enseigner, quand un programme déterminé doit-il être révisé, l'importance et la valeur des ressources fournies par les sites web et internet dans l'enseignement de la culture, l'apprentissage en autonomie et l'appropriation culturelle. L'idée centrale de ce travail est la réflexion sur les raisons qui nous servent à argumenter en faveur d'un élément de culture spécifique dans les cours de langues étrangères, faisant partie du contenu d'un diplôme d'études universitaires. Cette réflexion est menée à partir de ma propre expérience professionnelle dans la construction des modules didactiques en langue espagnole pour les cours offerts à l'Université de Limerick.

La tâche de décider sur le contenu d'un module culturel dans un cours de langue étrangère peut se montrer à nous comme quelque chose de facile et évident, mais, il arrive que cette tâche ne peut être affrontée sans souci pas même dans des pays monolingues, et surtout lorsqu'il s'agit d'une langue parlée en plusieurs pays, le problème s'accroît et on se pose des questions de plus en plus nombreuses.

Je ne vais pas ici envisager la problématique concernant la prise de décisions qui se rapporte au modèle et type de langue étrangère à enseigner, mais plutôt, je vais mettre l'accent sur le fait que l'enseignement d'une langue étrangère ne peut aucunement être dissociée de l'enseignement de la culture.

If we look at the history of culture teaching, it would be true to say that culture within the teaching of foreign languages has not been seen until recently as a major issue. I agree with Dimitrios Thanasoulas (2001) when he identifies two main perspectives that have influenced the teaching of culture. "One pertains to the transmission of factual, cultural information, which consists in statistical information, that is, institutional structures and other aspects of the target civilisation, highbrow information, i.e. immersion in literature and the arts, and lowbrow information, which may focus on the customs, habits and folklore of everyday life. [...] The other perspective drawing upon cross-cultural psychology or anthropology has been to embed culture within an interpretive framework and establish connections, namely points of reference or departure.

The approach to selecting content for foreign language teaching has not changed much in terms of what country tends to be the source of most of the cultural element. There is still a much higher percentage of the cultural content of language courses corresponding to, for example, England, France, Germany and Spain, depending of the foreign language being taught; leaving a limited room for cultural content from other countries where the languages in question are spoken: Ireland, Canada, Austria and Peru, to mention a few. This is not necessarily a random decision or a non-planned agenda; far from that, it responds to political and economic decisions with obvious consequences in the design of programmes of education, and the ideologies and attitudes encouraged by the cultural elements with which the students involved themselves.

Some common arguments to support this selection of cultural elements is that the standard dialect of the language is spoken in the first group of countries mentioned above, and with it, the so called highbrow culture. Another argument can be the geographical proximity to these countries; however, it is obvious that it all corresponds to a matter of power, both political and economic. Unfortunately, this being the case, the ideology and mentality of the super powers tend to be the norm and the guidance in all spheres of education, preventing a healthy balance of points of view and various perceptions of reality.

I strongly believe that choosing cultural content for a language course, first of all, should not respond to an ethnocentric criteria. Secondly, the wider the spectrum of the cultural exposure, the better and more real a picture students get of the history, politics, society and varieties of the language and cultures in question. It may seem an easy

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and obvious task for some to decide on what to teach as regards the culture element in a foreign language course. However, not even in languages spoken in only one country, should this task be taken light-heartedly. Therefore, when we are dealing with a language spoken in many countries, the problem seems to raise a number of questions.

I will not be dealing here with the decision-making process concerning what variation of a foreign language is to be taught. I also want to emphasise that the teaching of a foreign language, by no means, can be divorced from teaching culture; however this does not mean that if the variation of Spanish being taught is the one considered standard in Spain or the so called Castilian Spanish, that necessarily implies that only cultural aspects belonging to that society should be dealt with. Neither is my aim here to discuss whether culture, although so intricately intertwined with language, should be taught separately or not. I start from the point where a decision has been made to include cultural aspects as a separate element in a foreign language course<sup>1</sup>.

For many years it has stricken me that the geographical proximity to the country where the foreign language is spoken seems to be the norm to decide what cultural aspects should be part of the foreign language course. In the United States of America, for example, Latin American Spanish, the Mexican variation probably, seems to be widespread. I would argue that although geographical proximity may be one variable to take into account when deciding cultural aspects to be included in a programme, this could lead to a very restricted and probably distorted image of the cultural background of a language such as Spanish.

A careful analysis of the country and the background of the students who are to learn the foreign language are essential in deciding what elements to include as aspects of culture in a foreign language programme. This is why I will now turn to see the specific case of Ireland within the context of foreign language teaching and learning, and then, I will give a brief account of the situation of foreign language teaching at the University of Limerick.

Ireland is no doubt a European country, however it does have specific characteristics concerning its history in foreign language teaching

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<sup>1</sup> For reasons why culture should be taught as part of the Foreign Language Curriculum see Thanasoulas, Dimitrios (2001), "The Importance of Teaching Culture in The Foreign Language Classroom", in *Radical Pedagogy*, 3,3 [iucode: <http://www.icaap.org/iucode?2.3.3.7>].

and learning. As in many English-speaking countries, the real need for students and working people to learn foreign languages has not been seen essential until recently. And this awareness seems to have come first from the world of business.

Another peculiarity of Ireland is its recent history of masses of students, Spaniards mainly but also Italian and other European students in fewer numbers, who come to this island to learn English. Ireland is considered an attractive destination to learn English, primarily because their people are well known as being friendly, and also because it is considered a safe country from the point of view of criminality. However, this invasion of teenagers originally caused much concern to the Irish street person, confronting 'a different culture' in his/her own territory, and was, at times, even seen as non-desirable. Nevertheless, these students meant money coming into the country and employment for a number of teachers, otherwise unemployed, and above all, it has become part of the tourist industry, a very important one for the country. After a number of years, the Irish have learned to adapt and cope with this type of immigrant. We should not forget either that a good number of Irish people spend holidays in Spain, at least an average of two weeks per year. However, it should be said that in many cases, the contact with real Spanish culture is restricted to meals and hot weather, and they do not feel a real need to have any Spanish to get around a tourist area for a fortnight.

Since the introduction of foreign languages in Irish secondary schools in the late 60s, French has been the foreign language taught in almost every school in Ireland, followed by German. Spanish and Italian would have a lot fewer students; Spanish still being more popular than Italian. This situation alone implies different scenery to that found in other European countries. Since 1999 foreign languages have been introduced at primary level as part of a European pilot programme.

There has also been a continuous increase in the number of students taking Spanish at secondary level in the last five years with a 5 million Irish pounds from the national budget in the year 2000 devoted to the promotion of Italian and Spanish.

Let us now see the specific circumstances at the University of Limerick as regards the teaching of foreign languages. The University of Limerick, situated in the Mid-West part of Ireland, was founded 25 years ago. The first foreign languages offered almost from the beginning of the foundation of the university were French and German. Spanish was offered for the first time in 1987. Of course, the situation outlined in

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the paragraph above has meant that the majority of Irish students taking a foreign language at university level in Ireland still study French; German comes after French and Spanish follows German closely.

In the specific case of the University of Limerick, where I have been lecturing in Spanish since 1989, Spanish has grown from 35 students to c. 500 students today. It is the university with the highest number of Irish students taking Spanish as their foreign language in the Republic. Spanish is offered at both at beginner and post Leaving Certificate level. It is offered in the following undergraduate Degree Programmes: European Studies, Applied Languages, Language and Cultural Studies, Language with Computing, and Business and a language. It is also a minor option for Public Administration, Business and Equine Science.

It is important also to analyse some of the facts that have been made possible this increase in interest in the Spanish language and the culture/s behind it. In the early 90s the first Spanish students came to the University of Limerick as part of the Erasmus/Socrates exchange Programme. At present, approximately 70 Spanish students come every year from at least 15 different Spanish universities. A slight smaller number of Irish students go to Spain as part of this exchange programme. Living in the foreign country is perhaps the best cultural exposure students can achieve, allowing them to draw some comparisons between the home and the target culture.

The Degree Programmes at University of Limerick also include at least a semester job-placement period that takes place in the second or third year of their career. So, apart from placing students in Spain—which has proved quite a difficult job market—, since 1993 we have been sending students to work in Latin America. Argentina and Colombia have been the main destinations, however not the only ones. Given the apprehension of some parents to agree with their children's idea to go to work in Latin America for a short period of time, I did video recordings of their individual experience for at least the first five years in order to use them as feedback to the following prospective applicants to go to Latin America. Students would share their experiences with the new group and discuss some cross-cultural misunderstandings at special meeting groups. This was a very useful exercise, and it meant that myself as a Latin American would not have to give an opinion that could be considered biased. In order to incorporate this cultural experience abroad in the best way possible into the programme, students should be prepared for it before they leave. Unfortunately in the ma-

majority of cases, this is done indirectly only through the accidental discussion in class of culture capsules (Singhal, 1998).

Among the various programmes within which Spanish is taught, Languages and Cultural Studies is perhaps the one that allows for a deeper and better expansion on cultural issues. In a way, the old two-language option within the European Studies Degree Programme also had room for a relatively good cultural component. The first cohort of students for the Language and Cultural Studies Programme with Spanish major came to the University of Limerick for the first time in 1999. This is the one programme where students have between seven and nine contact hours a week devoted to the study of Spanish and Hispanic culture. Nevertheless, what I propose in terms of Latin American cultural studies content can be developed at a less profound level with students of all programmes.

The contact between Latin America and Ireland, although it has increased in the last two decades, it has been mainly at the level of the church and groups of solidarity with various Latin American countries suffering the abuse of dictatorships and US intervention. When I first came to Ireland in 1981, there was no hope to hear of classes of Latin American Spanish. However, Latin American literature was part of the Spanish Degree Programmes in Trinity College Dublin and Queens University in Northern Ireland. Since then Latin American literature has been introduced in UCD recently, and the University of Cork today has a Centre for Mexican Studies founded in 1998. Nevertheless, the most studied Latin American writers would be those within the Latin American Boom and not *indigenista* or *negrista* Latin American literature.

With the input of the Cervantes Institute in 1992, things did not change much concerning a stronger incentive towards the teaching of Latin American Spanish or Latin American culture. However, the publicity geared to stress the importance of Spanish in the world is always based on the 400 million speakers. Another institution founded in the late 80s, the Latin American Solidarity Centre, at present offers a ten-week seminar every year on various issues concerning different aspects of Latin American culture mainly relevant to current political and economic problematic areas. Apart from this, a Latin American Week is celebrated all over Ireland with a specific theme every year and it brings together all those concerned with Latin American issues, namely, cultural, political or artistic. The University of Limerick has started taking part of this celebration since the last year. A full-week of activities was

organised combining talks by people in academia, in politics or economics, together with entertainment: film, dance and music.

Despite the business and other cultural relations between Latin America and Ireland, only three Latin American countries have an Embassy in Ireland: Argentina, Mexico and Cuba. All the other Latin American countries use their Embassies in London to deal with Irish issues. As one can imagine, the coverage of news about Latin America on Irish TV, radio or the press is just restricted to either a natural catastrophe, a huge political upheaval or drug-related news.

Now, that a brief account has been made of the Irish context in which to situate our teaching experience, let us turn to what one should take into account when making decisions on cultural aspects to be included in a foreign language programme.

In general, factors that should be considered in deciding what the culture element should be in a university degree programme are:

- The overall aims of the programme.
- The input of Spanish as part of the programme.
- Contact time for lectures and tutorials.
- The proportion of time devoted to Spanish as compared to the rest of the programme.
- The expected time devoted to self-access work or activities.
- What other courses in the programme may touch upon cultural aspects to do with Spanish in the broadest sense.
- Staff resources in terms of who can teach what.
- What the cultural background and environment of the students is.
- The relevance of information filtered through media and the press.

It is not the place here to discuss all the above variables but simply to have them in mind, as they will determine the possibility of inclusion or not of certain cultural aspects. The last two factors would include the relationship between Ireland and Spanish-speaking countries, in our case, which seem to be a crucial factor to link our teaching to, but also paradoxically, to distance our teaching from considering that cultural stereotyping very much depends on these two.

The cultural studies element should also be seen as a way to counterbalance the bad image and stereotyping of certain societies. Knowing that in Ireland students, and their families, would hardly hear about Latin America in the news unless it has to do with some natural disaster, a huge political upheaval or a drug/guerrilla related problem, as stated



above, the cultural studies programme should take this into account in order to give an opportunity for a more informed opinion, a deeper discussion of the problem in a specific context and analysis of the situation from a humanistic perspective. This analysis will enlighten the students' view and their future actions and reactions before someone making easy generalisations and decisions that may hinder the communication and understanding between groups, societies and countries. "Culture can become the third (or second, for that matter) "superpower" dispensing justice and helping maintain stability and equilibrium if need be" (Cruz, Bonissone and Baff, 1995).

There is a pragmatic dimension in the teaching of culture through the selection of subaltern materials, and that is, the capability of intervening in this case in the future of Latin America. It is obvious, that the main drive for all, or the great majority of subaltern studies has been, on the one hand, a rejection, ethical or ideological, of injustice in situations, such as slavery, abuse, discrimination, etc.; and on the other hand, a feeling of solidarity or identification with those who have suffered or suffer oppression –Indians, blacks, peasants, workers, etc. If we, as educators, feel a real commitment to the subaltern, the sharing of this experience with our students is bound to bear fruit. We should not forget that 'books... become social tools by reflecting the values of the dominating classes' (Klein, 1990). This process of 'educating to rule' starts at a very early age in all societies. We have in Peru for example, private schools for children of wealthy families that have the slogan: 'We are preparing the top managers of tomorrow'. 'Through assertion, omission, concealment and mystification, the colonised people are forced to internalise as good the forces which are perpetually exploiting them [...] every dominating class has to develop, from among their very young, the cadres it will need to guarantee the preservation of its privileges [...] and to instill in them the ideological beliefs which give legitimation to its position of power' (Prieswerk, 1980).

An educator should be aware that the main goal in his professional activity are his/her students not as receptors, but rather as 'constructores de su realidad y su conocimiento'. It is through this marvellous opportunity of working with the person that one can achieve to contribute towards a world where individuals respect the differences in culture –ideas, customs, ways– and respect to human dignity regardless of the social, cultural, political or racial group someone comes from.

It is essential to take an ethical standing with respect to the selection of reading material and its discussion in a foreign language class.

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If we don't, we can only be, perhaps unconsciously, accomplices of what the most powerful nations have made the world believe about their former colonies. Denouncement is not a bad thing, if it is done positively. Peter Winn (1995) rightly stresses the fact that although times and circumstances have changed dramatically since the colonial period in Latin America, and the legal and state-mandated racially oppressive and discriminatory policies are not there on paper any longer, the colour of the skin is still a huge factor that decides where a person is positioned in society. I would add to Winn's observation, that apart from being a question of colour, it is also a question of culture; the more identifiable indigenous people are in their ways of living, and the stronger their vernacular language accent in Spanish, the lower they will be ranked in Latin American societies and the stronger discriminatory reactions they will receive.

Tavares and Cavalcanti (1996) stress that the aim of teaching culture is to increase students awareness and to develop their curiosity towards the target culture and their own, helping them to make comparisons among cultures (p. 19). I think the danger is that comparisons can lead to a wrong evaluation and to underestimate a foreign culture, instead of making students more sensitive and to develop empathy towards the societies who speak the foreign language they are learning. Of course, there can be no guarantee that empathy will occur; the integration of values and meanings of the foreign culture with those of one's own culture can bring about a shift of perspective or the 'recognition of cognitive dissonance' (Byram, Morgan *et al.*, 1994), both conducive to reciprocity and empathy.

I am of the opinion that the teaching of ethics or moral issues at university level should not necessarily correspond to a separate subject, which would more than likely be only part of a selective number or university programmes, such as theology, philosophy, psychology, etc. Ethics as a subject matter can be dealt with in any subject course and should be part of every teaching/learning area. In our case, there are a million opportunities in language teaching and learning to discuss ethical issues. If we carefully choose cultural material that constitute an excellent context to talk about values and attitudes; decisions and actions; knowledge and habits; that is, in general, moral issues that would become part of a dynamic process of education aiming at the overall education of the individual as a whole.

Ethical behaviour is understood as all human behaviour that recognises, attributes or gives to each person what each deserves; that is,

'acorde con la justicia' (Cobo, 1993). It is essential that education as a process does not neglect this hugely important aspect that will condition the individual for the rest of his/her life. More important today than ever in a world with sudden changes and a society with a pluralistic set of beliefs, customs, values, attitudes and customs.

If the decision has been made to include Latin America as part of the cultural background to a Spanish language programme, i.e. Language and Cultural Studies, then the next step would be to decide what aspects of Latin American culture should be included. No doubt, literature will be one of these areas. As Valdes (1986, p. 137) states, literature is a viable component of second language programs at the appropriate level, and...one of [its] major functions...is to serve as a medium to transmit the culture of the people who speak the language in which it is written. However, it is not enough to realise that literature should be a cultural component in a foreign language university course. Here we encounter a new dilemma.

On the one hand, what literary works should we include as part of the core reading to represent the cultural aspects of certain Latin American countries? Should we just remain at the level of the most well known writers internationally, which will more than likely be the ones accepted and included in anthologies, etc.? We face a problem in terms of availability of sources if we choose some not very well known writer, but it will always be worth our while to investigate. On the other hand, we face the dilemma of how should literature be analysed. We advocate the cultural studies approach to analyse and discuss literary texts. The inter-disciplinarity of cultural studies tends to give room for a more open discussion from different perspectives. The artistic value and creativity of a literary piece, in my opinion, while being important, should not be the main priority in the study of literary works. In the case, of *indigenista* and *negrista* literary works, for example, I would insist that it should be at least equal in importance to the message of vindication of the groups in question.

The introduction of Indian and Afro-Peruvian literature would respond to academic, literary, racial and ethnic issues. It is very important for the times Ireland lives at present facing a very high immigration that every effort should be made to cultivate good mixed race and culture relations. One of the aims of introducing Indian and Afro-Peruvian literature within Latin American cultural studies is to expose students to see the development of Latin America from a different perspective. This will help them realise that Indians and blacks have been active partic-

ipants in making and shaping all cultural aspects of the continent, a notion that is not so obvious in literature that follow a more white and Western pattern.

Within Latin American literature, *indigenista* writers should always be part of the students' core reading. From my own experience I will try to explain the immense possibilities of use of just one *indigenista* literary work: *Deep Rivers (Los Ríos Profundos)* by José María Arguedas and how it can give the opportunity to any lecturer to get into so many areas that have to do with the history, politics and society of Peru and Latin America.

As I have stressed already, the main aim of introducing Latin American literature and cultural studies to do with Indians and blacks in the Spanish programme is to analyse and discuss the active participation of these groups in making and shaping the cultural and literary aspects of the continent. At the same time, it is a chance to revise the historical sources and entertain discussions on a number of issues such as, the contribution of Latin America to the rest of the world in terms of ancient knowledge on medicinal plants; the variety of crops; respect to human rights, etc.

If we are dealing with a beginner student of Spanish, our choice for literary texts is naturally restricted to those works that have been translated into English, in the case of Irish students. Fortunately, there are quite a number of short stories and novels by Latin American Indigenist writers which have been translated into English. On the other hand we have literary works within the negritude movement, mainly by Caribbean authors who are themselves native speakers of English. Not many of the works by other black Latin American writers have been translated into English (*Changó, the Baddest Dude*, by the Colombian Zapata Olivella is one possible work to include). Nevertheless, there are many studies, articles and books analysing them which can allow for their use in beginners classes, with an effort on the teacher's behalf translating the most important extracts of the works within *negrista* writing.

Given that this type of literature is bound to be quite a novelty for students, it is necessary to stress that, in order for human communication to actually occur, interlocutors have to share some aspects of the definitions of a given situation. This is what is called 'shared meanings'. Teachers have to locate their student subject within a space, time, body and a history. This is the student's 'anclaje', a term used by Rocieur in his book *Si mismo como otro* (1996, translated by Agustín Neira Calvo,

Madrid, S. XXI Editores.) If one does not link the new material to the student's 'anclaje', communication will unlikely take place and as a consequence, we will fail in our aim to share the same world through the context of a situation. "...communication requires understanding, and understanding requires stepping into the shoes of the foreigner and sifting his/her cultural baggage, while always putting [the target] culture in relation with one's own" (Kramersch, 1993).

Areas such as the notion of globalisation, European aid to other non-European countries, ecological and environmental debates, human rights issues, etc. can all be used as shared common knowledge by the students which can be linked to the new cultural studies material. I will now give some specific examples of *indigenista* and *negrista* literature and their immense possibilities for analysis from a cultural studies approach.

First of all it should be stressed that for students to understand *indigenista* and *negrista* literature they need an introduction into Amerindian cultures, conquest and colonisation, slave trade and slavery, colonial times, independence, and the new Latin American Republics. The way it has been structured as part of all first year programmes taking Spanish at the University of Limerick is through General Lectures devoted to each of these themes throughout a semester. Specific cultural background in terms of writers and the country in question, for instance Peru, is dealt with in smaller classes together with the reading of a novel or poem.

I will now introduce one example of *indigenista* literature and how it can be analysed from a cultural studies perspective as part of the Latin American cultural element in a Spanish Degree Programme at university.

During the last fifty years Latin America has seen the development of a process of analysis in search of a cultural identity, which would rightfully incorporate the various cultures that have lived and coexisted in the continent for so many years. We will probably never know for sure exactly what the cultures, which existed in Latin America, were really like before the Spaniards came. The information has sifted to us through the chronicles and the conquerors, who would take the approach from an angle of superiority, that of the invader.

*Deep Rivers*, a novel written by the Peruvian writer José María Arguedas, can be analysed from the point of view of cultural studies as part of Latin American cultural studies. First it will be important for the students to situate Arguedas's work within the historical period and the

evolution of Latin American literature, as well as an overall frame of what culture means. Then it will be necessary to briefly analyse Arguedas's style of writing in *Deep Rivers*, given the importance it has in affecting the cultural information in his book. Only then one should devote most of the available time to highlighting the key words and symbols in *Deep Rivers*, which gives us a vast field of cultural aspects to be discussed. The main aim of this exercise in this paper will be to analyse to what extent, *Deep Rivers* (1958) by Arguedas can be a literary source of valuable information into the cultural identity of Latin Americans.

Arguedas is born in 1911. When his mother dies three years later, his step-mother does not want him around and Arguedas is raised by an Indian 'ayllu'. This is his first experience of a world the invader has convinced of being inferior, and whose only salvation would be to adopt that superior culture linked to a Christian god. However, because of his family status, Arguedas does not belong to this inferior world, but to the 'mestizo', and therefore, superior world. The Indian community which raised him taught him Quechua and all their cultural beliefs, their feelings and their way of thinking. As a child Arguedas identified himself fully with this Indian culture until he faced a different world in 1924, when he joined the *mestizo* world in Miguel Grau School in Abancay. His heart, nevertheless, remains with the Indian community, his cultural mother. Through an introduction of the writer's life, we intend to let the student know, this writer has something special that will give some authority in his task to introduce us to the '*mundo indigena*'. It is not just one more '*mestizo*' or '*white*' outsider.

Arguedas in his work *Deep Rivers* shows us the way society was structured in Peru in the 1940s and 50s. It concentrates mainly on towns in the Andes that he and his father visited, and the time Ernesto, the son, who is Arguedas himself, spent in a boarding school in Abancay, a province in the highlands. *Deep Rivers* has been classified by some critics as the traditional novel of learning (Bildungsroman) given that the main symbolic axis of the theme/plot is Ernesto, a teenager, who is undergoing his years of formation and facing the challenge of becoming an adult person (Peter Elmore, 1996; Paoli Roberto, 1982).

According to Julio Ortega (1982), Arguedas once acknowledged that it was two main literary works that influenced him. One was *El Tungsteno* by C Vallejo, and the other one was *Don Segundo Sombra* by Ricardo Güiraldes. *Deep Rivers* is primarily an autobiography and as such the similarity with *Don Segundo Sombra* is more evident. The intertextuality of the novel would be one way to analyse it linking it to other *indige-*

*nista* works, for example. In this way the student realises that Arguedas was not isolated in his effort to vindicate the Indian world in Latin America.

Arguedas's intention does not seem to be confiding characteristics, both linguistic and anthropological, of the Indian population. It is not only a narrative of his memories when he was fourteen years of age, but of memories that he brought with him and values at the time of his writing as an adult.

Octavio Paz (1983), talking about the complexity of the relationship between reality and literature in *Hispanoamerica*, states that literature and society are not interrelated on the basis of a cause and effect relationship. The link between them is at the same time necessary, contradictory and unpredictable. If it is true to say that society is transparent through its literature, it is also true to say that by being so, society is also changed, contradicted and even denied by literature. Society is portrayed by literature but also invented by it and therefore revealed.

Vargas Llosa (1992), sees this relationship between literature and society in *Deep Rivers* in the way Ernesto's personal tragedy is an indirect testimony of the injustice existing in the Andes. Ernesto is the product, the consequence of a system full of evil. According to Vargas Llosa it would be unfair and, a wrong interpretation of *Deep Rivers*, to say that Arguedas does not denounce or protest against this social order directly, but that he rather gets lost and mystifies the whole issue talking about a natural order above it. Ernesto's whole story would have no explanation or reason behind it, had it not been for the social and economic reality that lies underneath. This, in Vargas Llosa's words, makes *Deep Rivers* a living literary testimony and not just one more accomplished literary work.

As can be seen in the previous paragraphs, the analysis of *Deep Rivers* should be done taking into considerations general and very specific comments; getting students involved not just in what they interpret as they read, but what others' interpretations have been.

In *Deep Rivers* we can see a society clearly divided between two extremes: the oppressors and the oppressed; the small-town landowners and the Indian peasants; the boys in the school and the idiot, Marcelina; Lleras and Añuco and Palacitos; the misers from Cuzco and *el pongo*; the fruit and vegetable street traders and the house owners; etc. The function /role of opposite symbols in *Deep Rivers* between good and evil, the differences between the Spanish-like world and that of the

Indians, gives the impression that the only way out of this mess would be salvation in the Indian culture. Nevertheless Arguedas does not idealise the Indians as being all positive. He denounces some of their bad habits, for instance, their drinking. But, nothing in *Deep Rivers* can compare to the love Arguedas received when he was living in the *ayllu*.

Arguedas's first works in the 40s were considered by some critics to mark the end of a period of indigenous literature, which had fallen into some of the same mistakes of the previous period of Indianist "romantic" literature (Alemany, 1992). It was said that there had been no real attempt to identify and explain the Indian's cultural identity. However, Rodriguez Luis (1980) could foresee that this trend in literature had not died but rather would be continued. He emphasized that there would be a better opportunity to analyse this kind of literature through the new trends in novels in the boom era of Latin American writing.

Arguedas himself would be the link between what has been called Indigenistic literature and neo-indigenistic literature (1971). He expresses clearly his anger and frustration when he gets to university level and reads for the first time the description made of the Indian population in literary works by Lopez Albújar and Ventura Calderón, also Peruvian writers at the time. It is then that he decides to write about them and, in a way about himself, since he had been raised by an *Ayllu* of Indians. His vision of the future and cultural identity of his people will undergo a drastic change throughout his literary work. In *Deep Rivers*, Indians and mestizos are basically two extremes with little to share; however later on in *Todas Las Sangres* he will adopt an integrating vision emphasising the mixture of cultures as the real cultural identity (Alemany, 1992).

Since the word culture has been used with so many different meanings, it is necessary to determine at this point what we mean by culture in this essay. Culture is above all a matter of meaning (Hannerz, 1992). It has to do with ideas, experiences, feelings, as well as with the external forms that such internal experiences take as they are made public, available to the senses, and thus truly social. Arguedas's *Deep Rivers* offers plenty of materials, symbols and several conceptual dimensions that can be analysed in various degrees of complexity.

The concept of cultural identity or "oneself" is in a way the notion of a "self-concept" or a "self-system" which is linked to the recognition of value given to a cultural heritage, one's patrimony (Ainsa, 1986). According to Sambarino (1980), this patrimony consists of everything that



has been produced as culture by a specific group: architectural evidence, as well as signs and symbols passed on through oral tradition, the literature, the language or languages, handicrafts and folklore, music and dances, myths and beliefs, rituals and games. *Deep Rivers* does not fall short in any of these aspects.

What establishes a difference between Arguedas's work and that of his contemporaries, is the fact that he is one of few Latin American writers who speak about the Indian people from inside this culture. He was raised by an Indian community, an '*ayllu*', until the age of 12-14 when his father decided to take him to a boarding school in Abancay; to insert him into the *mestizo* world. Arguedas's first language was Quechua and therefore his view of the world, his way of thinking was in the first instance that of the Indians in the *ayllu* where he was brought up with love and care. Fernando Ainsa (1986) groups Arguedas together with Joao Guimaraes Rosa in Brazil, Juan Rulfo in Mexico and Ruben Saguier in Paraguay. He says all these writers have been able to perceive and assimilate essential aspects of the identity of these minority ethnic groups through an integration of culture and language.

As in Arguedas's case, although these writers have expressed themselves in Spanish, the syntax, style and some semantic units belong to the indigenous language, namely Quechua, Guaraní, etc. This cultural aspect of *Deep Rivers* could well serve as the context for analysis of the influence of vernacular languages on Latin American Spanish. Also to establish the presence of Amerindian words in today's peninsular Spanish. Arguedas does not situate himself outside but inside the Quechua language. He uses it in his attempt to communicate with the Indians in the haciendas, an attempt to be identified as one of them; but he fails. "*Señoray, rimakusk'ayki!*" (Let me talk to you *señora*). "...They would no longer even listen to the language of the '*ayllus*'" (p. 47). Here language as an element of cultural identity can be discussed and linked to the Irish situation where English was imposed during colonial times.

Ruben Bareiro Saguier says this use of syntax and forms of the vernacular language is a process of progressive appropriation carried out of a cultural patrimony the literature; patrimony which already exists: the collective creation carried out by constant offerings which have entered into the main part of the patrimonial language. The old myth then of a "degeneration/depreciation of language becomes a productive and an enriching one". According to Bellini (1992), Arguedas did not find it easy to find a convenient style to write in Spanish about his Indian

roots (something that was "himself") He was fully aware that the "improper syntax" in Spanish would conform the right mould/ tool for his writing. Vargas Llosa also observes that Arguedas was not particularly careful about style or even keeping the same style through a novel. His writing was more a necessity to communicate and once he found the way he was not extremely preoccupied about style.

The fact that he uses Quechua words and phrases to identify the closest people, things or what is mostly heartfelt to him, is important. It reveals the necessity Arguedas had to name things with the words he had first learned. These are key words in his society and his world (Williams, 1976). The concept behind, the meaning and scope would definitely not have been the same, had he used the Spanish equivalent. As Lotman and Uspenski (1976) observe, this need to name something, to find and use the right name appears again when Ernesto repeats the word *zumbayllu* to himself many times. Somehow this gives him a feeling of assurance, of comfort to him. And this is also a common feature in anthropological mythology.

Arguedas in *Deep Rivers* is not only perceptive of the social differences between oppressors and oppressed, but he is also sensitive enough to be aware of the power of language and speech. He is quite clear about the different ways in which, for instance, the priest addressed the *colonos* in the hacienda when he made them cry, and the way he addressed the small-town landowners, *the señores* in church. He even pictures the different tone and language when the priest talks to the students in the school. All this authority, this power can be analysed in terms of manipulation. What Spanish is good for, and what is the use left for Quechua. While Arguedas tries to search his own identity or at least in order to impose himself as a master. One can cover various topics here including the relationship between language and ethnic identity, inter-group communication and miscommunication; representations of ethnicity in *Deep Rivers* and other perhaps Irish cultural texts, and how ethnicity is involved in socialization, values, religion, and social institutions.

Every time Arguedas makes use of words, phrases or songs in Quechua, I think he achieves at least two aims. One is to be as objective as possible in the way he is telling us the story, given that a mere translation will not carry the same meaning and therefore may not be sufficient; and secondly, he is aware of the existing conflict between the actual literary written language and the oral tradition. The Andean culture is, as Cornejo Polar (1994) states, in the middle of a

conflict between what is spoken and what is written. This is the same conflict that exists between the literate and the illiterate. There have been disastrous consequences due to the fact that the education system in Peru has not properly valued oral tradition.

Concerning the narrative and the role of remembrance in it, Bellini explains how the past is alive and present in the narrator, and that this is the whole reason for the first to exist. This present experience validates the past and with it all the symbols which, although pertaining to an experience already lived, are still truly present in the narrator. Almost all critics agree that Arguedas was not happy with his present life and his narrative in *Deep Rivers* is an remembrance of a better life, that in the *ayllu: una. Añoranza*. Vargas Llosa (1992) insists that, it is this remembrance that determines the use of lyrics and poetic language. In his view, Arguedas idealises objects and people in his memories of them. Although this is true, one has to admit that this idealisation mainly occurs when Arguedas talks about those close to him, and even then, there are many instances when the same person is attributed both negative and positive characteristics. Probably the best example is the priest, the principal of the school, who at times is a warm person to Ernesto but at other is the devil in person talking to the peasants.

Likewise, the mixing of Indian/non Christian and *mestizo*/Christian cultural aspects occurs many times throughout the novel. When Vargas Llosa states that Arguedas idealises animals, plants and objects in a "pagan way", to the extent of making them sacred/or believe they are sacred, what we actually have here, is evidence of a mixture of two cultural aspects. On the one hand the Indian mythology would have this characteristic: *Apus* (mountains) are Gods, the lakes have sacred powers, etc. On the other hand, we have the cultural aspect brought with Christianity that would consider these Indian belief as pagan ones. In my opinion Arguedas does not have any problem at all in attributing sacred powers to rocks, rivers, to the *zumbayllu*. That is what he learned in his *ayllu*. And the Indian population did not leave aside all these beliefs when they took on Christian beliefs. They actually copied the new rituals and added new icons, but kept their own superstitions and religious beliefs. These religious cultural aspects have coexisted for over five hundred years.

This mixture of religious beliefs is perhaps one of the main common cultural aspects for Latin Americans where there is a significant present of Indian population. It even goes further in certain cases where Christianity has not entered at all. When Alan Sandstrom (1991),

an anthropologist doing research on the Nahua Indians –descendants of Mexico’s ancient Aztecs– asked about religion, he was told by a villager that, religion was one of the demonstrations of their cultural identity, different from that of the mestizo population. “Religion is a way of expressing our resistance”, the villager said.

Another strong cultural aspect is the adscription of man to his land, his territory or surroundings which is also present in *Deep Rivers*. The dramatic use of the scenery immediately helps us identify the Andean region. But Arguedas’s sense of place seems to me to be rather than merely in a physical place, in a spiritual one he has created for himself. Perhaps the idea about an inter cultural space may be worth studied in Arguedas’s case. He situates himself in a space in between which shares aspects from both cultures, somehow a space of his own.

Arguedas’s relationship with his physical surrounding in *Deep Rivers* flows like a conversation between him and the rocks, the rivers, and the trees. He can feel them, and he can feel for them. The father acts as a facilitator at times but Ernesto can manage quite well on his own... For instance the encounter with the Inca wall, when he says “I walked along the wall, stone by stone. I stood back a few steps, contemplating it, and then came closer again. I touched the stone with my hands, following the line, which was an undulating and unpredictable as a river, where ... In the dark street, in the silence, the wall appeared to be alive; the lines I had touched between the stones burned on the palms of my hands” (p. 11).

Vargas Llosa sees this communication with nature as the only alternative Arguedas has since he does not belong to either world, the white or the Indian one, and therefore he cannot communicate with men anymore. I totally disagree with this view and I rather see Arguedas’ communication with nature as a cultural aspect pertaining to the Indian view of the world around them: a very different perception from that of the white man. The omnipotent/almighty forces of nature are always present in Indian mythology. Superstitions that have to do with treating nature with respect because of fear of retaliation; all this is part of a mentality that Arguedas acquired in his early years and is still present in his adult life.

Arguedas, in my opinion, is not disillusioned at all with his Indian upbringing. Ernesto recognises that the love he is capable of giving and receiving, is the love he received from –and obviously gave to– the *mamakunas*. “...donde las *mamakunas* me protegieron y me infundieron la impagable ternura en que vivo”.

Bellini (1992) has made a careful study of some of the symbols found in *Deep Rivers*. I will mention some of them. Firstly, he mentions Cuzco that represents a sacred place, the promised land according to Arguedas's father where all pain and misery would disappear. Then the ruins of the Inca Empire, which Ernesto finds no problem identifying himself with immediately. He communicates with them as if they had been around him all his life. He is no stranger to them and to him they are alive and with enormous power. In my opinion, they are the symbol of Arguedas's belief and admiration of the grandiosity of the Incas, and his love for the Indians, their descendants.

The sound of the Maria Angola bell in the Cathedral in the main square in Cuzco, also symbolises the power of gold taken away from the hands of the Incas. However, at the same time, it also symbolises the frustration, the sadness of a defeated culture. "We stood together, and I was thinking of the way my father had described Cuzco on our journeys, when I heard a musical sound. The *María Angola*, I cried..." (p. 17).

Vargas Llosa (1992) suggests that the whistling "trompo" fulfils almost a totemic function in the novel for Ernesto who refers to it as, "To me it was a new kind of being, an apparition in a hostile world, a tie that bound me to the courtyard I hated, to that vale of sorrow, to the school".

When Ernesto meets "El Viejo", his uncle, the description of this old man with hard skin and bony appearance, gives us the idea of a mixture of fear and distrust. His dream of Cuzco starts becoming a nightmare when he sees the tree in the patio that had been abused, and then the *pongo* who is practically a shadow of a human being. All these symbols of decadence mingle with symbols of hope of which his father is the most significant one. The blue eyes somehow constitute looking up to the white race. His father had blue eyes and this is mentioned several times. The girl he remembers warmly from the hostile town where he stayed once with his father had blue eyes. Also the lady who helps him after the women's riot has blue eyes, and these inspire trust in Ernesto.

All the references to nature, basically conform a set of positive symbols belonging to the Indian culture: the mountains, the lakes, the Indian legends, the sound of the *zumbayllu* similar to a mysterious singing; all these bring a positive feeling and consolation to Ernesto. Vargas Llosa goes even further saying that it is the Andean landscape that is the main character in *Deep Rivers*. This *paisaje* takes on human

characteristics that goes beyond the use of metaphoric language and immerses into a world of magic. Indeed, to us with a western mentality, this is the way we see this cultural aspect of Andean culture/s. The fact that the Indians compare people to animals or flowers, etc..., the use of expressions like *Palomita mía*, talking to or about a girl, proves that it is not just poetic language used by Arguedas out of his passion for nature. It is rather the way Quechua speakers express ideas.

Out of all these symbols coming from nature, rivers naturally stand out, and they appear many times in the novel. The Pachachaca, a bridge over the world, is therefore a river which symbolises the whole world; the *Apurímac*, God of the Rivers or the God who speaks, challenges the idea of the God of the Christian people; also when Ernesto threatens the priest because he had accused him of having sexual intercourse with the idiot, he says "*los ríos lo pueden arrastrar, están conmigo. El Pachachaca puede venir*" (p. 230). Ernesto then believed in the rivers as his protectors since they had always been by his side: "...*me acordé de los pequeños ríos donde fui feliz*".

Another symbol, this time a negative one, is the approach of the army. In Latin America the Indian peasants know quite well that the army (although formed by Indian people as well), has always defended the law of the *mestizo*. Masacres of peasants carried out by the army have not been an extraordinary event in the highlands of Peru. This repression and abuse is expressed by Ernesto when he says "...*escarmiento... palabra antigua... oída en mi niñez en los pueblos chicos. Enfriaba la sangre*" (p. 126).

What gives authority and authenticity to the text in *Deep Rivers*, according to Peter Elmore (1996) is the unattachment of the narrator and the main character, both physical and socially. As the main character, Ernesto can move freely up and down the social classes, and has no permanent location, but as a narrator, he tries to travel back in time to his own past life while telling us the story.

*Deep Rivers* offers an abundant source of cultural aspects and symbols for the researcher and the lecturer that can be analysed in a much deeper way. Arguedas's work seems then to be hiding a new approach to cultural analysis and an attempt to analyse a culture that after so many years has managed to resist "acculturation" but has been undergoing a process of "transculturation" (Ortiz, 1973). His main interest is to express the creative force of his people, and his main worry is to achieve an intellectual understanding of the historical process that his people are undergoing. The Indian himself cannot express through a

foreign language and foreign patterns of thinking, what they feel, what they are like. An the invader has failed as well in his attempt to frame the Indian culture within the western ideas. Arguedas's work is a cultural journey based on an anthropological reflection.

I hope to have succeeded in demonstrating how productive and flexible can be the reading of a text such as *Deep Rivers*. There are so many and varied approaches one can give it in order to analyse aspects of Latin American history, anthropology, ethnic issues, influence of the church, political and social issues, etc. Most importantly that these are all issues still relevant to today's Peruvian society and can be related to other societal groups in the rest of Latin America.

Last academic year after weeks of reading and discussing *Deep Rivers* and another novel about blacks, *Matalaché* by the Peruvian writer, Ernesto López Albújar, with the first year students of the Languages and Cultural Studies Programme, majoring in Spanish, one of the students asked me at the end of a class: "What can we do to change things without preventing us to enjoy life"? The simple fact that the question was asked, already means a reflection and a search on behalf of the individual. The answer and the action can take many shapes.

#### CONCLUSION

I do not think there are any formulae that would make us sure of making the right decision concerning what culture and/or what cultural aspects to teach in a University Degree Programme. Nevertheless, I strongly believe that a wonderful opportunity can be missed if we, as educators, communicators and facilitators, do not give the necessary thinking to this crucial matter. I honestly think that including *indigenista* and *negrista* texts in the curriculum as part of the Latin American cultural aspects, we are doing justice to history and it gives us an opportunity to revise many concepts and ideas that have been around us without being questioned.

It is our responsibility, ethically and morally, to select reading material that will allow the students to develop a critical understanding of the world around them, hoping that the new generations will not make the same mistakes as regards racism and discrimination. I see my role within education as a continuous effort to help make this world a place of tolerance and understanding where all human beings can live with dignity.

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