Preface

This book has grown over many years of teaching foreign languages and training language teachers in the United States and abroad. Its different layers of understanding of what it means to be a language teacher, mediator of a foreign culture, and catalyst of educational change, are the product of many conversations I have had over the years with colleagues, students, friends, and family; they were also inspired by the many multilingual and multicultural people I have come to know and who, like me, live with two or more languages and cultures. To all those who have made this adventure worthwhile and who have clarified my thinking I am deeply indebted.

The idea of this book matured at MIT while I was teaching German to undergraduate students. Chapter 1 captures the questioning that went on during these years, as I attempted to make sense of the sometimes brilliant and quixotic ways MIT students learn foreign languages. The book started to take shape at Cornell University, where I visited in 1989. Chapters 2 and 3 grew out of an 'Introduction to Applied Linguistics' course I gave there and a 1990 TESOL Summer Institute course I gave at Michigan State University on 'Language Teaching as Social Interaction'. Chapters 4 and 5 are a direct outgrowth of the course 'Literature in Language Teaching' that I gave at Cornell and at the 1989 LSA/MLA Summer Institute at the University of Arizona with Yvonne Ozzello. I wish to thank those who invited me to give these courses, and those who thought through the ideas with me—my students, for their probing questions and untiring interest. Special thanks go to Linda Waugh, John Wolff, and Sally McConnell-Ginet at Cornell for their enthusiastic support of my work. I finished the book at the University of California at Berkeley. Chapters 6 and 7 reflect my current concerns as I now train graduate students to become linguistic 'go-betweens' in multicultural classrooms.

I would like to thank all the teachers who welcomed me into their classrooms and gave me valuable insights into their daily

CONTEXT AND CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt

encounters with foreign language learners. I am grateful to all those schools and universities in the United States and in Canada, Germany, France, Spain, and Russia, who invited me to give lectures and workshops in which I tried out some of my ideas.

There have been a few persons who have shared with me over the years my interest for problems of language and culture. I am grateful to Catherine Chvany for her wise mentorship, Suzanne Flynn for her companionship in linguistic matters, Michael Geisler for his grasp of popular culture, Jim Noblitt for his insights into computer literacy, Peter Patrikis for his unfailing support. Our long and sometimes impassioned conversations gave me the necessary inspiration to write this book.

My gratitude goes to the careful and critical readers of earlier versions of the manuscript: Brian Harrison and Eberhard Piepho, and, especially, Henry Widdowson, who with his wise understanding and impeccable logic encouraged me to refine my argument and to say what I really wanted to say. I should like to thank also Linda von Hoene for being the ideal empathetic and yet questioning reader and for her help in tracking down references. David Wilson was the most careful and patient editor I could have wished for. Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Cristina Whitecross and Anne Conybeare from Oxford University Press for their encouragement and support during the preparation of the manuscript. If this book can make a modest contribution to the emergence of cross-cultural understanding in a united Europe, it will be thanks to them.

Claire Kramsch
Berkeley, January 1992

© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt

Introduction

By its very nature, foreign language teaching is predicated on the conviction that because we are all humans, we can easily understand each other provided we share the same code; all we have to do is learn that code and use it accurately and appropriately. This view of language teaching values consensus and negotiated understanding. Because we all have the same basic human needs, we only have to agree on how to fulfill these needs in various situations of everyday life. On this shared experiential basis, it is believed that one language is essentially (albeit not easily) translatable into another. In foreign language education, this belief has been most fruitful in promoting functional and pragmatic approaches to the teaching and learning of foreign languages around the world.

Where it has encountered difficulties is in the teaching of culture: for culture is difference, variability, and always a potential source of conflict when one culture enters into contact with another. Culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them.

Consider, in fact, the differences among people due to such factors as age, race, gender, social class, generation, family history, regional origin, nationality, education, life experiences, linguistic idiosyncracies, conversational styles, human intentionalities. Given these differences and the enormous complexity of human relations, communication in general and, *a fortiori*, communication in a foreign language, should be all but impossible. And yet, more often than not, we do understand one another, however imperfectly, however temporarily.

This book takes a philosophy of conflict as its point of departure, thus reversing the traditional view of language teaching as

© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt

the teaching of forms to express universal meanings. It takes particular meanings, contextual difference, and learner variability as its core: a rose, maybe, is a rose is a rose, but it is not *une rose*, is not *eine Rose*, but multiple ways of viewing and talking about roses. Such an approach is more interested in fault lines than in smooth landscapes, in the recognition of complexity and in the tolerance of ambiguity, not in the search for clear yardsticks of competence or insurances against pedagogical malpractice. It is convinced that understanding and shared meaning, when it occurs, is a small miracle, brought about by the leap of faith that we call 'communication across cultures'.

Language teachers are well aware of the difficulties of their task. But they often view these difficulties in dichotomous terms that unduly simplify the issues and prevent them from understanding the larger context.

Dubious dichotomies and deceptive symmetries

With the ebb and flow of educational philosophies and methodologies, themselves reactions to larger social and political events, language teaching has tended to swing between what it views as opposite extremes: grammatical versus functional syllabuses, teacher-centered versus student-centered classrooms, cognitive versus experiential learning styles, learning-based versus acquisition-based pedagogies. These swings have been nurtured by the belief in the linear progressive development of the 'ideal' language learning environment and the disillusion with the betrayal of earlier teaching methods. For example, professional rhetoric views the functional–notional approach as having superseded the audiolingual method and having been superseded itself by a proficiency-oriented curriculum. Such a view is comforting—teachers are given a feeling of progress and achievement—but it is deceptive. Teachers know well the variability inherent in the educational context and the impossibility of capturing this variability in any methodical way. They either compensate in enthusiasm and personal commitment to a new method what they lose in global understanding; or they minimize the conflict between methods, styles, and goals, and settle for the so-called 'eclectic' middle ground.

Not only teachers, but teacher trainers themselves are trying to escape dichotomous thinking. Swaffar *et al.* (1991: 6) describes the traditional disparity found in higher education

CONTEXT AND CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt

'between initial semesters of language training (the remedial work) and later scholarly training (the academic mission)'. Richards (1990) sees a 'dilemma' in the fact that teachers have to master low-inference techniques and teaching behaviors that can be readily learned, and at the same time follow higher-level principles of decision making. He suggests that a balance needs to be struck between holistic and atomistic approaches to teacher preparation. This idea of balance between the polarities in the teaching of foreign languages is expressed by Maley, who strives to help teachers arrive at a personal synthesis or 'balance of opposites' (personal communication). Larsen-Freeman (1990) calls for a theory of language teaching that would help teachers find their own way out of the conflicting recommendations they receive from second language acquisition (SLA) research. Lightbown (1986) encourages teachers to become familiar with SLA research—not to find out what is good and bad teaching, but to understand the nature of language and language learning.

Indeed, classroom teaching is a juggling act that requires instant-by-instant decisions based on both local and global knowledge and on an intuitive grasp of the situation. Many of the decisions teachers make are based on compromises between how they perceive the needs of their students and how they view their role and their responsibility as teachers. These many factors are often in contradiction with one another and call for personal judgment based on as broad and differentiated an understanding as possible about what is going on at that particular moment in the classroom.

Rather than fall prey to attractive but ultimately reductionist dichotomies, this book will explore their possible reformulation within a non-dichotomous perspective. In the following, I examine some of the polarities most often cited by teachers and I attempt to break their symmetry by reformulating the questions within a larger contextual framework.

Learning by doing versus learning by thinking

One of the more tenacious dichotomies in foreign language education is that of skill versus content (see Kramsch 1988a). Language is viewed as a skill, a tool that is in itself devoid of any intellectual value. As an academic subject, it becomes intellectually respectable only when learners are able to use it to express and discuss abstract ideas. This argument has two aspects that

CONTEXT AND CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt

reinforce one another. First, an administrative one. In most Western countries, the teaching of foreign languages made a late appearance on the academic scene that was traditionally reserved for the study of ancient and modern literatures. The language teacher has hence a lower academic status than the professor of literature or of civilization. The interface between upper-level language courses and literature seminars is traditionally a particularly sensitive area of the academic curriculum in terms of staffing and syllabus.

The second aspect of the skill versus content argument is an educational one. Functional approaches to language teaching have been adopted with enthusiasm by educational systems in which educational effectiveness is traditionally measured according to its practical outcomes. For example, as Freed and Bernhardt (1992) have recently pointed out, American foreign language education values action over reflection; it believes that the sole responsibility of language teachers is to get their students to talk and write as well and as fluently as possible. Depth and breadth of thought belong to other subjects. The overall result of both these aspects of the skill versus content dichotomy has often been the trivialization of the teaching of foreign languages; it has made the teaching of culture a particularly controversial issue.

We can get out of this dichotomy by seeing learning by doing and learning by thinking as two sides of the same coin. Learners have to experience new uses of language, but they do not even know how new they are if they do not reflect on their experience. It is a fallacy to believe that students do not acquire content as they learn the forms of the language. To be sure, much of this content is not verbalized, it is the unspoken ideological substratum of the educational system, the community, the peer group, the family. If we consider language learning as the acquisition of new forms of discourse, learners have to first recognize to what extent their discourse is that of their surrounding environment. Chapter 1 offers an in-depth analysis of a segment of classroom discourse and explores the lessons we can draw from it to define the nature of the educational challenge we are faced with.

Grammar versus communication

If both action and reflection form the basis of the acquisition of a foreign language in educational settings, teachers will no doubt

CONTEXT AND CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt

argue that the two processes have to be weighted differently at the beginning and the more advanced stages: do beginning learners not have to *do* things with words before they can *reflect* with words? This was the argument made in the early 1970s against the abuses of grammatical metalanguage and structural analyses at the expense of communicative practice. Unfortunately, in many cases, the argument has been couched again in dichotomous terms as: grammar versus communication, conscious application of rules versus unconscious acquisition of conversational patterns.

Because of this dichotomous thinking, many teachers still believe that students should learn to use the language in communication only *after* they have learned to master its structures in drills and other mechanical exercises. On the one hand, it is a fact that structures have to be broken down and learned, that rules have to be explained, inductively or deductively, and that students have to get the necessary linguistic skills. On the other hand, teachers are now told that learners have to be given the opportunity to use their skills even before they have completely mastered them and that they should focus on the message, not on the form of their utterances. The pedagogical result, however, is often an 'everything-goes' attitude on the part of both learners and teachers, with a concomitant abdication of teacher responsibility.

Rather than an either–or dichotomy, grammar and communication can be seen within a view of language as social semiotic (Halliday 1978, 1989, 1990). The structures which speakers choose to use and hearers choose to listen and respond to construct the very context of communication in which learning takes place. Rather than a dichotomy, then, we have multiple options regarding the way language is used in variable contexts of use. In Chapter 2, drawing on Halliday's work but also on that of anthropological linguists like Hymes (1974), Goffman (1981), psycholinguists like Charaudeau (1983), Edmondson (1983, 1985), Ellis (1987), Long (1983, 1989), and sociolinguists like Saville-Troike (1989), I will examine the notions of context and of language teaching as contextual shaping.

Teacher-talk versus student-talk

The notion of social interaction itself has often been undermined by the phrases 'teacher-talk' versus 'student-talk' and by the

CONTEXT AND CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt

pedagogical principle that students should talk as much as possible, the teacher as little as possible. The metaphor 'teacher-talk/student-talk', coined by Flanders (1960), has no doubt been useful to dramatize the new focus on the learner, but it has limited our understanding of the nature of classroom dialogue. It has encouraged teachers to view these two notions as exclusive of one another and to focus on the amount of 'talking', not on what is being talked about nor what meanings are negotiated.

This dichotomy has become a dilemma in recent years as teachers are now told that learners should be exposed to a lot of comprehensible input (Krashen 1988) but that this input should be 'quality input' (Lightbown 1992). Teacher-talk and student-talk seem to be in competition with one another for which of the two provides the best 'input'. Here, quality input is still seen in structural terms, not in terms of quality of interaction, or in overall gains in cultural understanding.

How can we reframe the question in qualitative, rather than quantitative, terms? The larger psychological issue seems to be the following: teachers have to impart a body of knowledge, but learners have to discover that knowledge for themselves in order to internalize it—how can teachers at the same time give it to them and make them discover it on their own? This question is the fundamental paradox of education. Rather than worry about how much speaking, how much listening students should do, we might want to explore the various ways in which learners learn to learn, both as a cognitive and as a social process with variable individual styles of learning. In Chapter 3, I shall analyze the way in which teachers and learners shape contexts of learning both cognitively and socially during classroom lessons, and how they can become aware of this double process.

Reading to learn versus learning to read

Learners who become aware of how their interaction as speakers and hearers affects the type of knowledge they gain in the classroom can better understand the interaction between readers and texts. It can help them get out of the dichotomy that is still perceived by many when learning to read a text in a foreign language. Either they view reading as an exercise to reinforce their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, or they treat written texts only as a source of information about the foreign

CONTEXT AND CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt

culture. In the first case, the emphasis is on reading to learn—that is, to decode forms in texts; in the second, the main thing is learning to read—that is, to decode information from texts and to make sense of the text *despite* a deficient knowledge of forms.

This polarity—reading to learn the forms, reading to extract informational content—excludes other sources of meaning. It ignores, for example, the unexpected particularities of a writer's style, the social conventions regarding the use of genres and registers, the fractured symmetries of a literary text, and the special kind of interaction all these features require of the reader. It deceives learners into believing that all they have to do is 'retrieve' a meaning that is already in the text. It does not account for the fact that a text creates its reader through its very structure or form, and that readers in turn create the text as they imbue it with meaning. In Chapter 4, building on the work of linguists like Widdowson (1975), Chafe (1982, 1985), sociolinguists like Becker (1985, 1992), Fowler (1986), Tannen (1982, 1985), and literary scholars like Rosenblatt (1978), I will explore the dimensions of this interaction in its 'orate' and 'literate' modes.

Language versus literature

As language teachers are encouraged to help their students not only to read texts for information, but to interpret them for their many layers of meaning, it would seem natural to draw on literature as a means of teaching language. Yet some teachers still feel hesitant to use literary texts in the language classroom. Their hesitation is often a reflex of academic self-defense. As language teachers they are told they are competent only to teach language, not literature. The language–literature dichotomy has been institutionalized in departments of foreign languages and literatures at North American universities, but the split can be found in other forms all over the world. Teaching language is consistently viewed as a less sophisticated, hence less difficult, task than teaching literature.

As Widdowson has rightly pointed out (1975), the distinction is one of disciplinary boundaries, not of intellectual content. It serves to maintain a certain academic, political, and economic power structure, where language teachers and literature scholars are careful not to tread on each other's territories. The result in the language classroom is an ambivalent one. Even when literary

CONTEXT AND CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt

texts are chosen to teach reading because of their general interest and cultural appeal, language teachers seem constrained to teach these texts for their information value only.

Given that the dichotomy between language and literature has no intellectual justification, we have to reformulate their relation within the language teaching enterprise. Texts can be read on different levels of meaning. Whether they are texts of information or works of literature, language is the stuff they are made of. The pedagogical question may not be whether language teachers should teach literature or not, but, rather: how can language teachers help learners read texts at a variety of levels of meaning? This question will be pursued in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Language versus culture

The same hesitation about the teaching of literature in language classes can be found with the teaching of culture. One often reads in teachers' guide-lines that language teaching consists of teaching the four skills 'plus culture'. This dichotomy of language and culture is an entrenched feature of language teaching around the world. It is part of the linguistic heritage of the profession. Whether it is called (Fr.) *civilisation*, (G.) *Landeskunde*, or (Eng.) *culture*, culture is often seen as mere information conveyed by the language, not as a feature of language itself; cultural awareness becomes an educational objective in itself, separate from language. If, however, language is seen as social practice, culture becomes the very core of language teaching. Cultural awareness must then be viewed both as enabling language proficiency and as being the outcome of reflection on language proficiency.

Several researchers have recently furthered our thinking about the relation of language and culture in language teaching. Halliday's systemic linguistics gives a unified theoretical framework within which to view this traditional dichotomy. By calling grammar 'a theory of human experience' and text 'the linguistic form of social interaction' (1990), Halliday anchors culture in the very grammar we use, the very vocabulary we choose, the very metaphors we live by. Others approach this problem from a different angle. Quasthoff (1986) and Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989) have explored the cultural dimensions of speech acts and discourse pragmatics, Keller (1987) and Müller-Jacquier (1986) have examined stereotypes and self- and other-

CONTEXT AND CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt

perceptions, and Byram (1989) has reassessed the role of cultural studies in foreign language education. In the United States, scholars like Nostrand (1989) and Kramsch (1988b) are reevaluating the notion of cultural authenticity, while Valdes (1986) gives a fresh look at the 'cultural gap' in language teaching.

The question that concerns us here is the following: given that we want to teach language in such a way that learners are initiated into its social and cultural meanings, how many of these meanings must be made explicit, how many can be understood implicitly? How can a foreign way of viewing the world be taught via an educational culture which is itself the product of native conceptions and values? Once we recognize that language use is indissociable from the creation and transmission of culture, we have to deal with a variety of cultures, some more international than others, some more conventionalized than others. Chapters 6 and 7 will seek to describe the dialectic relationship of language and culture and suggest ways of developing not only the culturally-competent learner, but the cross-cultural personality.

Native speaker versus non-native speaker

For research purposes, it has been customary to view the linguistic development of a learner on an interlanguage continuum whose endpoint is a linguistic construct called the 'native speaker'. Non-native teachers and students alike are intimidated by the native-speaker norm and understandably try to approximate this norm during the course of their work together. If, however, we consider language study as initiation into a kind of social practice that is at the boundary of two or more cultures, such a linear progression makes less sense. In fact what is at stake is the creation, in and through the classroom, of a social, linguistic reality that is born from the L1 speech environment of the learners and the social environment of the L2 native speakers, but is a third culture in its own right. Chapter 8 will sketch the personal and political dimensions of such a 'third place'.

The importance of context in language education

The polarities mentioned above can be traced to the age-old duality of language as text and language as context—that is,

CONTEXT AND CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt

language as expression of an individual's thoughts and intentions, and language as expression of a speech community's knowledge and expectations (Kramsch and McConnell-Ginet 1992a). As Halliday and Hasan (1989: 117) have argued:

> The notions of text and context are inseparable: text is language operative in a context of situation and contexts are ultimately construed by the range of texts produced within a community ... One commonsense conception is ... that our ideas, our knowledge, our thoughts, our culture are all there—almost independent of language and just waiting to be expressed by it. This attitude is so deeply rooted that it finds its expression, for example, in our theoretical writings about language.

The dichotomy between language as an expression of personal meaning and language as a reflection of the social order is already inscribed in the very way we write about 'texts' on the one hand and 'contexts' on the other. It reflects the fundamental polarity of linguistic discourse that describes language use as both the creation of texts and the shaping of contexts. In order to conceptualize these processes we use two different words, but in fact they are, as Halliday and Hasan write, 'inseparable notions'—much like the dichotomies mentioned above are often two sides of the same coin and act as such upon each other.

Teachers eager to apply the findings of recent psycholinguistic research to their teaching often confuse the descriptive language of science and the prescriptive language normally associated with education. For example, research in cognitive science distinguishes between 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' processes to capture the way form and meaning contribute to an understanding of spoken and written texts. Teachers tend to teach these processes separately, at different stages, say, of learning to read. But what needs to be taught is not the one or the other, nor even the one and the other, but the *interaction* between the two.

On the one hand, if we teach language use, we are teaching not only a rule-governed structural system, whose usage is sanctioned by society, but 'the actualization of meaning potential associated with particular situation types' (Halliday 1978: 109). By teaching grammar we are teaching, to use Gregory Bateson's metaphor, 'contextual shaping' (Bateson 1979: 17).

On the other hand, language use has its own social grammar of roles, settings, rules of speaking, and norms of interpretation.

CONTEXT AND CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt

As Saville-Troike (1989: 258) remarks:

> That meaningful context is critical for language learning has been widely recognized. There has not been adequate recognition, however, that this context includes understanding of culturally defined aspects of a communicative event, such as role relationships and norms of interpretations, of holistic scripts for the negotiation of meanings, as well as observable aspects of the setting.

The difficulty of teaching the *interaction* of linguistic and social structures, of bottom-up and top-down processes, is that language and social reality are not coextensive. Researchers can describe the variations in language use but these descriptions are still no blueprint for the language teacher on how to teach the interaction of linguistic forms and social meanings: for this interaction is dependent on the context and the way this context is perceived by the participants. And two participants might see the context quite differently even though they might share the same language.

Given that language teachers have to teach both a normative linguistic system and its variable instances of use, attention to context calls for a type of pedagogy that fosters both direct and indirect ways of transmitting knowledge, that values not only facts but relations between facts, that encourages diversity of experience and reflection on that diversity.

A discourse perspective

The view of language that best captures the dynamics between the various opposing forces mentioned above is that of *language in discourse*. Between the learner and the language, between the teacher and the learner, and among learners, discourse is 'the process by which we create, relate, organize and realize meaning' (Riley 1985: 2). The classroom as 'coral gardens' (Breen 1985b) draws its impetus from the tension between a multitude of psychological, social, political, moral, and linguistic oppositions in conflict with one another for the construction of meaning. It is on the level of discourse that these tensions find both their justification and their dialectic resolution.[1]

Neither second nor foreign language education have any tradition of dialectic thought. Languages are taught from the per-

CONTEXT AND CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt

spective of either the L2 or the L1, or L2 forms and discourse patterns are contrasted with those of the LI. There is rarely any attempt at a synthesis that would permit the learner to see these contrasts from a higher ground. This is nowhere more apparent than in the cultural values that are promoted together with the language, be it a second language—such as English as a Second Language, Français Langue Etrangère, and Deutsch als Fremdsprache—or a foreign language, such as those taught in British, French, or German schools as part of the general education curriculum.

Second language instructors, who teach their language to immigrants or visitors in their country, or to adults abroad, have tended to transmit, with the language, a view of the world that reflects only the values and cultural assumptions of the native speaker's society. Even as an international language, English instruction transmits such Anglo-Saxon values as efficiency, pragmatism, and individualism, that superimpose themselves on those of the learner's native culture. Foreign language instructors, on the other hand, who teach a second or a third foreign language to students in educational settings, generally transmit with that language a view of the world that mainly promotes the values and cultural assumptions of the L1 educational system.

Foreign language education has been characterized up to now by the search for a 'middle landscape'. It has usually tried to solve conflicts quantitatively by taking a little bit of this and a little bit of that from several, often opposing, viewpoints—the well-known methodological swings mentioned above. By refusing to be ideological, this approach has in fact espoused a middle-ground conservative ideology, recognizable by its positivistic, pragmatic bent, intent on assimilating conflicts by minimizing them. However, as in other sectors of education, questions are being raised about a purely pragmatic type of foreign language education.

As other fields of inquiry, like cultural studies or literature studies, are redrawing the boundaries of their disciplines, it would be appropriate for foreign language study to re-examine its disciplinary base and its cultural presuppositions. Its main goal can no longer be the one-sided response to national and economic interests, and the pursuit of communicative happiness; it must include the search for an understanding of cultural boundaries and an attempt to come to terms with these boundaries.

CONTEXT AND CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt

To summarize, the contradictions sketched above, rather than being problems that can and should be solved, represent the basic condition of classroom learning—what Yves Châlon calls the 'conflit inhérent à la condition pédagogique' (quoted in Riley 1985: 1). As such, they can only be described and accepted. However, a dialectic perspective can help reframe traditional questions, break their deceptive symmetry, and eventually bring about change.

This book, then, is an attempt to redraw the boundaries of foreign language study. Rather than dealing with the teaching of each of the traditional 'four skills' and then with the teaching of 'culture', it takes its impetus from a concrete occurrence of cross-cultural miscommunication in a language class (Chapter 1), and takes *cultural context* as its core. The educational challenge is teaching language 'as context' within a dialogic pedagogy that makes context explicit, thus enabling text and context to interact dialectically in the classroom.[2]

Chapters 2 and 3 define the full dimensions of the here-and-now context of interaction between speakers and hearers in classrooms—what Wells calls the 'sphere of intersubjectivity' (1981: 47). Chapter 3 applies this definition to an examination of concrete foreign language lessons and of the interaction of teacher and learners. Suggestions are made for enriching the spoken discourse of the classroom by taking advantage of its diversity and variability.

Chapters 4 and 5 expand the notion of context to include the more distant interaction between readers and texts in the creation of what could be called a 'sphere of intertextuality'. Chapter 5 applies this definition to the teaching of literary texts in language classes. Here again, the challenge is to exploit the particular voices in the text and the particular responses of its readers.

Chapters 6 and 7 broaden yet again the notion of context to include the creation of a 'sphere of interculturality', through the use of culturally authentic texts. Chapter 7 gives a critical look at some of the cross-cultural approaches currently advocated for teaching texts from the media and other non-pedagogic sources.

The last chapter, Chapter 8, offers a reflection on a critical language pedagogy that values dissent, dialogue, and double-voiced discourse. It shows how learners can use the system for their own purposes, to create a culture of the third kind in which

CONTEXT AND CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt

they can express their own meanings without being hostage to the meanings of either their own or the target speech communities.

Notes

1 I will take here 'dialectic' to mean a dialogue between two opposed or contradictory viewpoints. In the course of this dialogue, each party comes to understand the other's position from a broader, less partial perspective, which does justice to the substance of each point of view, but allows the search for a common ground. It is in the course of this search that understanding between people may emerge, based on a recognition of difference and an acceptance of continued dialogue despite these differences.

2 In his desire to rehabilitate the particular voice of the individual in a totalitarian political system, Bakhtin makes a distinction between 'dialogic' and 'dialectic':

> Dialogue and dialectics. Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing voices), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics.
> (Bakhtin 1986: 147)

In this book I will not separate the two, since text and context cannot exist outside the individual voices that create them. I will therefore consider dialectics as being the very essence of dialogue, and dialogue as being intrinsically dialectic. The term 'dialectic' stresses the dynamic relation of text and context, the term 'dialogue' focuses on the relation of both text and context to the individual speaker/hearer.

CONTEXT AND CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
© Oxford University Press www.oup.com/elt