

speaking affected when you are talking to someone with a higher social status than you, or someone who intimidates you for whatever reason? How does this affect the way you speak to them? How important are these questions in the ESOL classroom?

Students have aspirations regarding their English which are not only connected to work and survival, but are also social in nature. For example, people need to understand English to connect with outside events through the media or to understand what people are saying to them: as one Chinese student in Leeds explains, ‘My wife and I used to joke with each other, saying that we might have said thanks in reply to someone else’s curses.’ Others expressed a strong desire to socialize with English speakers such as neighbours or others in the local community; here, a woman from Ecuador speaks of her wish to be as sociable in English as she is in Spanish:

I am very communicative in Spanish. For example if a woman comes along and we have to wait I’m ‘Hello how are you, how’s it going, what’s your name?’ and all that, and in English I would like to do the same. I like making conversation but I limit myself because I don’t know English.

Of course, learning a new language and culture can challenge established identity on a profound level. This is described movingly by Eva Hoffman in her book *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1989), and echoed by many ESOL students. A Russian man from Leeds describes the anxiety of never being able to be ‘fully himself’ in a language other than his own:

If we were sitting on the bench like now and wished to talk about life, I don’t think we would be able to do it in English. We would wish to talk about nature, flowers, art, pictures, images, impressions. I am sure we would not manage to talk about them. But it is a very important part of my life, and all that is in Russian. How can I translate it into a different language? What about my feelings and the like?

ACTIVITY 2 Student interaction outside class

Think of the students in a class you are teaching or have taught recently. What do you know about their interactions outside of class? Who do they interact with? In which languages? What do they feel they cannot talk about in English? Is it important to know this information? How might it affect the way you plan your courses?

Research on people in ESOL classrooms shows that they are highly motivated to learn English. However, some have been in the UK for many years without reaching a level of English language and literacy they find acceptable, not because of unwillingness to learn or reluctance to integrate, but because of