

Native speaker survival kit

Témoignages de professeurs stagiaires anglophones



IUFM de Paris 4 Sorbonne 2008-9

UE2-6 Claire Griffin, formatrice à l'IUFM de Paris 4 Sorbonne

Native speaker survival kit

The following quotes are from *Deep Culture* by Joseph Shaules. At the end of our 2008-9 workshop on native speaker professional identity, Claire Griffin asked participants to share their reactions to each quote while looking back at the year.

“*People and things are increasingly out of place*” = James Clifford in *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) (see Foreword by M. Kelly in *Deep Culture*).

KL : Crossing cultural borders when working for the Education Nationale does take some time to adjust to. As a non-French teacher, you do feel out of place at first because you are not a product of the system you teach in. I found that it was important to keep a low profile, and have an attitude that made others feel that you were open to learning their way of doing things. I made a real effort to find my place in my new school so that I could prove to myself that I had every right to be where I was.

CG (trainee teacher 2008-9): This quote makes me think of how I, myself, sometimes feel out of place amongst certain colleagues. As teachers, we receive a certain authority and respect from our students and peers. Yet, as a foreigner, and the youngest member of the teaching staff, my opinions and presence are often disregarded (during teacher meetings, interactions with the directors, etc.). My relation with many of my colleagues resembles that between a teacher and a student; I, of course, play the inferior role. Hence, I often feel as though my respected role as a teacher has been usurped and wonder if instead of hanging around the teacher’s room, I wouldn’t be better off mingling with the students that crowd the halls and the courtyard.

CH : Le déroulement officieux de l’année m’est toujours un mystère. Début juin j’ai compris qu’alors que l’année se termine le 2 juillet, il fallait envisager de terminer les cours bien plus tôt à une date... toujours inconnue à ce jour. Ce qui veut dire que finalement la fin du programme doit être envisagée bien avant. Un exemple des connaissances implicites qui échappent aux non-francophones qui n’ont pas suivi le cursus scolaire en France.

“The final description of the demands of intercultural learning offered by Weaver is a form of identity crisis. [...] Weaver describes the loss of our normal cues as disorienting, but remarks that the same disorientation can free us from our normal way of doing and perceiving” (110).

KL: I believe that this quote is especially important in developing one’s teaching style. My classroom became a microcosm where I felt free to be myself (within the limits of decorum and authority) because my students were on my territory. I went through my identity crisis years ago, and have made many, many, cultural gaffes along the way. So, I concentrated on helping to open up the minds of my pupils, and shake up their ‘normal way of doing and perceiving’ by using my status as an American. I reinserted my American cultural cues in my classroom. It’s seemed to work so far.

Native speaker survival kit

CH : Plus encore, le statut officiel du professeur certifié se double du statut officieux d'anglophone, ce qui permet un nouveau départ pour les élèves comme pour les collègues et – moins – les parents. On a le droit d'être excentrique car on n'a pas la même culture.

The stages of cultural learning:

“These include the ‘U curve’, which describes an initial high, or honey moon period, followed by a sharp emotional downturn and then finally an emotional upswing as sojourners get adjusted” (115).

KL: I went through this period when I was learning French, but it doesn't apply to my experience as a teacher.

CG: We could apply this ‘U curve’ idea to this year's training period and first real teaching experience. As I explained in my final paper for the IUFM, I started teaching in September, full of illusions and false confidence. The first visits and criticism given by my counselor and my tutor knocked me right off of my self-made pedestal. These visits made me realize that there were techniques that I was supposed to be using, but wasn't. Moreover, these techniques were French techniques; techniques that I didn't fully understand, had never witnessed during my own schooling, and therefore I felt intimidated by them. When applying these techniques proved more difficult than all my intern-friends and colleagues made them out to sound, disappointment gave way to defeatism. Finally, thanks to an incredibly positive, encouraging, and constructive counselor during my 1-month internship in middle school, I learned how to integrate these techniques and to acknowledge, and use to my advantage other teaching assets that no one had mentioned before.

As this year comes to a close, and I start to think about next year's fresh new start, I'm thinking positive and imagining what I'll be able to do with these techniques with a more positive and confident outlook.

“Cultural difference refers to the ways in which a sojourner's knowledge of his or her environment is inadequate in systematic ways – that is to say, sojourners must deal with not only new facts but also new systems of meaning. They must learn not only ‘things’ but also ‘how things work’ and ‘what things mean’. Cultural difference is experienced as incompetence, since there is a gap between the sojourner's internal competencies and the demands of their environment” (139-40).

CG: *see final paper for the IUFM*

KL: I think that this learning curve describes any new situation that one is confronted with - a new job for example - but is exacerbated by cultural differences. I wish there were a cultural guide book for France. There seem to be so many rules that I have infringed without meaning to do so. Feeling foolish was second nature to me at one time or another. I tried to

Native speaker survival kit

counterbalance this feeling of incompetency at my school by leaning how the *Education Nationale* worked, memorizing the programs, and listening to my colleagues talk about the meaning behind the terms.

Yet there are still areas of contestation. For example, the big discussion in ‘Seconde’ is what choice the students will be making concerning their academic future. I didn’t realize that student orientation is decided at age 16. (I couldn’t even decide between cereal or toast for breakfast at that age) I told my colleagues that I would never get used to making a kid go into L, when he hates literature, just because of low math grades. They grew up with the system so they find it quite normal. I don’t.

CH : Cultural difference often IS incompetence, surtout en ce qui concerne les relations avec et autour des élèves en difficulté. Les messages sous-jacents aux paroles de CPE, les enjeux des différents contextes socioculturels des élèves, sont difficiles à décrypter. J’ai été obligée de signaler mon ignorance culturelle auprès du CPE bienveillant à mon égard, avant de poser des questions dont je maîtrisais mal les limites acceptables.

“Resistance is one of the primary ways that sojourners **may** react to adaptive demands. Resistance is defined as an unwillingness to change in response to the adaptive demands of a new cultural environment. This doesn’t mean that one doesn’t change, but that if one does so it is done unwillingly” (150).

KL: We cannot change the system we work in, and are obliged to make concessions. I willingly adopted the programs and the CECRL because I felt very reassured by the structure. I changed the way I taught before entering the *Education Nationale* because I felt what we were taught this year was an improvement on what I had done before.

However, the way I carry out the programs is influenced by my native-teacher status. I tend to be closer to my high school students than my French colleagues in my school, and found that it has made my job a lot of fun. The kids are not used to it, and are a lot more willing and cooperative because I am interested in them as individuals. I don’t feel that I have to drop the American teaching style just to conform.

“After an extended period, deep cultural adaptation may raise questions of identity or even make a sojourner feel lost or alienated when they return home. But adaptation is fundamentally an additive process. It does not imply ‘replacing’ one’s ‘culture’ with a new one but rather adding to existing knowledge, skills and perspectives” (181).

KL: As an individual I totally identify with the quote. I have a real tough time, especially when I cross the Mason-Dixie line. But as a teacher, I couldn’t say. I would really like to do an exchange with a school in the States to see if I feel the difference.

Native speaker survival kit

CH : Je peux juste dire que je m'intéresse davantage à la culture anglophone depuis que je l'enseigne. L'approche à travers les élèves permet de découvrir des angles inconnus et je suis impressionnée par la rigueur de certains collègues en matière culturelle. J'essaie de suivre leur exemple.

“As bicultural sojourners shift back and forth between different language and modes of behavior, they may create, in effect, multiple selves – for example a Spanish self and a Chinese self” (195).

CG: For me, this seems to be more the case in the beginning. Having lived through the experience of changing countries and learning a new language, I believe that language is the most important means of expressing one's identity. When arriving in a new country, social integration can be difficult or impeded by a lack of linguistic capability. At first it was frustrating because in English I was “the funny, kooky” friend, but in French I was just boring and linguistically clumsy. Of course, over time, these effects wear off, but I still encounter moments of isolation due to language. For example, my brain has an annoying habit of turning itself off when it's time to give a quick comeback to jokes, or if I need to defend myself or opinion spontaneously. I also seem to surprise or even hurt people's feelings when using irony or teasing someone, it's almost always taken seriously, at least at first. Perhaps this is because people know French Carly, as serious foreigner Carly.

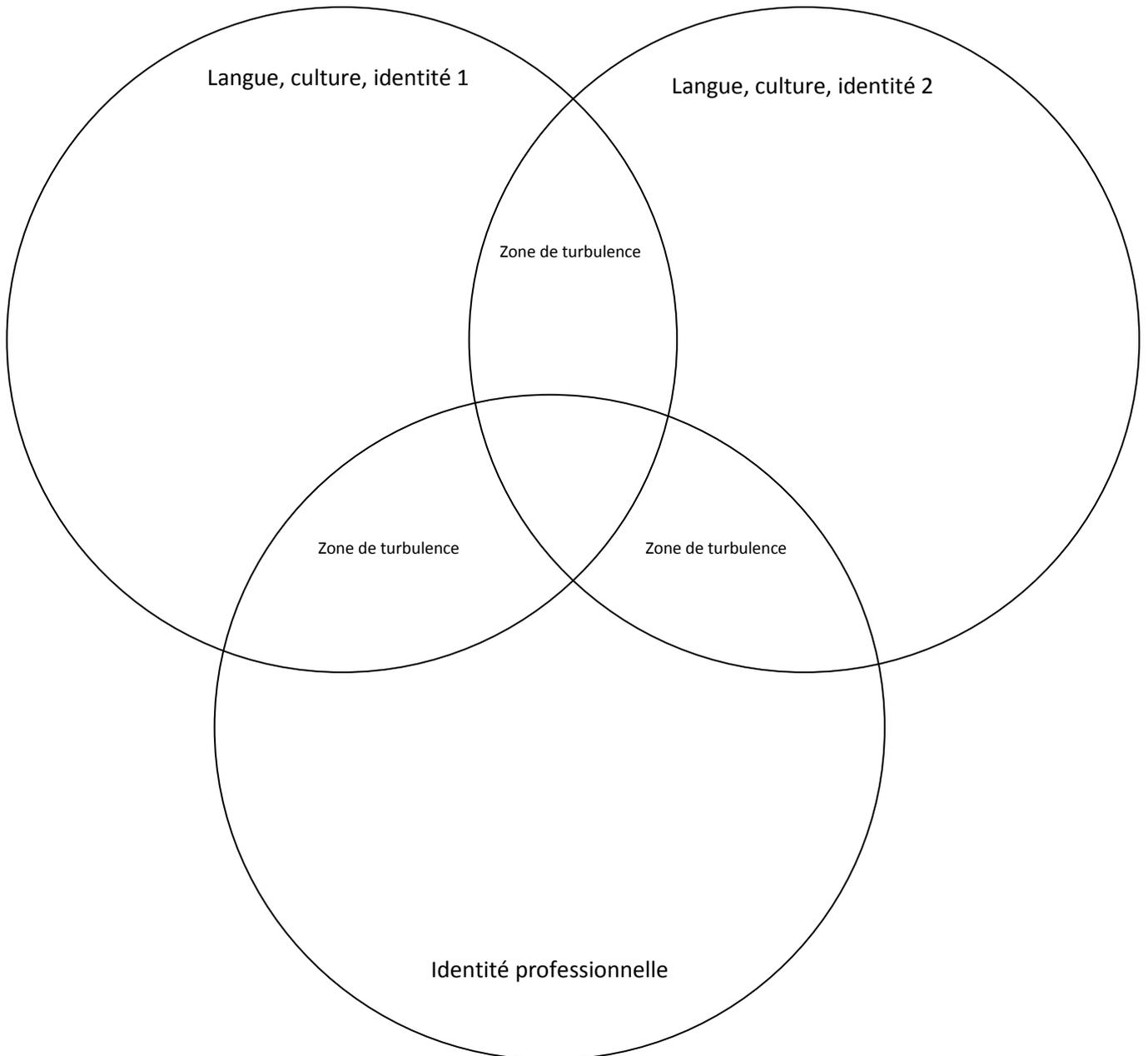
KL: Absolutely! I use humor and curse more in English to counterbalance the proper French culture I live in. I have to really check myself in the classroom because I am much more self-assured in English. As they say in French *'le naturel revient au galop'*. It doesn't have to do with my ability to speak French, but with the cultural boundaries. It is very important to have an outlet when you work and live in a foreign country. When you don't have a lot of friends to speak English with, life can get a bit boring and tame. It's important to leave one's French self on the shelf from time to time.

CH : La libération des langues, c'est très vrai. D'ailleurs les langues s'y prêtent et même s'imposent, chaque système linguistique révèle la personnalité collective quelque part. Par contre, malheur quotidien : les collègues s'imaginent que puisque je suis anglophone, je vais forcément pouvoir traduire de façon spontanée sans réfléchir alors qu'en réalité, si je trouve le mot juste dans une langue quelconque, je suis bien contente déjà. Il est tellement rare de trouver que son mot soit juste.

Native speaker survival kit

Intersection des cercles de l'identité

Tâche : prenant appui sur le schéma ci—dessous, essayez de repérer ce qui fait partie de vos zones de turbulence. Quelles sont les forces et les faiblesses de votre identité biculturelle ?



Select bibliography

Abdallah-Preteuille, M., Porcher, L. (1996). *Education et communication interculturelle*. Paris : P.U.F.

Byram, M., Barro, A., Jordan, S., Street, B. (2001). *Language Learners as Ethnographers*. Clevedon : Multilingual Matters.

Davies, A. (2003). *The Native Speaker: Myth and Reality*. Clevedon : Multilingual Matters.

De Carlo, M. (1998). *L'interculturel*. Paris : CLE International.

Demorgon J., Lipiansky, E.-M. (sous la dir.) (1999). *Guide de l'interculturel en formation*. Paris : Retz.

Demorgon, J. (2000). *Complexité des cultures et de l'interculturel : contre la pensée unique* (2^e éd.). Paris : Anthropos.

Phipps, A. et Gonzalez, M. (2004). *Modern Languages: Learning and Teaching in an Intercultural Field*. Londres : Sage.

Shaules, J. (2007). *Deep Culture: The Hidden Challenges of Global Living*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Widdowson, H. (1990) *Aspects of Language Teaching*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.

Zarate, G., « Les langues vivantes: d'une vision nationale de l'identité française à une vision européenne et internationale de la France », *Administration et éducation*, n°1, 2004, pp. 7-18.

Useful websites

- Read about the French education system: www.eurydice.org
- Exchange ideas and points of view, link up to a network of English teachers both French and English native speakers, find support from the community of English teachers working in France: <http://forums.agreg-ink.net/>
- Glossary of acronyms used in the *Education nationale*: http://pia.ac-paris.fr/portail/jcms/piapp1_16531/glossaire-des-sigles-de-l-education-nationale?cid=c_5074