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Woodward Smith, E. (ed.). 2007. *Approaching Cultures through English*. La Coruña: Departamento de Filología Inglesa. ISBN. 978-84-9749-237-9. 394 páginas.

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to its global spread English has recently been referred to as the *Tyrannosaurus rex* or *minority languages killer* in academic and professional settings. For many, the use of English as a *lingua franca* is implicated in processes of cultural homogenisation, some academics even name this tendency *Americanisation* or *McDonaldization* and assert that it poses a threat to cultural and linguistic diversity (Ferguson 2005: 73-94).

Contrary to this dominant view, *Approaching Cultures through English*, edited by Elizabeth Woodward Smith, explores the phenomenon of cultural diversity in English-speaking communities from a wide range of disciplines and views, namely Literary Criticism, Linguistics, History, Social Anthropology, Film Studies, etc., in an attempt to shed light on the different angles of the multifaceted nature of culture through English.

On the basis that sharing a language in a speech community does not necessarily imply that people have the same values, beliefs, attitudes, thoughts and behaviour in common, the forty-two essays in this volume look at the many-sided nature of culture in English-speaking communities and show diversity in both authorship and content. The authors in this volume come from many different parts of the world such as Spain, the USA, Hungary, Russia, Jordan and India, and deal with a wide range of issues like literature, cinema, music, customs and traditions, foreign language teaching, multilingualism, the evolution of modern science, forensic linguistics, language and communication, etc.

In the following sections I will attempt to review the major contributions of *Approaching Cultures through English*.

2. APPROACHING CULTURE THROUGH LITERATURE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Accessing another culture through literature written in English is indeed an essential debate that comes to the forefront in *Approaching Cultures through English*. The reader will find fourteen of the forty-two essays entirely devoted to this issue. Searching for national identity seems to be a recurrent subject in a number of the essays, such as those by Brito Marrero (pp. 59-68) or Kumar (pp. 289-300). Whereas the former tackles the notion of identity in multicultural postmodernist anthologies in American literature today, the latter focuses on the quest for Indian national identity through literary texts in the English language, as well as in the English translations of indigenous texts.

The expression of Irish national character and identity in the English language is intensely explored in several essays too. For example, De Toro Santos and Alonso Giráldez (pp. 103-110) focus on George Watson and Seamus Heaney's concept of *sense of place* in Northern Ireland together with its influence on the construction of identity in Irish poetry in English; Ledo Fernández (pp. 207-216) deals with Patrick Kavanagh's concept of *parochialism*, i.e. the universal in the ordinary, as a major contribution to the self-identification of the Irish nation; Losada Pérez (pp. 235-242) analyses Seamus Heaney's use of the Irish landscape as a physical medium in which national identity, cultural values and meanings are encoded; Montero Ameneiro (pp. 253-262) reflects on the *Big House* as a literary motif in Anglo-Irish writer Elizabeth Bowen's works and its effect on the so-called *poetry of regret* literary movement; and last but not least, drawing on Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's second novel *The Dancers Dancing*, Rosende Pérez (pp. 325-334) reviews the concept of national identity in Ireland.

In addition to the search for self-identity, the reader of this volume will find essays in which the authors look at William Shakespeare's influence on modern society. For instance, Couto Lorenzo (pp. 79-86) draws our attention to the Rule of Law principle in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, and Domínguez Romero and Carrasco Carrasco (pp. 111-120) investigate the influence of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* on Wilcox's science-fiction movie *Forbidden Planet*, regarding US socio-cultural worries in the 1950s.

Teaching culture through literature is another relevant issue in this book. Dachs Ventura (pp. 93-102) analyses the relevance of including children's books from around the world in the primary school English curriculum to develop multicultural awareness. For the most part, her article focuses on accessing South African culture through Dianne Stewart's short stories *The Dove* and *The Gift of the Sun*. Another illustrative example of this line of research is the essay by Proux-García (pp. 307-316) which examines the way in which the culture of romantic love may be taught through the genre of epistolarity, namely the letters written by Biedermeier romantics such as George Sand and Lord Byron in the period stretching from 1790 to 1850.

A good example of the multiplicity of topics tackled by the authors in this volume is found in the articles by Jarazo Álvarez (pp. 181-196) on palaeography as an approach to the study of ancient Welsh literary texts, Nadales Ruiz (pp. 263-270) on Galician

journalist Augusto Assía's impression of England and the English in his chronicles in the 1940s, and Pedreda López (pp. 301-306) on Nadine Gordimer's use of childhood in *July's People* as a metaphorical image of the end of apartheid in South Africa.

3. APPROACHING CULTURE AND GENDER THROUGH LITERATURE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

It is worth pointing out that more than ten of the forty-two essays in *Approaching Cultures through English* deal with gender issues through literature written in English. In several articles, topics such as gender roles and the role played by women writers in the eighteenth century are carefully analysed. Particularly, Fernández Méndez (pp. 131-138) explores the subversion of the transcultural romance while analysing gender relations between male colonisers and colonised females in Stevenson's *The Beach of Falesá*; Núñez Puente (pp. 279-288) draws our attention to the way Eastern women were depicted by Western female writers in the eighteenth century; and Lasa Álvarez (pp. 197-206) investigates the patronage system in English literature at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, making special reference to works by women writers such as Sarah Green's *Romance Readers and Romance Writers. A Satirical Novel*.

The nineteenth century is also revisited by Fernández Rodríguez (pp. 139-148), who analyses the role played by the female artist in Fanny Burney's philosophical novel *The Wanderer* and the difficulties faced by women at that time.

Within the realm of psychoanalytic feminism, Armental Romero (pp. 33-40) invites reflection on the oppressive father-daughter relationship in *Eucalyptus* by post-colonial Australian writer Murray Bail; and Lojo Rodríguez (pp. 217-226) explores the construction of female subjectivity in Eavan Boland's poetry.

4. APPROACHING CULTURE THROUGH FILM AND MUSIC

In addition to literature, the topic of accessing culture through film and music is also addressed in some essays such as those by Floyd Moore (pp. 157-166), Heavner (pp. 167-172), Iglesias Díaz (pp. 173-180), and Woodward Smith (pp. 383-394).

Floyd Moore (pp. 157-166) studies how the language of film may serve to analyse national and gender stereotypes. His research is based on *The Third Man*, a film noir-scripted by Graham Greene and starred in by Orson Wells, which shows a very Anglo-American view of Europe at the time.

On analysing *Trainspotting* by Danny Boyle and the renewed view it offers of Scottishness, Iglesias Díaz (pp. 173-180) explains how film-makers may contribute to the construction and deconstruction of national spaces by both changing the contents and introducing new cinematographic narration techniques.

Drawing on American born William Rose and Alexander Mackendrick's black comedy *The Ladykillers* made at Ealing Studios, Woodward Smith (pp. 383-394) examines British national identity in the post-war period. Her piece of research clearly portrays how differences of class, gender, generation and political ideas may be examined through the language of film, namely the plot, connotations of names, socio-temporal and socio-geographical markers, linguistic and literary references, attitudes, cultural stereotypes, and language use.

Heavner (pp. 167-172) considers jazz music to be the result of a gradual blending of cultures that first became recognizable as a musical style in New Orleans in the early 1900s and still continues to evolve by absorbing new features from a variety of musical cultures and styles.

5. APPROACHING ANTHROPOLOGICAL CULTURE THROUGH ENGLISH

Apart from the analysis of issues related to *high culture* -humankind's intellectual and artistic achievements- in *Approaching Cultures through English*, one may also find an attempt to analyse anthropological culture, namely customs, worldview, language, kinship system, social organisation, religion, etc. which may serve to characterise a group of people as a distinctive group.

To begin with, the visible face or outer expression of culture (Guillén-Nieto 2005: 100) is explored by Sagredo Santos (pp. 349-358), who focuses on customs and traditions. In addition, the reader of this book will find an interesting collection of essays on the invisible or inner face of culture, namely the world dimensions that have been commonly identified as affecting humankind at all times, but for which each culture may offer a differing solution (Hall: 1969 (1966); 1973 (1959); 1977 (1976); Hofstede 2001 (1980); Guillén-Nieto 2005; 2006; 2007). For example, the world dimension of *Time* in explored by Rouse (pp. 335-348), *Nature* by Caridad Barreiro (pp. 69-78), *Self-identity* by Álvarez Calleja (pp. 17-24), and *Religion* by Serén Bouzas (pp. 359-366) and Varela Tembra (pp. 367-372).

Moreover, the reader will find a number of essays on the interaction between culture and the world dimension of communication. Eynullaeva (pp. 121-130), for instance, offers a comprehensive approach to investigating language and its role in verbal communication as an inseparable part of culture. Her research on the linguistic and cultural gaps that exist between people involved in a communication act has relevant implications for both foreign language teaching and cultural mediation.

6. MULTILINGUALISM AND MULTICULTURALISM

The effects of multilingual and multicultural encounters are analysed by Amenedo Costa (pp. 25-32), who deals with the impact of British immigration in Ferrol in the eighteenth century; and by Ribas Segura (pp. 317-324), who researches on the influence

of Spanish, Italian and Greek migration to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s, highlighting the effects it had on architectonic styles, customs and traditions, and multilingualism, which have greatly contributed to the enrichment of Australian society.

7. APPROACHING CULTURE THROUGH SCIENCE

Crespo García (pp. 87-92) provides an overview of the socio-cultural development of modern science, namely science conceived as a practical and social activity rather than an intellectual and individual one since the seventeenth-century (“scientific revolution”). The author highlights the interaction between society and science with the parallel development of English scientific discourse, to which the printing press in England, the emergence of scientific journals, and the building of the seventeenth-century Royal Society greatly contributed.

8. APPROACHING CULTURE THROUGH THE LEGAL SYSTEM

Vázquez Maroño (pp. 373-382) considers the contributions made by Anglo-Saxon linguists such as Coulthard, Shuy, and Gibbons to the development of an emerging discipline, forensic linguistics, which is commonly defined as the interface between language and the Law.

9. APPROACHING CULTURE THROUGH FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

The interaction between culture and foreign language teaching is also an interesting topic emerging from three essays in *Approaching Cultures through English*. For example, Al-Abed Al-Haq, Baniabdelrahman and Shatnawi (pp. 1-16) draw our attention to the intimate relationship between culture and language, and more significantly to the cultural colonisation conveyed through English textbooks which, according to the authors, reflect Western values contradicting Arab culture and way of life, namely its religious and aesthetic values. In this essay, the cultural barriers still separating the West and the East are made apparent, though rather unconsciously, when the Jordanian authors characterise the Western life style in these terms: “[...] ‘The life of crimes, kidnapping, drinking and corruption’. All of which contradict our culture and way of living” (p. 13).

The quotation above provides a good example of the emergence of *social distance* in intercultural/cross-cultural communication, namely “how speakers’ mismatched cultural frames inexorably set in motion a process of interaction and communication in which the participants in discourse experience a mixed feeling of dissatisfaction and are unaware of the reasons that have caused it” (Guillén-Nieto 2006: 115).

Arroyo Vázquez (pp. 41-48) highlights the importance of teaching English language together with the historical and cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries, in order

to develop the students' cultural awareness, as well as their tolerance and respect for other people's differing cultural orientations, values, and beliefs.

10. CRITICAL EVALUATION

As a critical evaluation, I must say that we should welcome the ambitious project carried out by Woodward Smith when collecting the forty-two wide-ranging essays making up the interdisciplinary volume *Approaching Cultures through English*, in an attempt to provide an overview of intercultural and cross-cultural communication from a myriad of perspectives.

Despite the unquestionable academic quality of the book and its undeniable contribution to intercultural/cross-cultural research through the use of English as a *lingua franca*, the reader may also find some weaknesses to which I will refer in the next few paragraphs.

Firstly, Woodward Smith as editor of the volume could have written a critical introduction in the foreword drawing the reader's attention to the most relevant debates raised in the volume. This would have prepared the ground for a better understanding of the major contributions of the book regarding the interaction between culture and language in English-speaking communities.

Secondly, readers of this book may find it difficult to deal with the diversity of topics tackled because of the unsystematic way in which they are presented. The essays do not seem to follow any particular order, except for the alphabetical ordering of the authors' names. However objective this organising principle may be and however much it may contribute to project a multiple perspective of culture in discourse form, it may not be the most effective way of presenting contents in this case, since it leads to confusion as a result of the continuous changes in topic, time, and viewpoint-forty-two changes in fact.

Thirdly, the selection of topics dealt with in the volume seems to be slightly unbalanced, because it undoubtedly favours the discussion of issues related to *high culture*- the vast majority of the essays are devoted to approaching culture through literature, film and music.

Fourthly, in many essays in this volume the authors tend to take a general look at the external aspects of culture, except for some remarkable contributions such as Eynullaeva's (pp. 121-130). Therefore, they fail to provide an in-depth analysis of the underlying reasons-the hidden dimensions-that might serve to explain the visible aspects of culture. For example, Vázquez Maroño (pp. 373-382), on dealing with the importance of forensic linguistics in English-speaking countries, could have explored in further detail the cultural influence behind it, since it is precisely the adversarial system or Anglo-American Law-where English is the language of the law-that has encouraged the participation of linguists as expert witnesses in the legal setting (Gibbons 2003: 5-7, Pérez González 2005: 67-83).

Or let us consider, for instance, the essay by Rouse (pp. 335-348), which examines the introduction of the concept of *Time* before and after 1851 but fails to provide any

explanation as to the differing cultural orientations people may have towards the world dimension of *Time*, namely *polychronic* and *monochronic* cultures, as well as the cultural gaps that may result from these differing views in English-speaking communities. Almost the same can be said about Caridad Barreiro's (pp. 69-78) approach to *Nature*, which overlooks the diverse cultural orientations people may have towards it, namely *control*, *harmony* and *constraint* (Walker, Walker and Smith 2003: 125-126).

All things considered, I find that *Approaching Cultures through English* is a useful and valuable book for literary critics, social anthropologists, linguists, language teachers, and cultural mediators, because it leaves the door open for crossing disciplines to make real advances in cross-cultural research. It does indeed lay the foundation for developing language and cultural awareness, acceptance, adaptation, and integration in multicultural English-speaking communities.

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