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Missionary English Teaching: The English Language, Western Culture, and Christianity

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With the spread of English worldwide in the past century or so, a new avenue of Christian missions has surfaced and given the Western church access to countries which would otherwise be closed to missionary efforts. The Christian Church has taken advantage of this opportunity, and Christian English teachers are being sent as missionaries all around the world. These teachers, however, are faced with an additional set of difficulties beyond the stereotypical Christian missionary for several reasons. First, teaching missionaries are hired to provide a service to the people of the country in which they teach; therefore, they appear to have a responsibility that extends beyond their missionary work. This dual responsibility is true of any missionary whose vocation extends beyond his or her ministry (for the sake of convenience, these Christian missionaries will be called Christian vocation missionaries, and specific to the field of teaching English, Christian English teachers). Christian English teachers must be able to devote their time and efforts to teaching English while at the same time pursuing their purposes as missionaries. Second, with the historical imperialism of the Western World and subjugation—whether directly or indirectly—of other cultures, in many countries there exists an underlying resentment of Western culture, which is often associated with Christianity. Christian English teachers may find this problematic. The most obvious reason is that the nationals of a country may look upon Christianity with disdain and, therefore, distance themselves from even being associated with someone who is a Christian (Snow 31, 73). A less obvious problem, however, would be in the learning of the English language. To learn English well, one must have an understanding of Western culture because so much of the English language is interwoven with its culture, as is the case with most, if not all, languages. Therefore, in a country where the West (referring

mostly to the United States and possibly Britain) is not appreciated, learning about Western culture would not be acceptable since, to some degree, one would need to adapt to it, or at least open one's mind to it. Furthermore, many see the spread of English in the past few decades as a non-military imperialistic conquest; that is, some believe that the West is sending out English teachers to further establish the political, economic, and social influence of the Western world (Kazmi 1). It is advantageous for Christian English teachers to understand the issues and controversies they will encounter and be able to respond with integrity and wisdom in the midst of the world's opposition to Christianity as well as the Western world.

A History of Imperialism

From British colonialism and its resultant empire to the political, economic, and technological power of the United States today, Western influence on countries the world over has been in prominence for two centuries or more. In its prime in the early 1900s, the British Empire controlled around one quarter of the Earth's population and about one-fifth of its landmass (Ross). Therefore, around a quarter of the peoples of the world were directly under the imperialism of Britain, specifically in the regions of North and South America, South Asia, East Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (Snow 30). Those who were not colonized and controlled by Britain certainly saw the effects of Western culture on the lives of those who were.

The power of the English-speaking West did not diminish with the fall of the British Empire. The United States, though not by imperial colonization, stepped into the role of the leading world power soon after World War II. Challenged only by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, the United States was the leading power in the West, and

with the fall of the Soviet Union near the end of the century, the U.S. became the leading world power and influence with its military, economics, politics, and technology (Snow 30). As a result, the world is well familiarized with the “Anglo-American” West. There is hardly a country in the world that has never been visited by English speaking Westerners, whether as tourists, officials, or teachers. According to Donald Snow, “during the last century virtually all countries in which CETs [Christian English teachers] work have experienced some form of domination at the hands of Western nations—often either Britain or the United States” (30). In their interaction and dealings with other countries, the United States and Britain have normally been in the position of power and, therefore, possessed the ability to control the situations. For example, some countries that were not actually conquered or controlled by Britain were offered no choice but to accept trade agreements and the influence of this powerful nation within their own nations. After World War II, the United States defeated several nations such as Japan, Germany, and the Soviet Union in economic and political competitions for supremacy in these areas (Snow 31). In his article “Hegemonic International Law,” Detlev Vagts quotes Charles Krauthammer who once wrote the following in *Time* magazine:

America is no mere international citizen. It is the dominant power in the world, more dominant than any since Rome. Accordingly, America is in a position to reshape norms, alter expectations and create new realities.

How? By unapologetic and implacable demonstrations of will.

(Vagts 843)

In such a position, the United States, or any nation, does not have to use military force for its influence to spread worldwide.

The Results of Imperialism

Attitudes towards Western Culture

The point here is not to argue the justice or injustice of Western imperialism in the last two centuries, whether through force or the power of influence, but to examine the results of such a legacy of imperialism on teaching English as an international language as well as to analyze the claim that the spread of English is yet another form of Western imperialism. The fact that the U.S. is so influential in the world today raises several important problems for Christian English teachers in general. There is an abundant variety of attitudes towards the English speaking West based upon this history of imperialism and the power that specifically the U. S. has today (Snow 31).

Many nations feel at risk in the face of the English speaking Western world and are fearful that Western cultural domination may overwhelm and consume their own culture. This threat comes mostly from the media of the United States, which includes the significant influence that its film industry has on the world due to the economic power of the U.S. Other nations simply do not have the economic strength and influence to contend with the outpouring media of the U.S. The power of global media is based upon a capitalistic system, which is one reason why the media of the U.S.—a capitalistic country—dominates in the world media today (Herman and McChesney 10).

Those who oppose the cultural domination of the United States call it American cultural imperialism, and one can easily understand how those of other cultures would be concerned about the survival and the well-being of their own cultures. However, some would claim that this apparent domination by Western culture is intentional and that the United States is subtly continuing the historical imperialism of the English-speaking West. However, they fail to understand that although the U.S. is responsible for its own

culture, the demand for the products of the West is a significant reason for the rapid globalization of the English-speaking West. In other words, the U.S. is not necessarily intentionally attempting to acculturate the rest of the world to its culture, but the position of power that the nation has and the structure of the country's economy lends itself to be highly marketable and influential throughout the world. According to Ryan Dunch, author of "Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions, and Global Modernity," "[. . .] many alleged manifestations of 'cultural imperialism' actually occur through market forces, raising the issue of demand for cultural commodities" (304); opponents, however, say that "[. . .] demand for products of (usually) American culture merely demonstrates the power of cultural imperialism to shape global tastes to profit the U.S. corporations" (304). To say that American corporations attempt to market their products to the world would be correct; that is how a free market system works. However, Dunch goes on to say, "this conceptualization attributes coordinated intent and coercive power to 'capitalism' or 'imperialism,' and little or no autonomy to the people on the receiving end" (304). With the power that United States wields, its culture, products, ideas, and language are going to be of interest to the rest of the world, and through the free market system of its economy, the rest of the world has access to its commodities, which include its language.

Regardless of whether the English-speaking West is attempting a degree of cultural imperialism, the threat that the Western culture is to other nations is a legitimate concern, and one that will lead many to view Christian English teachers as ambassadors of the Western world, which in their eyes is attempting to squelch their native culture under its own. As erroneous as this view may be, written history does not favor the Western missionary in its portrayal of their relations with other cultures. According to

Dunch, “Missionaries are routinely portrayed in both literature and scholarship as narrow-minded chauvinists whose presence and preaching destroyed indigenous cultures and opened the way for the extension of colonial rule” (307). Christian English teachers may not be identified necessarily as missionaries; nevertheless, as ambassadors of the West (which they will be, whether they desire to be or not), they will likely be characterized and associated with missionaries of the past who preceded imperial powers.

In the above portrayal of other nations’ views of the Western culture, particularly that of the United States, one might assume that the U.S. is hated by all nations of the world and is indeed worthy of such hatred. This view is not necessarily the case and must at this point be balanced with opposing evidence. Truly, some people of the world hate the United States, calling it the *Great Satan* and harboring a great amount of hostility towards U.S. citizens. However, in many countries the people have a respect for the West, and any grievances they have had against it have been forgotten from the passing of time. Therefore, it would be false to claim that all countries hate the West. The attitudes toward the Western world have blended into an interesting variety from country to country (Snow 32). According to Snow, no nation in which Western English teachers normally teach is without a history of varied feelings about the West:

[. . .] in virtually all of the countries where CETs are most likely to teach, there is a legacy of very mixed feelings toward the West, particularly now toward the United States. Respect and admiration for the achievements of the West are often mixed with envy of its successes and resentment at its exercise of power. Even in countries where CETs encounter little overt anti-Western sentiment, there is often latent resentment toward Western power. (32)

Furthermore, the air of superiority with which Westerners often have carried themselves when interacting in other countries understandably causes the people of those countries to resent Westerners. Most citizens of the United States and other Western countries are proud of the great achievements of their nations, and this national pride is understandable and acceptable. However, when those citizens approach people from other cultures with arrogance as if the Western world were superior and other cultures unworthy of respect, resentment will build against the West. Most people take pride in their country whatever the state of its opulence and power (Snow 32).

Attitudes toward Christianity

In most countries around the world Christianity is associated with the West so closely that they are almost seen as one entity, especially in Muslim countries where being a citizen of the country almost always means one is Muslim. As previously mentioned in reference to Western imperialism, Christian missionaries often preceded the soldiers and officials of the West and in their preaching and ministry frequently, although perhaps unintentionally, bore the sense of superiority that Westerners displayed in their relations with other cultures. As a result, Western missionaries were seen as forerunners of imperialism (Dunch 307). According to Reverend Issa Diab, one of the principle activities of Western missionaries at the beginning of the nineteenth century was “spreading ethical, educational and cultural principles based on the Bible (Christian Education)” (92). At first glance, the previous statement seems to be harmless and, indeed, a commendable act of Christian service. However, missionaries could have easily used this principle to acculturate indigenous nationals to Western culture, justifying their actions from misinterpreted passages of the Bible. None of the sources used for this paper indicate that Western missionaries explicitly used this principle to justify Westernizing

the nations in which they served; however, Reverend Diab pointed out the reactions of many of Middle Eastern countries to the first Western missionaries:

Now that almost two centuries have passed, what can we say of the Missionary work in the Middle East? It had indeed not only positive results, but also negative reactions from the people: [. . .] Muslims and Nationalists considered it colonialism. I can enumerate tens of books that were published in Arabic, and whose authors associate western missionary work (evangelism, education and philanthropic activities) with western colonialism in the Middle East. (92)

This close association with the West has been a hindrance for Western missionaries since the period of colonization.

At the same time, however, Western Christian missionary efforts made significant accomplishments for Christ and established some churches that are now independent and vibrant Christian fellowships. The lives of many missionaries showed the love of God to people who never knew of their Savior and improved the state of their lives dramatically. Therefore, in some places Christianity may not be as closely associated with Western culture as in others, since independent churches have existed in many countries for many years.

However, Christian English teachers should be aware that Christianity is often associated with the West and, therefore, is perceived negatively in some countries. The teacher may not meet with open hostility towards Christianity or even the West, for the people will most likely value hospitality and extend it to foreign teachers. However, underneath the nationals' polite attitudes, there may be some resentment and a certain amount of wariness of associating with Christianity. Christian English teachers must

never adopt the attitude of the stereotypical Western individual, which will alienate the teacher from the people and the culture that he or she desperately wants to reach with the love of God (Snow 35).

At this point, one might wonder how a Christian English teacher might respond to the perspectives on the West and Christianity that have developed in some countries due to the imperialism and power of Western culture. Before discussing the Christian English teacher's available responses, however, there are specific issues surrounding the teaching of the English language which must be understood.

The Extent of the Use of the English Language

Since the two primary world powers of the last two centuries have been English speaking, naturally the language has spread throughout the world and is at this point fast becoming the *lingua franca* of communication for the entire globe. The spread of English is considered to be the most remarkable spread of language in the last one hundred years and possibly in history, even exceeding the spread of Latin during the Roman Empire (Bhatt 529). As far back as 1962, Jacob Ornstein wrote,

The global demand for English knowledge has since World War II grown at a dizzying rate. Travelers report that in the remotest areas, where no formal instruction is available, natives often trot out dog-eared copies of American illustrated magazines, which they painfully decipher with the aid of pocket dictionaries. (9)

He continued by explaining that it was the technological advancement and "involvement in foreign affairs" (9) of the United States that spawned the world's interest in the English language at the time. Learning English became popular throughout the world, and it was a symbol of status; learning English elevated one's respectability.

A much more significant explanation for this spread and popularity of English, however, is the amount of writing, academic and otherwise, that is produced in the English language. Since the vast majority of scholarly research and writings are done in English, scholars, doctors, and other professionals around the world must be able to read and study in English to stay at the forefront of their field. Furthermore, around thirty percent of the information that can be found on the internet, which is the major communicative tool of the twenty-first century, is in English, leaving somewhere around seventy percent divided among the rest of the world's languages (Müller, personal communication).

According to the *Ethnologue Report on World Languages*, there are around 508 million people who speak English as a native or second language, and it is spoken in over one hundred countries around the world (Gordon). This number does not include the millions of people who are learning English as a foreign language, and according to Bhatt, that number is between one hundred million and one billion people worldwide (530). By way of contrasting English with another highly spoken language, Chinese has over one billion first and second language speakers, and this number is without foreign language learners. However, Chinese is spoken in fewer than fifteen countries worldwide (Gordon).

The future of English is unclear at this point in history. From all appearances, the rate at which English has spread recently and the numbers of people who speak it would indicate that English is not going to decline from its status as the world dominant language. According to Martin Kayman, the English language no longer belongs to its native speakers, but has spread sufficiently throughout the world that there are more non-native speakers, and therefore, English is now what he calls a global language (1-2).

However, there are some who believe that, in the future, technology will be great enough that electronic translators will be proficient enough to eliminate the need to learn second languages at all, and if no one has a need to learn a second language, then English will steadily decline in its use around the world (Derbyshire 36-37). Whether one agrees with this belief or not, it will be interesting to see how technological advances affect language learning in the future.

Regardless of the future of English, at this point in history it is the dominant language of the globe and the demand for learning it is at such heights that thousands of English teachers would be needed to satisfy it. Therefore, Christian English teachers will continue to be sent and will need to understand all the issues surrounding such a world wide language movement.

Problems with the Imperialism of English

Such a widespread use of English in the world raises several interesting questions about its dominance over other languages as well as about the possibility that it hinders rather than helps improve communication throughout the world. Some argue that English as a global language does not facilitate improved communication, but causes information losses between those who do know English well and those who do not, when the absence of English altogether would in allow for communication in the native tongue that is unhindered. For example, Alastair Pennycook gives examples in which the strict use of English hindered quality communication. A doctor in Hong Kong could not think of the spelling or the correct translation for the word “acute” and, therefore, did not write it in the report for a patient who died several hours later due to being given a less than critical status. Other examples support the belief that English is the language of the wealthy and, therefore, causes even further class gaps and injustices in societies around the world:

All [the examples] speak to the ways in which English becomes linked to forms of institutionalized power; all speak to the ways in which English functions as a class-based language; all speak to the dichotomization between local, multiple vernacular languages and the mono-lingualism of the language of power; all speak to the ways in which English is as much a language of global discommunication as it is a language of global communication. (Pennycook 6)

The examples Pennycook gives are specialized and individual cases, which he admits. However, the fact that English does cause some miscommunication as well as class distinction throughout the globe is easily documented and a valid point that Christian English teachers would be wise to take into consideration.

A second problem that exists in the imperialism of English is in the preservation of native languages. Just as cultural imperialism destroys the unique features of cultures around the world, so the spreading of English has an effect on the survival of already dying languages. According to Charlie Furniss, the rapid spread of English is causing the extinction of hundreds of languages, which is always the case when an imperialistic power spreads its language to other cultures (he references Latin in the spreading of the Roman Empire) (53-54). However, if English is actually causing languages to become extinct—which is a logical assumption due to its status as a global language—the question one must ask is whether or not this language extinction should be of concern to humanity. Of course the preservation of history and cultures is of great value to later generations and the history of the human race in general. However, languages are constantly changing and dying out while new ones are born and old ones revitalized, but

the human race has never been able to control this loss of languages, even though attempts are made (McClelland, personal communication).

The Necessity of Teaching Culture

In teaching language, one of the fundamental aspects that the learners need to grasp is the culture from which the language comes. There is no avoiding the issue. Each language and culture has its own set of characteristics in communicating that are meaningfully different from other cultures. The language of one culture is directly affected by that culture's way of thinking and processing information, its way of life, and its environment; also, cultural norms such as social behavior or belief systems are tied with the language of the culture so closely that to learn another language requires the adjustment or the expansion of one's understanding and perspective on the events and situations of life. When an individual learns a second language well, he or she is in essence learning the culture of those who speak the language; therefore, however controversial it may be, to teach English is to teach Western culture.

The word *culture* is an ambiguous term; and, in association with language, it has several separate meanings. When discussing art such as literature, music, or motion pictures, one would be discussing the artistic culture of a certain country. However, culture also refers to social aspects of a country such as its traditions and behavioral norms (Asraf 2). Naturally, one would assume that to teach a language properly, those types of culture would at least be discussed in the classroom. However, in language teaching, the types of culture that are most important, and indeed necessary to teach are the semantic and pragmatic cultures.

According to Ratnawati Mohammed Asraf of the International Islamic University of Malaysia, semantic culture refers to "the semantic sense of a culture in which a

language is, in fact, an embodiment of a culture's conceptual system. This has to do with the vocabulary of a particular language, which conditions the culture's perceptions and thought processes" (2). Semantic culture is a difficult concept to grasp because one does not naturally see the aspects of one's language that shape the way one thinks. Sometimes one assumes his or her way of thinking is natural to everyone, but this is obviously not the case. Finally, the last type of culture, according to Asraf, is pragmatic culture. A pragmatic cultural understanding gives one the ability to correctly use words and phrases that are acceptable in certain situations and not others. Speaking manners and etiquette, such as saying "bless you" after someone sneezes, are examples of pragmatic culture (2).

One erroneous conception that some people, and even some teachers of English, have about teaching language is that it is not necessary to teach the students the culture of the language. The students can be taught to communicate efficiently by knowing how to use the language as a tool of communication. The basic premise of this belief is that a language can be directly translated into other languages (Thanasoulas). There are a few problems with this misconception of language teaching. First, if the teacher does not teach the learners the specific cultural vocabulary and idiomatic expressions relevant to the target culture, the students will be left with a sizable gap in their understanding of and communicative competence in the language. The learners cannot become proficient in the language because there are so many cultural nuances that they will not have mastered, which will severely inhibit their ability to communicate well in the culture. Second, it is crucial that the students are taught the semantic sense or thought processes of the target culture. R. Politzer once said, "If we teach language without teaching at the same time the culture in which it operates, we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning..." (Thanasoulas ¶ 5). One of the basic principles

of language acquisition is that to master the language one must learn to think in that language; in other words, one must attach meaning to the words of the target language separate from the words of the native language. However, the understood meaning must be more than the basic or translated definition; one must understand how the culture understands each word. When one has been able to grasp the meaning of the words in the target language the way the target culture does, then he or she has acquired the language (Thanasoulas).

Those who believe that it is not necessary to teach culture to language learners fail to realize that professional language teaching automatically involves the teaching of culture. When a good teacher teaches language, there is no distinction between the culture and the language. According to C. Kramersch, they are not separate entities but one:

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. (1)

The teacher that says it is unnecessary to teach culture is woefully mistaken; one cannot teach language correctly without teaching culture (Kramersch 1).

As a teacher of English, one might wonder what in English qualifies as the semantic sense or culture of the language. The semantic sense of English could refer to any aspect of the language depending upon the language learner. A learner from one culture may be completely confused by a certain aspect of English that a learner from another culture would find easily understandable. For example, in many cultures

directions can be designated not only from an objective standpoint like north and south, but from a subjective position relative to the individual, like left and right. However, the Aboriginal Guugu Timithirr peoples of Australia, for example, have no words for left, right, front, and back. Rather they use objective directions like south, west, northeast, and so on. On the surface, this distinction seems to be a pragmatic cultural sense that would need to be taught if one were teaching these people English; however, it could stem from a deeper semantic sense representing how these people think. In other words, if they were much more communally focused rather than individualistic, they may find no need for words that designate direction based upon the subjective view point of the individual. Or they may value objectivity much more highly than English speakers do and, as a result, find little need for relativity. These explanations are purely hypothetical, but the point is that each culture will have subtle differences in the way they think about life that are in contrast to the way English speakers think. Each person in the United States is unique; indeed every individual in the world is unique in the way that each processes information and makes choices, but there are aspects of an individual's culture that can characterize how he or she will react in similar situations (O'Neil).

In the United States, many ideals of life are vastly different from other countries, and therefore, the perspectives of U.S. citizens are not the same, and neither is their semantic understanding of certain English words and concepts. For example, when they think of the word "freedom," a wide variety of ideals come to their minds—freedom of speech, freedom from oppression, freedom of religion, freedom to choose one's career. The basic ideal of freedom in the American mindset is that each individual is free to make his or her own choices without interference from others as long as these choices are within the law. Explaining this concept of freedom to someone who is from a country

where oppression and persecution are common or has a highly restrictive government is an example of teaching semantic cultural sense, and it is not an easy task.

However, freedom is just one example of the general American, indeed, the Western mindset. Our concepts of time, materialism, individualism, justice and more all affect our language and the way we think (Burzi). To teach English effectively, teachers must teach students how Americans understand these concepts and how they affect their way of thinking. This understanding will give the students a deep-seated knowledge and ability to communicate and interact in English. Otherwise, the students will supply their own understanding of these concepts and construct an inaccurate perspective of American culture and have difficulty comprehending the specific nuances of American speech (Donoghue 124).

One can see how this necessity of teaching culture would be controversial in those countries where the culture of the U.S. is seen as a threat. This dilemma along with all the other issues presented, face Christian English teachers when they go to another land, culture, and people in order to serve them. The question remains how a Christian English teacher can teach in a world where his or her belief system may be such a source of opposition for him or her.

Teaching English as a Missionary

Teaching as a Christian

Being prepared to respond to the issues and controversies involved in teaching English as a Christian is of tremendous importance for the Christian English teacher. However, in researching the subject, one may find that the Christian world has said little about how to respond to such issues as the imperialistic reputation of the West and Christianity. One Christian author and former Christian English teacher recognized the

need for English teachers to be prepared for what they will encounter. Donald Snow's book will be the basis for the following discussion on how the Christian English teacher should respond to the problems.

First of all, Christian English teachers are often afraid to reveal the fact that they are Christians, but they may need to be more open and honest about who they are when serving as a teacher. Many nations are against Christianity in their country, but openly allow Christian English teachers because it is believed that their purpose is to teach English. When the purpose of Christian English teachers is other than teaching English, it becomes a problem of deception and dishonesty (Snow 70). The problem is then how a Christian English teacher can retain the motive to share the gospel with the people of the country because as Snow states, “[. . .] the more CETs mislead others as to their true intentions in accepting a teaching position, the more their integrity is compromised and the luster of their witness is tarnished” (71). One cannot effectively represent Christ and demonstrate the love that He gives when one is living deceptively. To avoid any issues surrounding the comprising of his or her integrity, the Christian English teacher may want to make his or her primary goal to teach English to the absolute best of his or her ability and, thereby, honoring Christ.

The secular world sees that followers of Christ are using the field of English teaching as a means to gain access to share the gospel in countries where they otherwise would not be able to enter, and it condemns Christians for doing so. Many non-Christians are appalled at the apparent manipulation and deception that is involved in teaching English as a missionary. According to Alastair Pennycook and Sophie Coutand-Marin, many educators say that “it is ‘utterly repellent’ to use English language teaching for any purpose other than the betterment of those students’ lives as defined by those students

themselves” (4). When referring to Christian missions that use English teaching as a means to gain access to closed countries but have no concern for teaching English well, these educators have a point. Some Christian English teachers argue that “the Christian message is a true message and the more souls that can be saved, by fair means or foul, the better” (3). As previously stated, such a mindset raises several issues concerning one’s integrity as a teacher. The secular world may have legitimate reason to be concerned in such situations. However, when the Christian English teacher attempts to teach English as effectively as he or she possibly can and allows his or her life to testify for Christ, there is no deception involved.

No matter where a Christian is in the world, the most important aspect of his or her life is the quality of his or her relationship with God, and this involves the quality of the work that they do and how they interact with people. Therefore, every individual who claims to be a Christian is a missionary no matter where he or she is. The nature of a Christian’s life shines the most for the truth of Christ. Therefore, as Snow postulates, “it is often through the responsibility with which they carry out their teaching work that their most effective Christian witness is presented” (Snow 72). The life of the Christian is often the most attractive testimony to non-Christians, which means that at every moment, the Christian is at the same time a witness for Christ; ideally, a the follower of Christ is a missionary no matter where he or she goes. Therefore, the Christian English teachers can say honestly without deception that their purpose for going to another country is to teach English to the best of their ability. Their witness is not constrained by their setting. In other words and according to Snow, teaching English is an act of Christian service and should be seen as a mission in itself (19).

As a Christian, then, the English teacher's life is hopefully distinguished by certain characteristics in how they teach and in the way they interact with their students and the community. These characteristics will probably set them apart from non-Christian English teachers and be a light of Christ to the students and the community.

Teaching as a Westerner

As an English teacher from the Western world, one will be confronted by the variety of feelings that the nations of the world will have towards Westerners. Being away from the United States does not mean that one can leave the label of "Westerner" behind; it is a permanent identity that is difficult to remove. As Snow says,

CETs are daily involved in the task of promoting the West's most widely used language and teaching the culture of its most powerful nations. This virtually ensures that no matter how CETs view themselves, in the host culture they will be seen as ambassadors of the West. (27-28)

This Western identity will induce some to be welcoming and friendly, while others will look with disdain on the one who represents power and even, perhaps, the enemy.

The missionary teacher may respond in a couple different ways to this possible animosity towards his or her identity. First, one might view it as a disadvantage, which will hinder one's ability to reach out to one's students; or, and much more positively, one could view it as an opportunity to build bridges between cultures and make amends for offenses that were years in the making. Snow points out that, as Christians, missionary teachers are called to be reconciliatory agents, as 2 Corinthians 5:18 states, "And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." This verse is speaking directly of reconciling God with men; however, as Snow states, "While conflict between people of different nations and cultures is as inevitable as human sin, this is not the condition God

desires for humanity,” and, therefore, as servants of God, missionary teachers have the opportunity to bring peace between peoples and cultures as a means of honoring Him.

Separating Christianity from the West

Along with the resentment of the West, some nations also perceive Christianity and the West as one entity. To be Western is to be Christian in their eyes, and vice versa. Therefore, Christian English teachers may need to distinguish between the two in their teaching of Western culture. Of course Christianity is and has been part of Western culture for centuries; however, the students need to see that Christianity is not just a religion of the West, but a truth that transcends one culture and is applicable to all cultures at all times. Christian English teachers often use lessons on Western culture to present truths about Christianity, but the danger in this is twofold. First, it borders on deception that should be avoided in one’s stated purpose, and second, it may strengthen the impression that the West and Christianity are one and the same (Snow 73).

Learning and Reconciling

Knowing that the culture in which one is teaching may be resentful of Western culture, unhappy with one’s teaching about Western culture, and opposed to Christianity due to its status as a Western religion, the Christian English teacher’s approaches to living and teaching are essential to his or her success not only in teaching English, but in representing the love of Christ.

The life that the teacher leads, in and out of the classroom, is crucial to his or her success as a teacher and a missionary, and it will influence the community’s willingness to accept him or her. The result of a selfless, loving, and devoted life may represent the West to the target culture in a reconciliatory way, even if it is to the slightest degree. One of the most effective ways of acting out this reconciliatory role is by showing the people

of the community that one cares about their culture and learning their language as much as one cares about teaching them one's own culture and language. Snow quotes Charles Kraft, a missionary anthropologist, saying, "Indeed, if we do no more than engage in the process of language learning we will have communicated more of the essentials of the Gospel than if we devote ourselves to any other task that I can think of" (42). When the native people realize that the Christian English teacher is not so arrogant to think that his or her culture is better than their own, but instead invests time in attempting to understand the culture and learn the language, it will speak to them about the character of the teacher. As a result, the teacher will also benefit from the effort—and it will take effort—to learn the culture and the language. A language teacher may benefit greatly from going through the same difficulties that the students are going through. He or she will be able to identify with the struggles that his or her students are dealing with in learning English, and he or she may also be able to identify strategies that will improve his or her teaching and the students' learning (42).

Furthermore, often when people relocate to an entirely different culture, they experience culture shock, which can manifest itself in the form of negative feelings towards the culture and an overall pessimistic perspective, or a bad attitude. Trying to build relationships with people is probably hindered by attitudes of hostility towards their way of life and their language. However, giving a concerted effort to learn the language and culture can help avoid such feelings, especially once one begins to be able to use the language and understand the culture (51).

Probably the most beneficial reason for a Christian English teacher to attempt to adapt to the new culture is that it may help build relationships with the students and the community, and hopefully, it will begin to destroy the negative stereotypes of Westerners

that many of the people may have. When the teacher asks questions about the culture or the language, and the students see the teacher attempting to use the language and struggling as they struggle, it puts them in the role of the teacher and lowers the teacher to the role of a student. This position of humility speaks to the people of the love that the teacher has for the culture and for them (56).

Teaching and Representing Christ

Whatever a Christian does in life should be done to the best of his or her ability because that is the standard that Christ commands. When Christians work hard and responsibly at whatever they do, they demonstrate the character of Christ to the world. Colossians chapter 3 verse 17 says, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (NIV).

Christian English teachers who teach to the absolute best of their abilities and devote their time and effort to their students’ lives will hopefully leave an impression on the students and the community that will not be forgotten. Missionary teachers who view their teaching as service to God may be more highly motivated to be the best possible teachers they can be, and through the quality of their teaching, these teachers are truly missionaries representing Christ:

Rather than being incidental to witness or even evangelism, the quality of CETs’ teaching work is the primary vehicle through which they share the love of God with their students, and also the strongest and clearest statement they make about what a Christian should be like. (Snow 65)

The students that will be in the teachers’ classrooms will have needs that must be met by that teacher. One of the most effective ways to express the love of God to these students may be to meet these needs as efficiently as possible.

However, some teachers may struggle with how well they are able to communicate ideas to students, and some students struggle to learn no matter who their teacher is. These are issues which cannot necessarily be controlled by the teacher, but the teacher can control how much work he or she puts into teaching. This effort is the mark of a good teacher. Students then have the opportunity to see how hard the teacher works; through this, they may understand that the teacher does care about them and about teaching them English well, and they will be positively affected (68).

Conclusion

In the end, those Christian Westerners who desire to teach English internationally as a Christian service have a unique set of difficulties to deal with in their endeavors. They must realize that the very country from which they come will inhibit their ability to connect with the people that they so long to interact with and serve. The language they teach is in high demand, but it is also the language of the powerful and in some cases the enemy; yet to teach it well they will have to teach its culture. In doing so, they may face great opposition, but with the strength of Christ's love, they can teach in a way that is effective in overcoming the obstacles. They will probably need to offer themselves unselfishly to win the trust and approval of those they wish to serve and positively impact. Also, by devoting themselves to learning the culture and the language of the people, the Christian English teachers can show humility and their love for the culture of the native people, and thereby reconciling the West with the nations that are so resentful of that for which the West stands. They will need to commit to teaching to the best of their God-given abilities in order to meet the immediate needs of their students and to show them the life of a Christian representing Christ.

The Christian English teacher does not have an easy task. In truth, it is one of the most difficult tasks in life to do if one is doing it well, so much so that this task is impossible to do apart from the strength and power of Christ. However, with God with us nothing can stand against us, and the rewards of such selfless service will be far greater than the pain.

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