

MODULE ONE: UNIT ONE

CULTURE

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RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Abbott D (1998) *Culture and Identity* London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton

This book is one of a new series of concise and easy-to-read topic books for sociology students. It can be useful for teachers of English in that it discusses new perspectives on interpretations of culture, and the way people respond to it. Related issues addressed are 'age', 'stratification', 'ethnicity', 'gender', 'socialisation', 'subcultures', etc.

Byram M (1997) *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters

The book explores the issues of teaching and evaluating the learner's ability to relate and communicate with people who speak a different language and live in a different cultural context. The book suggests a model for intercultural communicative competence and defines appropriate modes of assessment of that model. It is useful for language teachers because it provides a framework for developing specific skills in the language classroom.

Byram M and Fleming M. (1998) (eds) *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press

This book addresses the ways in which language learning is related to learning about other cultures and to acquiring an ability to communicate across cultural frontiers. Especially interesting is the chapter called 'The Privilege of the Intercultural Speaker' by Claire Kramsch.

Fantini A (1997) (ed) *New Ways in Teaching Culture* Alexandria, Virginia: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc

This volume focuses on new ways of teaching culture. It contains six parts. The first part presents theoretical concepts about teaching language and culture for achieving intercultural communicative competence. The other four parts deal entirely with classroom activities that illustrate different new ways of teaching culture. These ways include different explorations in the language classroom – linguistic, sociolinguistic, cultural and intercultural. The last part contains a selected list of annotated bibliography.

Seelye N (1994) *Teaching Culture* Lincolnwood Illinois USA: National Textbook Company

The book provides useful ideas for teachers who want to teach their students understanding of other cultures. At the end of each chapter the teacher is presented with "suggested activities" which show how to apply the theoretical concepts in the classroom. The book presents not only the rationale for the development of intercultural skills but also suggests concrete activities for attaining them.

UNIT ONE

CULTURE

THE AIM OF THIS UNIT



In this unit you will be introduced to the term culture and how it operates within different research paradigms, so that you can critically evaluate approaches to culture and adopt your own.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

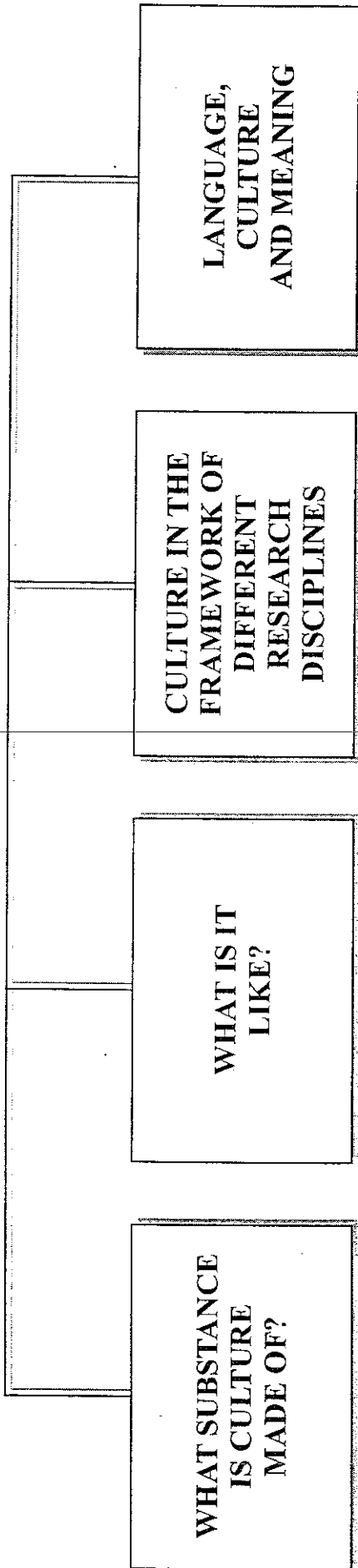
By the end of Unit One you will have:

-
- read excerpts from research articles representative of different approaches to culture
 - attempted a guided evaluation of the research orientation of each
 - adopted a broad understanding of the term **culture** with an appreciation of the theoretical slants to it
 - explored the role of culture in various disciplines.

As you can see from the diagram on the following page Unit One consists of four sections:

- what substance is culture made of
- what is it like
- culture in the framework of different research disciplines
- language, culture and meaning.

CULTURE



SAQ 1



Outlining a wide interpretation of the term culture

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo

T.S. Eliot '*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*'

Starting a chapter about culture with a quotation from T.S. Eliot would be viewed as 'cultural' by a wide circle of practitioners in the field. However, it may give an idea of a term narrower than the one used in this course. To set the range of your expectations right, please consider the list of options what represents culture below. Tick the column 'culture' if you think that the item is culture, the column 'not', if you do not think it is culture and the column '?' if you are in doubt.

	culture	not	?
Michelangelo			
T.S. Eliot			
poems			
women talking of Michelangelo			
T.S. Eliot ridiculing women for talking about Michelangelo			
regarding women unfit to discuss art			
coming into rooms			
chatting on various topics			
writing poetry			
writing good poetry			
writing bad poetry			
criticising poetry			
telling good poetry from bad poetry			
knowing who has the right to discuss art			
knowing how to come into a room			
knowing how to chat			

No Answer Key is given at this point. You will be referred to this table in Section Three.

INTRODUCTION

This questionnaire is **half-serious**, but serious. The term culture associated with Michaelangelo, T.S. Elliot and good poetry restricts culture to an elitist concept analysing a selected sample of art products. The notion of selecting art/culture from non-art/culture tends to set a mark of prescription or bias. The opposing view – chatting, coming into rooms, etc brings the concept down to earth and is known as culture with a small ‘c’, serving the purposes of describing life styles and orientations.

Rather than limit the range of objects that are qualifiable as **culture** or not, we shall adopt a functional view of culture as an analytical tool instrumental for certain purposes. The term will take value from the purposes it serves.

1.1 WHAT SUBSTANCE IS CULTURE MADE OF?

Even a tool has substance and we shall try to put a finger on it – is it an object, an idea, or something else? Porter and Samovar (1994:12) suggest a preliminary distinction among three types of components:

artefacts – products created by human activity

concepts - beliefs or value systems

behaviours - which project beliefs and value systems into practice.

They represent easily recognisable categories distinguished by the nature of the object. Next we shall apply the distinction to some material.

SAQ 2



Classifying the components of culture

On the following page you will read interpretations of culture randomly collected in informal interviews, slightly abridged and edited for the purposes of keeping the classification straight. Each definition is given a letter-denomination in the list. Place the letter in one of the columns in the table below indicating whether you consider the thing an artefact, concept or behaviour. The first one has been done for you as an example:

Artefact	Concept	Behaviour
	(a)	

Extract One

- a) Culture is extraordinary. Everybody has their own beliefs and ways of interpreting them. This is our life.
- b) The culture of a group of people is the relations within the group.
- c) Culture includes the people's individual desire for more knowledge and constant progress.
- d) Culture is a special process of exchanging experience connected with social issues of a group of people.
- e) Culture is the general knowledge about different questions which concern life and society as a whole. It is handed down from generation to generation.
- f) Through culture people, families – and all groups in society - know how to function effectively.
- g) Culture is an integrated pattern of institutions, rituals, tools and objects of art that characterise one people and distinguish it from another.
- h) Culture is art and music. The culture of a group can be recognised by all its various creative compositions of the dramatic, musical, puppet theatre, film productions, opera or ballet, philharmonic, symphonic or chamber orchestras.
- i) Culture is the museum of a writer, or the monument to a composer. All the memorials of the past are part of that culture.
- j) Religion and cultural heritage (folklore, legends and myths) form a central part of a culture.
- k) Ethics and morality form the spiritual part of culture.
- l) The national heritage of treasures, historical buildings and museums.
- m) The observance of etiquette commonly shared by the whole nation.
- n) The persons ability to interpret art and the metaphors therein.
- o) The ability of the members of a nation to communicate with each other.
- p) The things you do every day.
- q) The nation's ability to purify itself from evil.



So people understand culture as concepts, behaviours and artefacts. The boundaries between these components can be quite fuzzy, eg institutions can be treated as artefacts, concepts and behaviours; rituals involve artefacts but behaviours and concepts, as well. These distinctions serve the purpose of ‘zooming in’ on the concept, of narrowing down to its surface.

1) A Taxonomy

In a survey conducted among teachers from England and Denmark, Byram and Risager report that for lack of a stated definition of culture in educational documents, the respondents need to rely on their own conceptualisations (1999: 83). Here is a classification of the meanings that evolve from their definitions, summarised by the authors (1999: 85):

Extract Two

1. culture understood as people’s **way of life and traditions** – how people live in concrete terms, their activities, their ways of living together and so on (emphasis added).
2. culture understood as **the objective structure people live in**, the social, political and economic institutions, for example.
3. culture understood as the **norms or values** characterising people’s lives – the ideas people have about their lives, behaviour, mentality, consciousness and so on.
4. culture understood as varied **products or artefacts**: as artistic life and artistic products of different kinds, for example literature, music, art and so on.

(Byram and Risager 1999: 85)

This takes our initial classification into artefacts, concepts and behaviours to a new, more analytical level. The item **people’s way of life and traditions** includes **concepts** about what can be eaten, or rules of **behaviour**. Some **artifacts** project essential insights into how people live – eg the Bulgarian orchard in the backyard.

The **social, political and economic institutions** include **artefacts**, such as national symbols, buildings etc but also the bus ticket as a significant institutional **artefact**, revealing the way public transport functions. The category also associates with **behaviours** connected with the way people interact with these institutions, for example the way people use bus tickets. What this category adds to the understanding of components as artefacts, concepts or behaviour is the idea of **organised social patterns**.

The **norms or values characterising people’s lives** are the concepts of good and evil, beautiful or ugly. The category adds an evaluative element to patterns of behaviour as well eg a dog in American culture would normally be conceived of as fluffy, sweet, endearing, whereas in Korean culture – as the perfect object to go into the evening’s barbecue (example from Porter and Samovar (1994)). So this is the category of **attributing values**.

The most straightforward match between Porter and Samovar's and Byram and Risager's classifications is in the category varied products or artefacts. Drawing upon SAQ1, it is worth treating this category in a broader sense. Apart from objects of art, we shall include, for instance, an editorial article from a specific newspaper, or a dustbin, or a stamped logo on a T-shirt. At the intersection with the above category – norms or values - an artefact can be accepted, or - rejected in a culture, eg graffiti as art or/and vandalism; an item can be disputable – eg Is haiku poetry? The evaluation is as important as the product.

On the one hand we have seen culture as “high” and “low”, on the other hand we have discerned components of ideational nature along with others of material, and still others - of behavioural nature. A third approach classifies some components as related to social organisation, others – as evaluative and still others – as accepted or rejected in society.

2) A Metaphor

To conclude the answer to the question about the substance of culture, we shall take a bird's eye view of the 'quarry'. A metaphor likens culture to an iceberg (the Peace Corps 1990:10). Some of its components **stand out** and can be seen above the water, others are **hidden** below and one can only judge about them from outward manifestations.

This aspect is very important when it comes to studying culture. Knowing which parts are observable and which need more subtle techniques to probe into is essential in planning research.

SAQ 3



Classifying the components of culture into manifested and hidden ones

Fill in the following passage about the relationship between manifested and hidden components of culture. Use the words **visible** or **hidden**:

Extract Three

Artefacts and behaviours are _____. Concepts are viewed as _____ because they can be interpreted differently, according to different values, or accepted practices. Behaviour is _____ in a superficial way. Interpreting what _____ values and patterns determine it add a significant touch to understanding it. Selecting the range of cultural artefacts affects how _____ they are on the basis of the approach to culture as 'high' or 'ordinary'. Describing artefacts as they function makes _____ the social organisation underpinning them. Evaluating artefacts as accepted or rejected substantiates the _____ value system of society.



Implications:

- ✓ Concepts have a formative influence on all the other aspects of culture but can not be easily detected
- ✓ **Professed** concepts are not always the **true** concepts
- ✓ The ability to detect concepts and values behind their manifestations in artefacts and behaviours is a cultural skill.

1.2 WHAT IS IT LIKE?

Having discussed the ‘substance’ of culture, we move on to its characteristics. Porter and Samovar (1994; 12-14) reveal the following features:

1. culture is not innate, culture is learned
2. culture is transmissible
3. culture is dynamic
4. culture is selective
5. the facets of culture are interrelated
6. culture is ethnocentric, that is, centred on its own group.

You will be assisted in finding out what each feature means in the SAQ below.

SAQ 4



Explaining the characteristics of culture

In the right column of the table on the following page you can read the descriptions of the features. In the corresponding column on the left write down which characteristic from the list above is being explained. The first has been done for you:

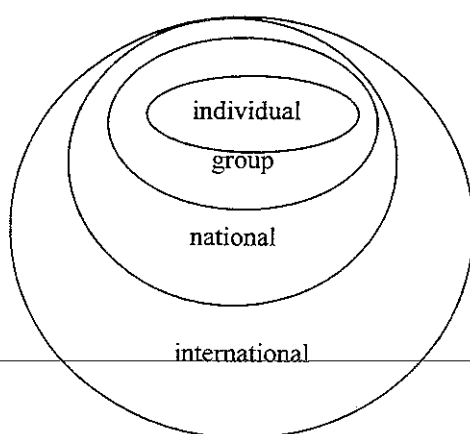
3. culture is dynamic	Culture is ongoing and subject to fluctuation. Through invention new practices, tools and concepts are introduced and through diffusion products from other cultures are borrowed. Cultural calamity describes the effect of wars and destruction on cultural processes. Some components, however, do not change and they are known as the deep structure, such as values, ethics, morals etc.
	Keesing (quoted by Porter and Samovar 1994) notes that ethnocentrism is a universal tendency for any people. 'Nearly always the folklore of a people includes myths of origin which give priority to themselves, and place the stamp of supernatural approval on their particular customs.' The fact that ethnocentrism is the perceptual window through which a culture interprets and judges other cultures leads to subjective assessment, or in an extreme case – to negation of otherness.
	We use verbal or non-verbal symbols to pass on the content and patterns of a culture – eg national flags, written documents, films etc. On the basis of our shared understandings, we can encode and hope that others will be able to decode what we convey.
	Culture is a whole system, rather than a miscellany with no particular arrangement of components. If one component is changed, another one will follow suit.
	The orientation to fashions of behaviour or to ways to serve God are culture-specific and subject to personal choice. What a culture selects to pass on to the next generation must be important. Selection also effects separation between cultural groups.
	From infancy on, members of a culture learn their patterns of behaviour and ways of thinking. Our culture-learning proceeds through interaction, observation and imitation. The Hindu child who lives in a home where women eat after the men is learning culture. All of this learning occurs as conscious or unconscious conditioning. This activity is frequently called enculturation , denoting the total activity of learning one's own culture.



1) What Space Does Culture Inhabit?

Interpreting the survey of teachers' understandings of culture, Byram and Risager (1999: 89) develop a second classification, based on the societal levels teachers assign to culture. Thus, they identify four levels:

- culture understood as a phenomenon which is international or cross-national
- culture understood as a national phenomenon
- culture understood as related to groups below the national level, for example social categories of class, ethnicity, region or social groups such as the family
- culture understood as connected with the individual and his/her personal development.



SAQ 5



Arranging levels of culture

An individual, by virtue of appearing in the cross-section of all the circles – her (various) groups of belonging, national and international - takes on features of all the levels. Arrange what features a Bulgarian teacher, or you – in particular - possesses. You can draw it as circles.



2) Small Culture v/s Large Culture

Size and geographical situation acquire a new meaning in relation to culture. Find out how they are interpreted in the following text by Adrian Holliday.

Extract Four

On asking both academics and non-academics what they mean by 'culture', one will invariably find that they first refer to 'large' entities such as British, Indonesian, Western or European cultures. However, at other times one may also hear people referring to small entities such as hospital, research, family, office or organisation cultures. When asked how these two types relate to each other, some people say that the 'large' usage is the correct and that the small is metaphorical. Others say that small cultures are 'subcultures'. Casual observation thus gives the impression that when asked, people will state 'large' culture, but will often use 'small' culture as an unmarked form.

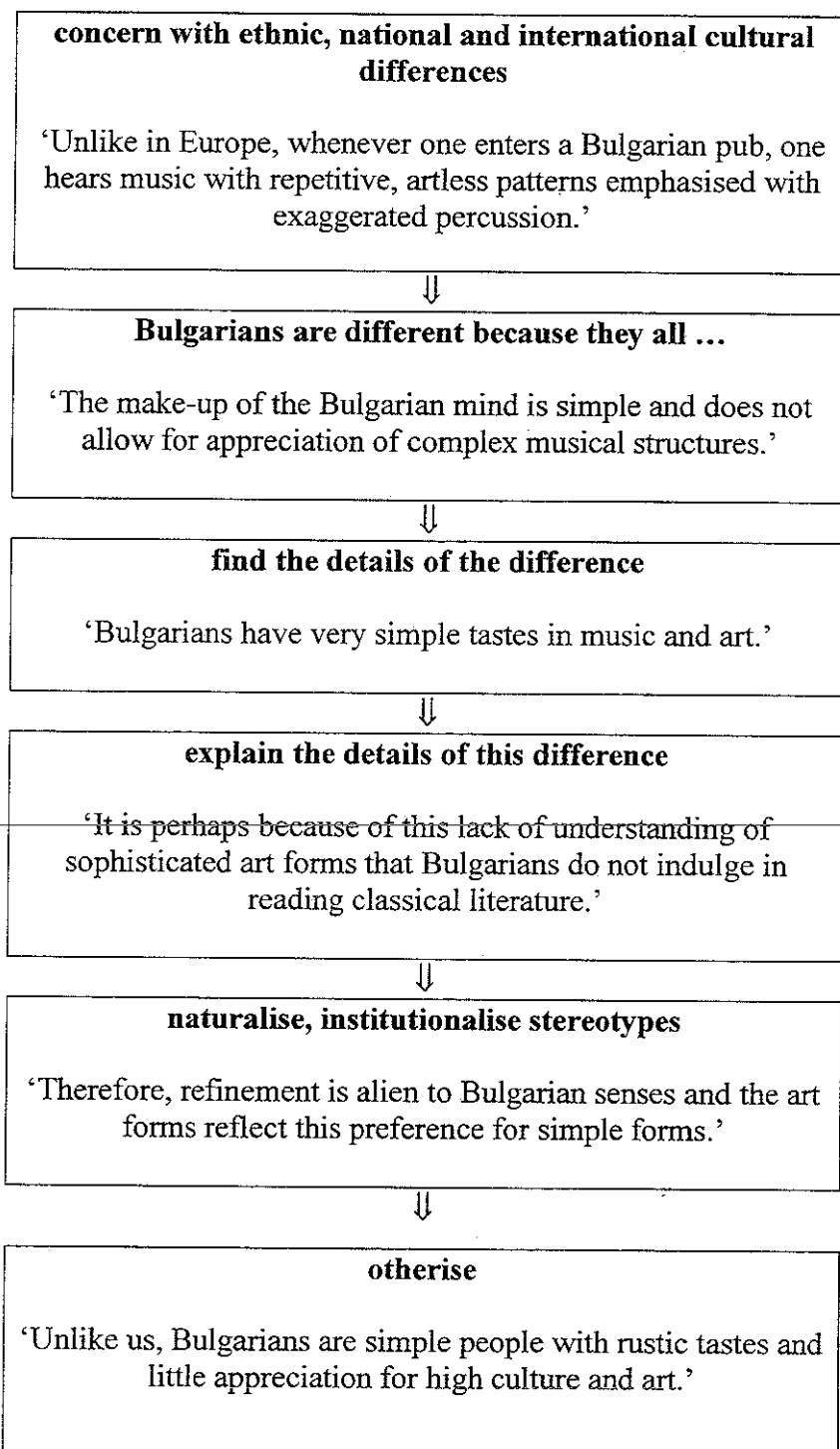
Holliday (1999: 238)

So apart from the geographical and size features, **large** and **small** constitute approaches to describing culture, connected with methodological principles of analysis. Below is a demonstration of the two approaches.

3) The Large-Culture Approach

Holliday describes 'large-culture' research approaches as **culturalist**. They begin with the idea that specific ethnic, national and international groups have different cultures and then searching for details (1999: 241). Holliday streamlines the type of analysis in the flowchart which follows.

Each stage (in bold type) in Holliday's flowchart on the following page is accompanied by an illustration from Bulgarian culture. The statements present what an imaginary foreigner with a taste for classical music might think about Bulgarian musical tastes, entering a pub playing pop-folk music.



What a nasty character! The foreigner, I mean. Or is it that I am applying the large-culture approach to foreigners? No, this is just an example of a way of how not to analyse. A commentary of the approach follows.

SAQ 6



Analysing the large-culture approach to cultural phenomena

Which of the qualities in the list below characterise the large-culture approach? Circle the relevant ones.

- subtle
 - perceptive
 - considering concrete persons
 - mechanistically unifying a group under a national criterion
 - allowing for variation and change
- describing a group starting at observed features
- exaggerating national uniformity.

Instead of an Answer Key, read Holliday's comments on the implications of culturalist analysis.

Extract Five

The concept in question (discussed under the umbrella of a national term, Bulgarians, in our example above – E.T.) becomes relatively fixed in people's minds. Hence the apparent 'patterns and order' (g) of these so called groups are exaggerated and unduly emphasized at the expense of 'variations and variability' which might blur their boundaries. A 'culture' then becomes the 'tagged and tied luggage of isolated groups'. ... The members of a group to which an ethnic, national or international label has been attached are perceived as confined and **reduced** to pre-defined characteristics.... Otherisation can be defined as the process whereby the 'foreign' is reduced to a simplistic, easily digestible, exotic or degrading stereotype.

Holliday (1999: 245)

Even worse is the otherisation under the umbrella of "foreign". Consider the example above – all foreigners have tastes for classical music, all of them jump to negative conclusions on superficial evidence, therefore, ... down with foreigners. The trouble with this approach stems from **all**, but in the case of **foreigner**, is the word not the same as **all**, only different from **us** by default?

Let us proceed with otherisation as a result of the application of the large-culture approach.

SAQ 7



Analysing the implications of otherisation

On the basis of Holliday’s comments (1999) consider how the “otherisation” of Bulgarians functions in the example about the foreigner and pop-folk music above. What is it that the imaginary interpreter fails to see?

Use the prompts below. The first one has been done for you:

The group tagged Bulgarians is wider than the sample observed by the foreigner in this incident. The observer is tempted to attach the national label because of an exaggerated feeling of otherness towards Bulgarians.

If one observes what music people listen to in a pub, then her conclusion should be
.....
.....
.....

Variation of musical tastes

.....
.....
.....

A stereotype is fixed

.....
.....
.....

The stereotype is reinforced by

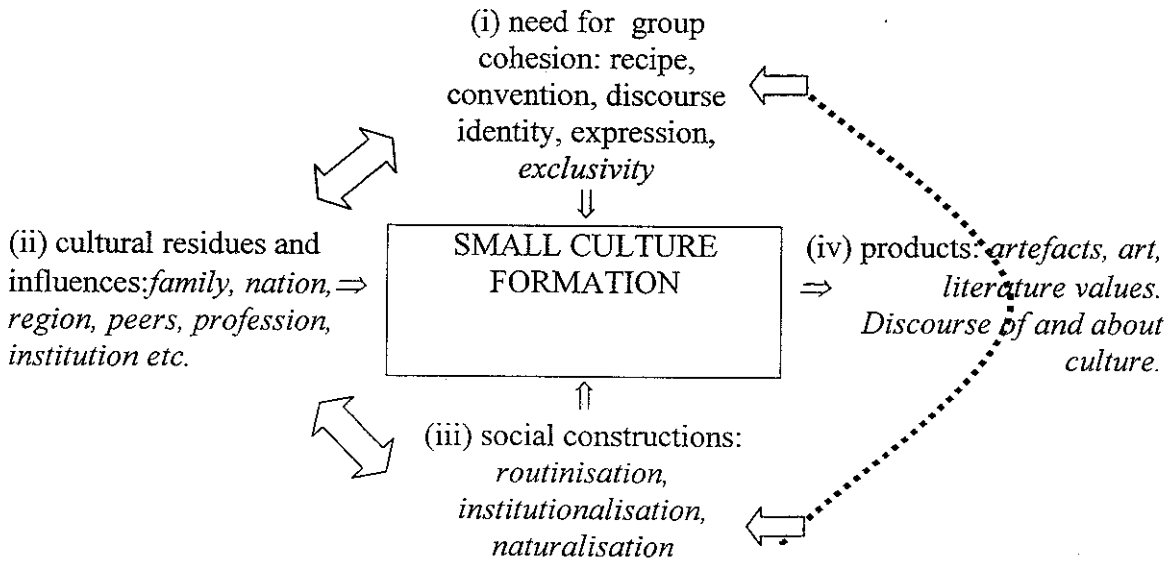
.....
.....
.....

The answer key suggests an answer of a purely illustrative nature.



4) The Small Culture Approach

Small culture, in Holliday's interpretation (1999: 249), is characterised by the following process of formation:



A schematic representation is best understood by exemplification from real life.

SAQ 8



Exemplifying the small-culture approach

Your task now is to make up your own story, on the model of the one about 'large culture' to illustrate this analysis. It should contain the four stages outlined above, each one exemplified with a description. Do not forget to start with a group smaller than the national.

(i) need for group cohesion	
(ii) cultural residues and influences	
(iii) social constructions	
(iv) products	



Following is Holliday's (1999) discussion of small culture which will provide you with a theoretical framework for understanding the concept.

Extract Six

Small culture is thus a dynamic, ongoing group process which operates in changing circumstances to enable group members to make sense of and operate meaningfully within those circumstances. When a researcher looks at an unfamiliar social grouping, it can be said to have a small culture when there is a discernible set of behaviours and understandings connected with group cohesion. The dynamic aspect of a small culture is central to its nature, having the capacity to exist, form and change as required.

Small culture is thus the sum total of all the processes, happenings, or activities in which a given set of people habitually engage.

Thus small cultures constitute a 'tool-kit' which emerges to solve problems when required. Moreover it involves an underlying competence in which people are not passive "cultural dopes"; they are active, often skilled users. A good example of this is the classroom group where a small culture will form from scratch when the group first comes together, each member using her or his culture-making ability to form rules and meanings in collaboration with others.

(Holliday 1999: 248)

SAQ 9



Conceptualising small culture

Choose an answer for each question from the suggested options. Only one option is correct. You may find it helpful to consult the table on the following page.

<p>1. A small culture is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. a group of people b. a type of behaviour c. a process. 	<p>5. The vital characteristic of a small culture is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. its set pattern of behaviour b. the underlying values and ideas c. its adaptability.
<p>2. A researcher can establish a small culture by observing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. a selected group b. the behaviour of common people c. people who reveal a recurrent type of behaviour. 	<p>6. The expression “cultural dopes” means that group members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. automatically follow accepted patterns of behaviour b. are not very intelligent c. have no understanding of culture.
<p>3. A small culture is useful in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. enabling people to understand and adapt to the group b. establishing stereotypes c. making judgements about the nation. 	<p>7. The expression “active, often skilled users” refers to the fact that the group members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. engage with groups for their own purposes b. actively create the small culture c. know how to observe the rules of society.
<p>4. A small culture consists of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. values and ideas b. the way a group operates c. the artifacts of the group 	



Below is a comparative summary of the approach to culture distinguishing small from large.

	Large culture	Small culture
Character	essentialist culturalist culture as essential features of ethnic, national or international groups	non-essentialist, non-culturalist relating to cohesive behaviour in activities without any social grouping
Relations	Small (sub)cultures are contained within and subordinate to large cultures through onion-skin relationship	no necessary subordination to or containment within large cultures, therefore, no onion-skin
Research orientation	normative beginning with the idea that specific ethnic, national and international groups have different 'cultures' and then searching for the details (eg what is polite in Japanese culture)	interpretative, process interpreting emerging behaviour within any social grouping heuristic model to aid the process of researching the cohesive process of any social grouping

It is for you now, as a teacher, to consider the implications of the small-culture approach for language teaching and learning.

SAQ 10



The implications of the small-culture approach to language teaching

Make notes about what the approach implies for teaching. They are your notes. By way of an example, here is what I think:

Extract Seven

Some methods of FLT recommend one language variety as the standard, thereby assigning it a 'large culture' scope of operation; regional features are classified as 'deviant' and banned. Such methods deprive the language taught of significant characteristics.

Presenting language the way it functions in real-life situations, without imposing preconceived characteristics, provides learners with a small-culture description.

Your notes:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

There is no Answer Key for this activity as you are drawing upon your own experience and understanding of the issue.

1.3 CULTURE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF DIFFERENT RESEARCH DISCIPLINES

Culture appears in the texture of several research disciplines. As it often happens, each discipline defines it according to the purpose it is expected to serve within the specific research frame. Below you can read definitions of culture given by some of the disciplines.

(1) Anthropology

Extract Eight

Culture pertains to the whole way of life of a people or group. In this context, it includes all the social practices that bond a group together and distinguish them from others. It thus includes every day patterns of behaviour as well as ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with others. Language is central to these processes because it is the main medium through which relationships are made and maintained.

(Montgomery and Reid-Thomas 1994: 5)

(2) Sociology

Extract Nine

The term 'culture' is defined very broadly. It is most commonly used to delineate the **symbolic** aspects of human society so as to include beliefs, rituals, customs, conventions, ideals or artistic endeavours. In this usage, culture contrasts with the biological aspects of human behaviour on the one hand, and society and institutions on the other. Culture does, therefore, cover a wide range of social phenomena. Societies are seen as composed of a very large number of cultures - e.g. youth culture, leisure culture, media culture etc. - which compete with one another. Each culture is an expression of the way of life of a particular social group.

(Abercrombie and Warde 1994: 417)

(3) Cultural theory

Extract Ten

This tradition ... defines culture as a realm separate from, and often actively opposed to, the realm of material production and economic activity. This is important for our present purposes because, in general, public cultural policies have evolved from within that tradition. Public intervention in the form of subsidy, is justified on the grounds (1) that culture possesses inherent values, of life enhancement or whatever, which are fundamentally opposed to and in danger of damage by commercial forces; (2) that the need for those values is universal, uncontaminated by questions of class, gender and ethnic origin; and (3) that the market cannot satisfy this need.

(Garnham 1993: 54)

(4) Language teaching

Extract Eleven

.... Meaning is not in the written or spoken text, but in the dialogue between the learner and the text. In both cases, social and personal voices intersect to create what Nostrand calls the central code of a culture. It consists not only of customs and properties, it involves above all the culture's 'ground of meaning', its system of major values, habitual patterns of thought and certain prevalent assumptions about human nature and society which the foreigner should be prepared to encounter.

(Kramersch 1993: 177)

Next, we shall identify what features of culture come across with the definitions.

SAQ 11



Identifying the semantic components in definitions of culture

The list of semantic components in the left column has been derived from the definitions quoted above. The other columns in the table are marked with the number of the definitions from above. If you think a definition contains this semantic component, tick the column, if not – leave it blank.

semantic components	1.	2.	3.	4.
Culture ... distinguishes group from others	✓	✓	✓	
presents common behavioural patterns				
is determined by common values				
governs norms of behaviour				
explains values				
links the individual to a group				
caters for specific spiritual necessities				
creates group cohesion				



A cultural approach to understanding the nature of concepts finds the reasons why they are defined in the way that they are. As we stipulated at the beginning of this unit, culture is a theoretical instrument, therefore it functions in accordance with the tasks that the respective discipline sets for it.

So far we have looked at culture as:

- an object of investigation
- a research tool
- a part of the theoretical frame.



Identifying the role of culture in research disciplines

Ways in which culture has been used in the disciplines mentioned above are enumerated below. As you read, mark whether culture is **the object of scientific enquiry, a research tool, or a part of the theoretical frame** of this discipline. The first has been done for you as an example:

Extract Twelve

1. Anthropology

Researchers in this field (Malinowski, Boas, Lado etc) have been observing societies, collecting artefacts and accounts of behaviour, in their attempt to discover systems of beliefs, routines and behaviour which unite them in a whole rather than a mechanistic medley. The unifying patterns were given the name **culture** as a central feature of the organisation of human society.

research tool

Sociology

Culture has been seen as the ideological factor which expresses the way people relate to each other and to objects, practices and processes in society. It is juxtaposed to material factors which also shape relationships. Describing social organisation can not be done in terms of just one factor – the material, or the ideological. The complex relationships between the two help explain social processes and organisation.

.....

3. Cultural theory

Initially, cultural theory demarcated the line between culture and non-culture. Later, under the influence of Marxism and the growth of consumerism, it moved on to discuss the multiplicity of facets culture has in its various manifestations and the social factors that shape each. Finally, cultural theory links policies and trends in social development to their respective projections in the media, art and literature. (Murdock 1989)

.....

4. Teaching foreign languages

Initially, culture – or civilisation, in the discourse of researchers in this vein – engaged with customs, traditions, famous symbols and a miscellany of landmark objects, places and people to enliven the classroom atmosphere and drift a whiff of the country where the language is spoken. As a more systematic academic venture, history, geography and art were enmeshed in a background course to help understand literature. The communicative approach included culture as the fifth skill, along with reading, writing and speaking. (Doyé 1996)

.....



You can now go back to SAQ 1 and check the reasons for accepting an interpretation of culture wider than the one restricted to good poetry. Such a restriction operates within cultural theory. Ours is an anthropological notion, relating also to Sociology and mainly – to innovation in Language teaching.

Culture holds two types of implications for Language teaching. One is connected with its methodology and we shall deal with it at the end of this unit. The second implication envisages the relationship between language and culture in the process of making words, actions and behaviour mean. This process will be referred to as **meaning attribution** and discussed at some length in the next section.

1.4 LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND MEANING

Culture is a system for attributing meaning. Linguistic knowledge alone is not sufficient to understand statements, like: 'A gallon of the four star, please'. Unless one is familiar with the way of indicating types of petrol in Britain, knowing the meaning of all the words in the sentence is less than helpful. No dictionary lists the expression because it is not an idiom. Cultural knowledge holds the key to understanding statements like this.

What follows is a review of how culture conveys meaning.

1) What Conveys Meaning?

In the following incident, the vehicle of meaning is non-verbal and even non-human.

Extract Thirteen

An informant told me that many years before he was sitting in a tent one afternoon during a storm, together with an old man and his wife. There was one clap of thunder after another. Suddenly the old man turned to his wife and asked, "Did you hear what was said?" "No", she replied, "I didn't catch it." My informant, an acculturated (Ojibwa) Indian, told me he did not know at first what the old man and his wife referred to. It was, of course, the thunder. The old man thought that one of the Thunder birds had said something to him. He was reacting to this sound in the way he would respond to a human being, whose words he did not understand.

(Hallowell 1964: 64)

The event which few Europeans would attribute communicational meaning to is thunder. The culture of that Indian people determines the fact that they seek meaning in a natural event.

2) The Concept-Word Link

As is known, the same furry animal which relates to the string of phonemes /kæt/ for the speakers of English, is denoted by the string /kotka/ for the speakers of Bulgarian. This culture-specific phonological phenomenon has often bewildered researchers. Here we shall focus on the link between word and **concept**, which explains why translation equivalents often hold different nuances of meaning.

Below is an anthropologist's account of an experience which happened while the author was studying the culture of a village in South India.

Extract Fourteen

In that kinship system, the father is called *baap*. Only the actual biological father is called *baap*. But the word for 'uncles' is, from an ethnocentric point of view, a mess. Let's say the father's brother ambles by, and Nate Notebook, as I referred to myself then, asks what he is called. *Motobaap*, they say. The ethnocentric conclusion is that *motobaap* equals 'uncle'.

Another brother stops in, and the anthropologist, chest swelling with pride, points at him and calls him *motobaap*. The group members laugh, do the South Indian village equivalent of slapping their knees, and once again prove that the only reason Nate was ever tolerated was because of his entertainment value.

No, they say, he is called *kaaka*. I expect at this point that readers are having their own ethnocentric reaction.

Now, since a wedding is brewing, the mother's brothers show up from another village. Confused and perplexed, Nate tries *motobaap* and *kaaka* and gets that look he has just stepped out of a flying saucer. No, they are called *masi*. All of them are *masi*.

....

And that system makes sense. *Motobaap* labels the older brothers of the father, and *kaaka* labels the younger brothers. *Masi* labels the brothers of the mother.

Agar (1994:52ff)

This type of mismatch between translation equivalents often turns up because different principles underpin the naming of objects in different languages. Would you translate 'uncle' as 'чичо' or 'вуйчо'? Next, we shall explore further why naming differs.

SAQ 13



Identifying reasons for the difference in the lexicons of two languages

In connection with the anthropological account above, consider reasons why kinship terms are based on different principles in the two languages. A list of reasons is suggested below and you can tick your choices. Choose as many as you wish.

So, the kinship terms in the language of that South Indian village and English differ because:

- the tribe is a very primitive, patriarchal society
- the tribe has a more complicated social structure than English society
- age differences matter in the South Indian village
- inheritance goes down to the father's lineage
- the South Indian language is underdeveloped
- English is underdeveloped
- the language reveals a backward culture
- the observer's culture is too backward to allow him to understand.

Instead of an Answer Key, read the author's explanation.

Extract Fifteen

Since Nate is trained after Boas¹, he knows that the conclusion is not that these people are confused, less efficient, or burdened with so much concrete detail that they'll never rise to the level of abstract intelligence. He knows that there is another system operating, one with its own logic, and that his job is to figure it out.

The point is that the father's line- the patrilineage – is labeled separately from the mother's. ... The kinship terms differ from what Nate Notebook expected, because they dance with a system of inheritance he didn't know anything about. Property passes down the male line. The newly married couple live in the groom's village, not the bride's. The day-to-day social world where age makes a difference in terms of who has authority, a split between older and younger makes sense.

The mother's brothers, on the other hand, live over there somewhere. You don't see them much, and anyway, they don't have anything to do with your inheritance.

(Agar 1994:)

Such variations in language do not concern just the vocabulary. They spread over grammar, phonology etc. For example, Whorf (in Agar 1994) found out that instead of marking verbs for time, a Hopi Indian marks them for validity – whether an action is real, expected or remembered.

So a language builds up its lexicon and grammar in relation to the way society functions. If social life depends on distinguishing a number of varieties of snow, the language contains a hundred words for snow. Translation equivalence is far from a perfect match. Knowing about social organisation is essential to understanding the naming relation.

This has been an issue in Anthropology because naming objects gives the opportunity for explaining the social organisation that determines it. What follows takes us to the paradigm of another discipline – Sociology.

¹ Boas, Franz is considered the primary founder of American anthropology. In opposition to the idea that society was subject to evolution very much like human biology, he rejected descriptions of people from the point of view of the observer's culture. He thought that observers refusing to categorise facts on the basis of categories innate for the society observed get unreliable data. Their mistake to superimpose their own criteria to other societies is called *ethnocentrism*.

3) Language and Context

The meanings of linguistic expressions and behaviour are shaped by the **context** in which they occur. Context has been described as a complex of several components, summarised in the acronym **SPEAKING** by Hymes (1972). The table below gives you an idea of what these components are:

S	etting/cene	the physical circumstances of the event
P	articipants	speaker and hearer, audience
E	nds	purposes and goals
A	ct sequence	the order in which the act of communication proceeds
K	ey	the manner in which the people communicate
I	instrumentalities	how the interaction takes place (the verbal and non-verbal means of communication)
N	orms of interaction and interpretation	the specific properties attached to speaking and interpretation
G	enre	the text type

The nature of this course does not require us to go into more detail concerning the context of situation. However, to give you a sense of how meaning can shift when context components change, we shall consider an example from the experience of a group of Bulgarian student teachers (ST) teaching cultural lessons in British high schools.

The arrival of the Bulgarian ST, new **participants** in the classroom, changed the way an utterance belonging to accepted classroom language, was perceived.

The STs observed that whenever the pupils were noisy, the class teacher would say 'Excuse me' with a specific rise-fall-rise tone. While teaching their own lessons the ST also tried to hush the pupils by using the same expression and even by imitating the tone of the class teacher. The expected result was not achieved. Obviously, the utterance had its desired effect only when made by the teacher, the rightful and accepted participant in this situation.

4) Language Impure

Meaning attribution often connects with **national** culture – therefore, with the national language and customs. **Group** cultures, for their part, also put their imprint on meaning attribution. Sociological parameters, such as class, region, occupation, age, gender etc determine the meaning attributed to words, expressions and non-verbal behaviour.

The language in textbooks, presented as ‘correct’ tends to hide important sociolinguistic information from the learners. What follows is a demonstration.

SAQ 15



Identifying meaning associated with sociolinguistic variation

Below is a text from a sociolinguistic corpus. Read it carefully and indicate which of the questions about the speaker you can answer:

Is the speaker:

- from the South of England?
- a man or a woman?
- well educated?
- careful about what impression his/her language creates?

Circle the questions you can answer.

Extract Sixteen

Aye – what was it noo – Ah heard this wuman saying, an ah was laughin, see. What did she say for ‘rinsin’? She had this soapy waater aw left, see. An she went, “Aw, that’s a shame tae waste thon ...” – an what did she say. It was a right auld-fashioned word. Aw, Ah cannae remember. An Ah mean – ‘sapple’! “That’s a shame tae waste thon sapple!” It was aw this lovely soapy waater, see an she’d only washed wan wee thing in it, an she went, “Anything else tae get washed? ! “That’s a shame tae waste thon sapple!” Ah thoat that was dead funny.

(Montgomery and Reid Thomas 1994: 41)

If you do not understand the language, check the Answer Key for a glossary. The answers to the task are on the following page.



Probably you guessed that this is a woman, not from the South of England (from Scotland, to be precise), probably educated because she is sensitive about word usage as old fashioned or modern, probably in an informal situation. You could identify this information from the 'irregularities' in her speech.

The prescriptive notion of **standard language** classifies the deviant forms as wrong. An alternative attitude is to relate them to the peculiarities of speakers from a region, social group, or in specific circumstances. Withholding such deviations from the learners deprives them of the opportunity to learn to deduce such information.

A cultural approach to language is necessarily descriptive because prescription obscures the significant cultural information.

5) Culture and Teaching

Education is concerned with developing competences. 'Language learning' by a simple etymological process relates to linguistic competence. But as we have seen, meaning is not only in language and can only be understood in a broader cultural context. That is why the goals for language teaching have evolved through the years to include a range of social factors.

Doyé (1996) traces the following scheme of development of language learning competences:

~~Linguistic Competence~~ ⇒ ~~Communicative Competence~~ ⇒ ~~Intercultural Communicative Competence~~



Defining types of competence as a goal for language teaching

Below you will find the description of each competence. In the box beside it, indicate which kind of competence it is: linguistic, communicative or intercultural communicative.

<p>1. An understanding of language as a social phenomenon was brought forth by the so-called Pragmatic Reform. Two influential books – J L Austin’s (1955) <i>How To Do Things With Words</i> and J Searle’s (1969) <i>Speech Acts</i> – appeared and made all the difference. Teachers began to realise that producing well-formed sentences was no longer enough, but that the ability to use such sentences in communication was required. This was the time when, in the curricula of many countries, the catalogues of grammatical structures were replaced by lists of language functions.</p>	
<p>2. People spoke of four skills that had to be attained: speaking, listening, writing and reading. These terms were used in a rather narrow sense, meaning the ability to produce well-formed sentences and to understand such sentences. Aspects like the relationships between the partners in a conversation, the setting in which they conversed, the intentions of the communicants etc were of no importance.</p>	
<p>3. By concentrating almost exclusively on the performance of speech acts the theorists had neglected – or did not take enough consideration of the fact that communication is always about something, and that this something is embedded in the context of a particular culture and cannot be separated from it. In order to be able to communicate people have to understand at least part of the culture of which this language is a prominent part.</p>	



Summary

In this unit we have reviewed culture as a concept comprising behavioural, ideational and material components. They relate to each other and reveal patterns of social organisation, or value systems determining the way a society functions. Some of them make themselves obvious and serve the purposes of analysis. Culture has been shown to be learned, selective, transmissible, subject to change, ethnocentric and interrelated. It operates at levels starting at the individual, through groups and nations to international unities. The approach which attributes group characteristics to individuals, rather than deduce them on the basis of observation leads to otherisation.

We have also discussed culture as a research tool, objective or theoretical framework for various disciplines. In relation to linguistics, we saw culture as a tool for meaning attribution – both as a formative component of the lexicon of a language and as contextual features.

Finally, we have reviewed how in connection with the increased awareness of culture as a system for meaning attribution, language learning has evolved from setting linguistic competence as a goal, through the sociolinguistic concept of communicative competence to intercultural communicative competence, as a full-fledged representation of meanings incorporated in language. The next unit will acquaint you with modes of learning informed by the latter.

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SAQ 1

Outlining a wide interpretation of the term culture

No Answer Key is given at this point. You will return to this question at the end of Section Three.

SAQ 2

Classifying the components of culture

You have read interpretations of culture collected in informal interviews by teacher-trainees on a Cultural Studies course, slightly abridged and edited for the purposes of keeping the classification straight. Each definition has been given a letter-denomination in the list.

You will have placed the letter in one of the columns in the table below indicating whether you consider the thing an artefact, concept or behaviour.

artefacts	concepts	behaviour
(g)	(a)	(b)
(h)	(c)	(f)
(i)	(d)	(m)
(l)	(e)	(o)
(p)	(j)	
	(k)	
	(n)	
	(q)	

SAQ 3

Classifying the components of culture into manifested and hidden ones

Extract Three

Artefacts and behaviours are visible. Concepts are viewed as 'hidden' because they can be interpreted differently, according to different values, or accepted practices. Behaviour is visible in a superficial way. Interpreting what hidden values and patterns determine it add a significant touch to understanding it. Selecting the range of cultural artefacts affects how visible they are on the basis of the approach to culture as "high" or "ordinary". Describing artefacts as they function makes visible the social organisation underpinning them. Evaluating artefacts as accepted or rejected substantiates the hidden value system of society.

SAQ 4

Explaining the characteristics of culture

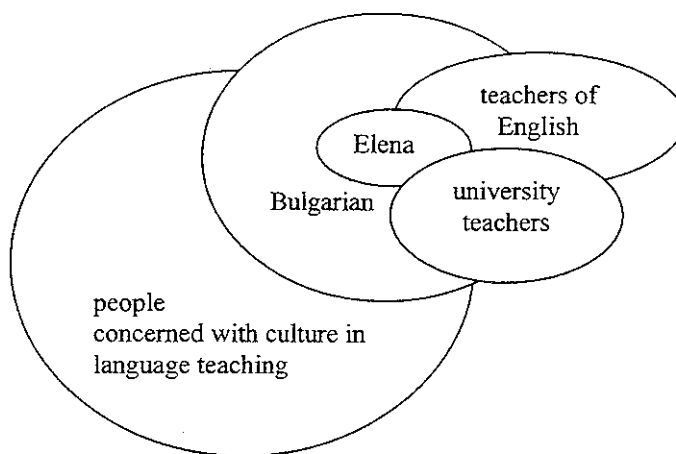
3. culture is dynamic	Culture is ongoing and subject to fluctuation. Through invention new practices, tools and concepts are introduced and through diffusion products from other cultures are borrowed. Cultural calamity describes the effect of wars and destruction on cultural processes. Some components, however, do not change and they are known as the deep structure, such as values, ethics, morals etc.
6. culture is ethnocentric	Keesing (in Porter and Samovar 1994)) notes that ethnocentrism is a universal tendency for any people. "Nearly always the folklore of a people includes myths of origin which give priority to themselves, and place the stamp of supernatural approval on their particular customs." The fact that ethnocentrism is the perceptual window through which a culture interprets and judges other cultures leads to subjective assessment, or in an extreme case – to negation of otherness.
2. culture is transmissible	We use verbal or non-verbal symbols to pass on the content and patterns of a culture – e.g. national flags, written documents, films etc. On the basis of our shared understandings, we can encode and hope that others will be able to decode what we convey.

5. the facets of culture are inter-related	Culture is a whole system, rather than a miscellany with no particular arrangement of components. If one component is changed, another one will follow suit.
4. culture is selective	The orientation to fashions of behaviour or to ways to serve God are culture-specific and subject to personal choice. What a culture selects to pass on to the next generation must be important. Selection also effects separation between cultural groups.
1. Culture is not innate, culture is learned	From infancy on, members of a culture learn their patterns of behaviour and ways of thinking. Our culture-learning proceeds through interaction, observation and imitation. The Hindu child who lives in a home where women eat after the men is learning culture. All of this learning occurs as conscious or unconscious conditioning. This activity is frequently called enculturation , denoting the total activity of learning one's own culture.

SAQ 5

Arranging levels of culture

This represents my own affiliations. It is a little simplified – features, like **brown-eyed**, or **strict** can be added as well. Also, one belongs to a number of groups at national and international levels.



SAQ 6

Analysing the large-culture approach to cultural phenomena

To find out the answers you should read Extract Five.

SAQ 7

Analysing the implications of otherisation

If one observes what people listen to in a pub, then her conclusion should be **only about that particular pub. The fact that in this pub people listen to such music does not mean that everybody listens to it.**

Variation of musical tastes, **or indeed, any taste should be taken for granted until something proves unambiguously that the pattern is typical of all the members of a group.**

A stereotype is fixed by **making conclusions from one case of superficial observation.**

The stereotype is reinforced by **wrongly over-generalising a pattern of behaviour and attributing it to a group wider than the one that has been observed.**

SAQ 8

Exemplifying the small-culture approach

We shall use here the same situation as the one for the large-culture approach - an imaginary foreigner with a taste for classical music entering a pub playing pop-folk music.

(i) need for group cohesion: recipe, convention, discourse identity, expression, exclusivity:

‘The patrons of this pub obviously like this type of music. They meet here to listen to it and probably to discuss the latest songs, groups or gossip.’

(ii) cultural residues and influences: family, nation, region, peers, profession, institution etc.

‘They seem to belong mostly to the taxi-driving profession, judging by the taxis parked outside the pub. If there are people with other jobs, what unites them is the sense of belonging to the group of admirers of this music.’

(iii) social constructions: routinisation, institutionalisation, naturalisation

‘They obviously meet here after their shifts are over. The pub bears the name **Pop-folk** and there are many posters of singers. They also sell the fanzine at the bar.’ (fanzine – a specialist magazine produced by and for fans of various cults eg football, music)

(iv) products: artefacts, art, literature values. Discourse of and about culture

‘The music has simple, repetitive patterns, so it cannot be the factor that holds the attention of these people. The lyrics are obviously very important. They reflect everyday topics and dreams for affluence, power and sexual prowess. These would be the values shared by the patrons of this pub.’

SAQ 9

Conceptualising small culture

1. ‘c’ Small culture is thus a dynamic, ongoing group process which operates in changing circumstances.
2. ‘c’ When a researcher looks at an unfamiliar social grouping, it can be said to have a small culture when there is a discernible set of behaviours and understandings connected with group cohesion.
3. ‘a’ Small culture is thus a dynamic, ongoing group process which operates in changing circumstances to enable group members to make sense of and operate meaningfully within those circumstances.
4. ‘b’. Small culture is thus the sum total of all the processes, happenings, or activities in which a given set of people habitually engage.
5. ‘c’. The dynamic aspect of a small culture is central to its nature, having the capacity to exist, form and change as required.
6. ‘a’ Thus small cultures constitute a ‘tool-kit’ which emerges to solve problems when required. Moreover it involves an underlying competence in which people are not passive “cultural dopes”; they are active, often skilled users.
7. ‘c’ A good example of this is the classroom group where a small culture will form from scratch when the group first comes together, each member using her or his culture-making ability to form rules and meanings in collaboration with others.

SAQ 10

The implications of the small-culture approach to language teaching

There is no suggested answer to this question. You can refer to my notes.

SAQ 11

Identifying the semantic components in definitions of culture

The list of semantic components in the left column has been derived from the definitions quoted above. The other columns in the table are marked with the number of the definitions from above. If you think a definition contains this semantic component, tick the column, if not – leave it vacant.

semantic component	1.	2.	3.	4.
distinguishes group from others	✓	✓	✓	
presents common behavioural patterns		✓		

is determined by common values	✓	✓	✓	✓
governs norms of behaviour	✓		✓	
explains values	✓	✓	✓	✓
links the individual to a group	✓		✓	✓
caters for specific spiritual necessities	✓			✓
creates group cohesion	✓	✓	✓	✓

SAQ 12

The role of culture in research disciplines

1. **Anthropology** - research tool
2. **Sociology** - part of the framework
3. **Cultural theory** - object of investigation
4. **Teaching foreign languages** - part of the framework

SAQ 13

Identifying reasons for the difference in the lexicons of two languages

No answer is suggested here. You can find some reflections on this issue

SAQ 14

Identifying meaning associated with sociolinguistic variation

Extract Sixteen

Yes –what was it now – I heard this woman saying, and I was laughing, see. What did she say for ‘rinsing’? She had this soapy water all left, see. And she went, “Ah, that’s a shame to waste that ...” – and what did she say. It was a right old-fashioned word. Ah, I can’t remember. And I mean – ‘sapple’!
 “That’s a shame to waste your sapple!” It was all this lovely soapy water, see and she’d only washed one little thing in it, and she went, “Anything else to get washed?! “That’s a shame to waste your sapple!” I thought that was dead funny.

The answers to this question are contained in the SAQ itself.

SAQ 15

Defining types of competence as a goal for language teaching

1. Communicative competence
2. Linguistic competence
3. Intercultural communicative competence

? Unit One

Question sheet

This sheet is intended to deal with queries that arise during your work on these materials. The question sheet is not intended to restrict the length or number of your queries - if there is not enough space on the sheet please use it as a cover sheet and attach it to your page(s) of questions/comments. The sheet should be posted to the Course Coordinator.

Name _____

Address for returned sheet: _____

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Page reference _____ question _____

Answer _____

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Page reference _____ question _____

Answer _____
