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"This American English Class": A New Model of Cultural Instruction

Are unmarried couples given more freedom in the United States?
How close are Americans to their co-workers?
Do Americans trust the police?

Finding the right answers to these cultural questions is difficult for any teacher. In the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom, nonnative English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) may feel unprepared to provide immediate and "true" answers to questions like these and thus may rely on limited experience, stereotypes, or uninformed generalizations of the target culture for information to share with inquiring students. Alternatively, these teachers may avoid such questions entirely and instead attempt to remove culture from the language classroom. This response ignores the cultural information that occurs naturally in many language materials and risks exposing students to cultural values without giving them the contextual information they need to process those values. This approach also deprives students of an opportunity to develop linguistically through critical engagement with materials in the target language.

While one might easily imagine the challenges facing NNESTs who are less familiar with the target culture, teachers who speak English natively also struggle when responding to questions like these in the English language classroom. In fact, it is precisely the perceived familiarity and comfort of native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) with the target culture that may lead them to provide cultural representations that are overly neat and definitive. Although there exist misguided beliefs that native speakers are representatives of Western culture (Holliday 2005) and are highly competent in all elements related to English (Creese, Blackledge, and Takhi 2014), no single native English-speaking instructor can completely represent the many pieces of his or her home culture. Attempts to authoritatively and unambiguously answer cultural questions with evidence only from personal cultural experience are sure to oversimplify details and erase diversity.

Avoiding culture in the language classroom or providing instant answers to complicated cultural questions both carry a further risk aside from the threat of the inaccurate cultural representation noted above. These approaches also fail to make use of the important learning opportunity offered by cultural questions, whether posed by the

instructor or raised in the classroom by students; closing down discussions of such questions ends the potential conversation that the questions spark. Choosing instead a deliberate and guided investigation of cultural questions (1) facilitates students' critical thinking and sense of cultural investigation in the classroom, (2) provides a natural opportunity for students to enhance speaking skills through discussion, and (3) relieves the pressure on teachers to act as comprehensive cultural resources.

This article presents the Cultural Facilitation Model as a means to guide the investigation of cultural questions with benefits for EFL instructors (NESTs and NNESTs) and EFL students alike. It will describe how instructors can act as cultural facilitators and empower students to answer cultural questions in the context of an advanced listening course using authentic material, and it will also show how to adapt materials for other courses and student levels.

THE CULTURAL FACILITATION MODEL

Cultural instruction in the EFL classroom would benefit from a new model that leads to sophisticated cultural awareness and maximizes opportunities to use the target language. To replace the roles of NEST as cultural expert and NNEST as cultural novice, we propose instead the Cultural Facilitation Model, where all EFL instructors aim to be cultural facilitators who do the following:

1. thoughtfully choose and present *cultural evidence*—culturally embedded materials produced by and for members of the same cultural environment

2. scaffold, but do not control, evidence-based cultural investigations of both home and target cultures

3. encourage students to act as *cultural investigators* by thinking about culture creatively and critically

CHOOSING CULTURAL EVIDENCE

In this model, cultural evidence refers to materials whose speakers or writers share a cultural framework or background with their *intended* audience; these same materials become critical for cultural instruction with a *non-intended* audience (i.e., members of a different culture). This would include, for example, Armenian English-language learners listening to a radio program produced in the United States with an American English-speaking audience in mind. When a language learner of a different culture engages with cultural evidence, the learner has the opportunity to hear (or see) culture interacting with itself through a conversation in which both speaker and intended audience share the same general cultural assumptions. In such conversations, shared cultural assumptions are treated as normal and are unlikely to be explicitly described or elaborated upon. These unspoken assumptions can offer a rich resource of cultural content for language learners to explore, when they are scaffolded appropriately.

Scaffolding cultural analysis

Cultural evidence, having been created within and for specific cultural environments, automatically carries cultural information in both what is said and what is unsaid. Because these materials contain considerable amounts of cultural content for student analysis, a teacher need not be a cultural expert, but rather can rely heavily on the cultural information embedded in the language to guide student learning. As Kramsch (1998, 31) puts it, "the responsibility of the language teacher is to teach culture *as it is mediated through language*, not as it is studied by social scientists and anthropologists." This means that discussions of culture in the classroom are to be governed by information, values, or differences evident in the language of in-class materials. Both NESTs and NNESTs should aim to let the language of the materials "do the talking" and resist the impulse to oversupplement available language with additional cultural explanation.

One way to improve critical thinking is through thoughtful analysis of target-language culture.

Encouraging critical thinking

The EFL classroom is a good place for activities designed to strengthen students' critical-thinking abilities (Yang and Gamble 2013); in fact, development of critical-thinking skills is often an explicit objective of academic English-language programs. One way to improve critical thinking is through thoughtful analysis of target-language culture.

Understanding of foreign cultures is achieved by exploring the differences between one's own culture and another (see, for example, Kramsch 1993). Investigation of the target culture, then, must include explicit attention to students' home culture in order to create opportunities for contrastive analysis. When students as cultural investigators examine their own home cultures, they adopt the role of "comparative ethnographers," who seek and investigate differences between home and target cultures and, as a result, better understand both (Gilmore 2007, 106). Instructors, too, need to prepare themselves for the Cultural Facilitation Model. Because this model by definition considers cultural knowledge to be emergent, dynamic, and context-specific, NESTs and NNESTs alike may be surprised by students' questions and interpretations.

So far, we have argued the need for a new model of cultural instruction. We now shift to an exploration of the application of this model to a sample course.

THIS AMERICAN ENGLISH CLASS

The particular lens to explore the Cultural Facilitation Model here is a listening-comprehension course developed and taught in an EFL context at the American Corner in Yerevan, Armenia. The American Corner is a mediated cultural space whose goal, with support from the United States Embassy, is to strengthen mutual understanding between the United States and Armenia. Our course was named "This American English Class," after the popular podcast and radio show *This American Life*, from whose episodes all in-class materials were derived.

This American Life is broadcast weekly on public radio stations in the United States to more than two million listeners. Episodes are also available online and through a free podcast, which is downloaded by 2.5 million people each week. We chose to develop a course around *This American Life* because it is a useful source of spoken American English intended for an American English audience (making it *cultural evidence*). A major component of most episodes is the inclusion of a series of stories told around a theme.

Twenty years' worth of episodes of the show, along with written transcripts, are archived online and free to access via the *This American Life* website (www.thisamericanlife.org). Additionally, the latest episode is available for free personal download up to one week after it is released, making it possible for instructors to use programs like Audacity or iTunes to adjust (i.e., slow down) the speed of playback before sharing the episode with students. Due to the range of topics covered in a variety of registers and spoken accents by different American speakers, the show is a fruitful resource for spoken English. The length of *This American Life* episodes makes contextually driven interpretations of content more likely; because students are exposed to longer audio selections rather than decontextualized clips, they are more likely to rely on the available context, rather than their own stereotypes, to interpret the selection's meaning (Dema and Moeller 2012).

We created and taught this course at the American Corner of the Yerevan City Library.

Each session of this weekly, three-month course lasted 90 minutes. The course was free and open to the public, and the approximately 25 weekly students were EFL learners ranging in level from intermediate to advanced.

Decoding cultural information in *This American Life*

The primary learning objective of the course, beyond the linguistic objective of listening skills development, was for students to develop the functional skill of uncovering embedded cultural information from listening passages. In other words, we hoped to help students develop as cultural investigators who could start with *This American Life* and later learn to deconstruct cultural messages beyond the classroom. In our class, the teacher as cultural facilitator was responsible for facilitating and scaffolding the four steps that the students as cultural investigators enact:

1. Listen to other people's stories through the content of *This American Life*.
2. Locate the "strange" or different elements present in these stories.
3. Distinguish between unusual individual experience and unfamiliar cultural context.
4. Identify, investigate, and draw conclusions from the unfamiliar cultural elements.

Encouraging students to identify gaps between home and target cultures draws upon a strength to which language learners are already predisposed—that is, the ability to identify difference: "Foreign language learners are in a unique position to notice the gaps, the ruptures of expectation in the foreign cultural phenomena they encounter" (Kramsch 1998, 30).

After listening to excerpts of culturally facilitated and scaffolded episodes of *This American Life*, the student as cultural investigator explores three questions:

1. Which elements of this story are strange or unusual to *me*? (In other words, what do I need to have explained?)
2. Which of these elements does the *speaker* consider strange or unusual? (What does the speaker provide explanations for?)
3. Which of these elements does the speaker *not* consider strange or unusual? (What things does the speaker not explain and thus treat as common knowledge, shared with the American audience?)

Elements that are strange to both the American speaker and the cultural investigator are not of interest here; this is where the story shows novelty and describes an unusual experience. However, elements that are unexplained or mentioned without emotional reaction by the speaker, but that

	Strange to the speaker	**Not strange to the speaker**
Strange to the cultural investigator	Novelty; unusual experience; *not of interest to the cultural investigator*	Potential cultural difference; implies a background cultural assumption that is not shared by the cultural investigator; *requires further investigation*
Not strange to the cultural investigator	Potential cultural difference; implies a background cultural assumption that is not shared by the speaker; *could require further investigation*	Shared cultural assumption; *not of interest to the cultural investigator*

Table 1. Locating cultural difference

are still strange to the cultural investigator, are the places where the investigator can locate possible cultural differences. A grid representing these overlaps is found in Table 1.

An additional source of potential cultural difference is found in the discrepancy between any elements that the cultural investigator does not consider strange but that are perceived as strange or unusual by the speaker. However, this component, while it could require further investigation, was intentionally excluded from investigation because, perhaps counterintuitively, it can be much more difficult for students to identify that which is normal than it is to identify that which is strange.

CULTURAL INVESTIGATION IN ACTION

In order to better understand how to implement the Cultural Facilitation Model, we provide transcripts of three excerpts of *This American Life* and descriptions of associated activities that inspire cultural investigation.

Excerpt 1: The Babysitter

The transcribed excerpt in Table 2 is from a 2003 episode of *This American Life* called "20 Acts in 60 Minutes." In this excerpt, the host, Ira Glass, is interviewing guest Catherine about an experience she had while babysitting many years before.

The cultural investigator first asks, "Which elements of this story (big or small) are

Ira Glass: This happened to Catherine and her husband John long before they were married, back before they graduated from college.

Catherine: Girls babysit a lot and boys don't. And girls understand that when you babysit, part of the deal is that you get to eat anything you want. So after we'd put the kids to bed, I said, "Well, we should go see what they have to eat." And he said, "We can't eat their food." And I said, "Of course we can eat their food. What do you mean?" And he said, "That's stealing." I said, "John, I promise you. It's fine to eat something. They expect us to. They understand. They don't expect us to starve while we're babysitting." And finally, he said, "Well, we can eat something but only something they won't miss." And they had a huge crate full of grapefruits. And they also had cans and cans of black beans. So I had to have the grapefruit. And John opened up a can of black beans and had that. And then I wrapped up the other half of the grapefruit. And John rinsed out and dried off the empty can of black beans. And we put the wrapped-up half of grapefruit and the cleaned-out can of black beans in his bag.

Ira Glass: So that people wouldn't know that you had eaten these things?

Catherine: We had destroyed the evidence.

Ira Glass: At his insistence?

Catherine: Yes, it was absurd. And then we watched TV, our hunger satisfied. And then the couple came home. And we made small talk. And then John picked up his bag in the hallway, and there was a dull thud. And half the grapefruit fell out on the floor. And I said, "Oh, that's mine. I'm sorry. We're allowed to take a piece of fruit from the dining hall, and I had taken that grapefruit from the dining hall. And that's why I have it here." And then they said, "OK, OK that's nice." And then I put it back in John's bag. And then John picked up his bag again. And then there was, you guessed it, a clang. And clanging out onto the floor went this empty can of black beans. And when the can fell out on the floor, John said, "Oh, that's mine. I keep change in that." Like "I keep change," as if that was less insane.

Table 2. The Babysitter (http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/241/20-acts-in-60-minutes)

Generalizations are okay, unavoidable, and even helpful. However, they must be understood as generalizations, rather than certainties.

strange to *me*?" Here are possible investigator answers, produced by our students at the American Corner:

- A couple has left their children with someone they barely know rather than with a family member or trusted neighbor.
- The babysitter's boyfriend is allowed to be there with her.
- These two university students are working while in school.
- They hide the remains of the food they eat in their bags.
- The grapefruit and empty bean can fall out of their bags when the couple comes home.

A teacher of lower-level students may wish to scaffold this exercise more. One way to do this is to provide a checklist of specific observations or explanations provided by the speaker for the students to verify and compare against their own experiences of their home cultures.

The second step is to identify which of these elements are strange to the *speaker(s)*. In other words, which of these elements do the speaker(s) explain, emphasize, or emotionally react to? To identify these elements, students listen for and analyze the communicative choices (e.g., prosodic, pragmatic, or lexical) of the speakers. In this excerpt, Catherine and Ira laugh loudly at key points in the passage and use words like "absurd" and "insane" to highlight the details that *they* find surprising:

- They hide the remains of the food they eat in their bags.
- The grapefruit and empty bean can fall out of their bags when the couple comes home.

These story details—surprising to both speaker and cultural investigator—are fun to listen to, but ultimately not of further interest for cultural investigation because they suggest a sense of novelty shared by speaker and cultural investigator rather than an underlying cultural assumption that is novel only to the cultural investigator.

However, the first three elements elicit language and attitudes from the cultural investigators that are different from Catherine and Ira's. The couple who have hired Catherine are referred to as only "the couple," indicating a low level of familiarity or intimacy. Catherine's boyfriend, John, is there with her, even though she points out that young men do not often babysit. The listener learns in the first line that Catherine and John are both college students at the time that this story takes place. These three details are not elaborated upon, but rather mentioned briefly to establish context and then dismissed entirely by the speaker in favor of other, more unusual plotlines. This lack of elaboration, however, stood out to our students, most of whom do not often babysit, are unlikely to spend one-on-one time in someone else's home with an unmarried partner, and are not typically expected to work while in school. These items identified by the students, then, serve as evidence of a potential cultural gap, deserving of deeper investigation.

At this point, students participate in a guided reflection (e.g., via discussion or writing, depending on course goals) about the ways in which the details of this episode do or do not fit into their individual understanding of the world. Students are allowed to express difference or disagreement. A university

student with a job, for example, might find the third item ("These two university students are working while in school") unsurprising. Ultimately, the desired product of this exercise will be some sort of consensual generalization about a difference between the target culture (American) and home culture (in this case, Armenian).

It is important to emphasize here that generalizations are okay, unavoidable, and even helpful. However, they must be understood as generalizations, rather than certainties, in order to avoid giving cultural investigators the impression that these culturally embedded values are homogeneous or uniform. Furthermore, the co-constructed generalizations prompted by this method are evidence-based and grounded in real-world examples of language-in-action. These generalizations, essentially, take speakers at their word: "People are not what we believe they are, but what they say they are" (Kramsch 1998, 31). It should also be noted that students can continue to move from generalizations to more sophisticated cultural understanding through similar analysis of additional cultural evidence.

Excerpt 2: The Lonely Employee

Table 3 contains another example from the same 2003 episode sampled above.

This selection provides a more transparent example of a cultural assumption between speaker and audience. In this excerpt, the American audience is directly addressed in the second line: "If you work in a big office, you know there's always at least one person whose name you do not know." Underlying this statement is a significant cultural assumption about intimacy in the workplace, which allows for immediate comparison with the cultural investigator's home culture. A teacher could guide lower-level student attention to this line and ask the following two discussion questions:

1. *"Could this statement be true at an office in Yerevan, Armenia? Why or why not?"* This

Ira Glass: And this brings us to Act 16, That One Guy at the Office. If you work in a big office, you know there's always at least one person whose name you do not know. In Jordanna's office, Matt is that guy for perhaps, as best as anybody can figure, half the people who work there. Jordanna will tell you about it.

Jordanna: Matt Ostrauer sits next to the printer in the busiest hallway at our office. People walk by him dozens of times a week on their way to retrieve printouts. And though he actually works in the New Media department and has nothing to do with the printer, most people don't know this. It's his sad fate that most of his conversations at work are about one thing.

Matt: Originally a lot of them were printer-based. Why is this printer taking so long? Oh, paper's out. Oh, there's a printer jam. Some of it has never really left that genre of conversation. They don't really expand too much, so a lot of it is just very superficial.

Worker: Hey, did you throw away any printouts here?

Matt: No, I didn't touch anything.

Jordanna: I'd been working in the office a few months when one day a friend called me and said he was hanging out with one of my co-workers who lived in his building. "Who?" I asked. "Matt," he said. I had no idea who that was and said so. Then I heard a voice in the background say, "Tell her I sit next to the printer." And that's when his predicament hit me. So I decided to survey my co-workers to see if they knew who he is, what his real job is. Do they even know his name?

Table 3. The Lonely Employee (http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/241/20-acts-in-60-minutes)

item sparked considerable discussion among our cultural investigators at the American Corner, whose anecdotal experiences in their own workplaces and those of their families suggested a far deeper sense of intimacy than that implied by the American speaker of this excerpt. One student mentioned that, in small Yerevan offices, employees often feel like extended family. In this excerpt, encoded information about the target culture led to deeper awareness of the trends of their home culture in Yerevan.

2. *"What might this say about the level of intimacy in the average American workplace?"* Any generalizations born out of this question are cross-culturally informed and evidence-based. Students suggested that it seems, in general, that the American workplace cultivates more-distant relationships or that Americans establish more-distinct boundaries between their personal and professional lives. Some students speculated that this might be a natural consequence of the offices they suspect are much larger in American cities than they are in Yerevan, although this cannot be confirmed by evidence in the excerpt alone. What this example illustrates is that, from one simple excerpt (and especially from one line within it), students were capable of generating a sophisticated cultural picture of American and Armenian work cultures.

Excerpt 3: Squirrel Cop

A third *This American Life* excerpt highlights the potential of culturally embedded materials to address more voices than a single teacher can provide. "Squirrel Cop," the excerpt in Table 4, is from a 1998 episode called "First Day." (Please note that *cop* is a slang word to describe a police officer.)

Cop: There was nothing, nothing going on. Saturday night in the village. Really quiet. Super cold. And this call came over for "unknown animal in a house." And it was on my post. It was about five minutes away. So myself and another car were assigned the call. And we show up there. And luckily for me, it was another guy who was pretty new. So we walk up to the door with all our stuff on, the nylon coat, the vest, the belt, the whole nine yards. And the door opens, and the guy who is behind the door, he's about 30. I was 23 at the time. He's about 30. He looks like a broker, a lawyer. He's just really well put together, a nice guy wearing glasses. He's wearing these, like, silk pajamas with a monogram, got my attention. And he's going, "Listen, I'm really sorry to bother you. Normally, I'd handle this sort of stuff on my own. But my wife really insisted I call." So we ask him what the problem is. He says, "Well, we were having kind of a romantic evening down in the living room, and we heard a scratching upstairs. So I ran upstairs to see what it was. And it turns out it's coming from the attic. There's something up there. And it's just running around, knocking a few small things over. I can't tell what it is. It could be a squirrel, a raccoon. I really don't know." So the other cop that I was with said, "Well, you know, we really don't handle that. It's not so much a police function. But we do have numbers of these private contractors who will come in, and they'll put a humane trap down, and they'll remove the animal for you. And it's really not such a big deal. But it's really not our thing."

So right as he was in the middle of saying that and getting us off the hook, the guy swings the door back, and there's his wife, who was just beautiful. She was beautiful. She was probably about 26 or 27, but just really beautiful—perfect skin, long blonde hair, great teeth, brilliant blue eyes, a really nice smile. Just, like, beautiful and friendly. If she had said, "Eat this broken glass," I just would have said, "OK, broken glass it is. That's fine."

Table 4. Squirrel Cop (http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/115/first-day)

When asked to identify what they found strange, cultural investigators immediately and unanimously pointed out how unusual it was to them that the police had been called to someone's home in order to retrieve a small animal. When asked what they would do if a squirrel snuck into their homes, the cultural investigators offered many answers: capture it ourselves, ask a neighbor for help, open a window and let it find its own way out. Everyone in our class agreed that calling the police was not a believable option, even if there was considerable pressure to do so by one's spouse, as in the excerpt.

Using this cultural gap as inspiration, the first generalization to formulate here would read something like, "Americans may feel more comfortable than Armenians to call the police for help with small problems." However, in order to fully mine the embedded cultural information in this excerpt and develop a generalization that is more reflective of diversity in American attitudes toward the police, our cultural investigators must return to the text. We asked, "Through the police officer's description of the event, what do we know about the couple who called the police?"

> *He looks like a broker, a lawyer. He's just really well put together, a nice guy wearing glasses. He's wearing these, like, silk pajamas with a monogram.*

The underlined selections above contain evidence of wealth and social status.

> *She was beautiful. She was probably about 26 or 27, but just really beautiful— perfect skin, long blonde hair, great teeth, brilliant blue eyes, a really nice smile.*

Here, we see evidence of whiteness. Students on their own were able to identify and decode many of these underlined details; other details, such as "silk pajamas with a monogram," required some teacher scaffolding. Importantly, this process also led to a naturally emerging need for students to investigate and learn specific language from the passage that conveyed these cultural elements.

A more appropriate cultural conclusion to draw after this discussion, using only embedded textual information as cultural evidence, would read something like, "Depending on wealth and race, some Americans feel comfortable calling the police for help with small problems." When compared to the first generalization, this one stands out as truer, more sensitive to the information encoded in the text, and more reflective of the diverse voices and experiences within any target culture.

That final point is especially crucial here. Kramsch (1993) warns of the dangers of treating national culture as homogeneous:

> With the recent revival of nationalism, and as, at the same time, national identities are being questioned around the world, the temptation is great to view culture only in terms of national traits: the French do this, Germans do that. However, traditional questions like 'what does it mean to be French/ to be German?' become increasingly difficult to answer considering the growing multiethnicity and multiculturality of French and German societies. Not that national characteristics are unimportant, but they cannot be adduced without further specification of other cultural factors such as age, gender, regional origin, ethnic background, and social class. National traits are but one of the many aspects of a person's 'culture.' (206)

The rest of "Squirrel Cop" describes a wild series of events. Two police officers, in attempting to capture a squirrel, end up inadvertently killing it, destroying this couple's apartment, and setting some of their furniture on fire. These details—though quite engrossing—are not the focus of the cultural investigator. It will be the cultural facilitator's responsibility to guide student attention back to the quiet assumptions that lead us to cultural difference.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF CULTURAL CONTENT

This American Life was the most appropriate source of cultural content for our students at the American Corner because (1) its emphasis on American English matched the linguistic goals of our students, (2) our familiarity with the podcast allowed for quick retrieval of relevant episodes, and (3) the listening abilities of our students were advanced enough to comprehend the spoken English of the program. It is important to note, however, that the Cultural Facilitation Model can be implemented with a wide range of cultural evidence; *This American Life* serves as merely one example. Another source of listening material that serves as cultural evidence is TED Talks. TED Talks are short lectures on a variety of personal and academic topics. Many are available for free on YouTube. Speakers span a wide range of cultural backgrounds, and teachers need to select TED Talks carefully for use as cultural evidence.

The Cultural Facilitation Model may also be adapted for English-language reading courses. Desired material would be level-appropriate, related to a topic of interest, and, crucially, written by and for members of the same cultural environment. One possible source of written cultural evidence to introduce into a reading classroom is *The New York Times*' "Room for Debate" series (www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate). Here, a variety of topics—political, social, economic, and environmental—are discussed and debated in short pieces presenting opposing viewpoints. An archive of more than 1,500 debates, dating back to 2009, is available for free reading. Additionally, as each set of articles surrounding a topic is written by different contributing authors—ranging from high school students to professional experts in a field—there is a wide range of linguistic sophistication and difficulty. Searches across articles are made easier with a list of available hyperlinks on the home page, which classifies debates into discussion topics as specific as "Environment," "Food," and "Technology." One can just imagine the American-specific cultural discussion that could be generated by a set of articles addressing the question "Should Every Young Athlete Get a Trophy?" (*The New York Times* 2016).

ADAPTING THE CULTURAL FACILITATION MODEL TO DIFFERENT CONTEXTS AND LEVELS

Though this article has focused on the use of the Cultural Facilitation Model in the context of an advanced listening course, this approach to cultural and linguistic investigation can be adapted to other classroom contexts. For example, while parts of this model may require a non-beginner-level linguistic baseline, much of the approach can be adapted for different levels. Instructors can start by ensuring that their cultural evidence is level-appropriate by selecting passages at the students' language level, as much as possible, and then by adapting the materials as necessary, or through the targeted preteaching of vocabulary, grammar, or content. In the case of listening materials, transcripts can also be provided, or recordings can be repeated or slowed; in the case of written materials, texts can be enhanced with annotations or glosses as necessary.

The steps of the cultural investigation can also be adjusted to suit varying student levels. For example, the language of the questions and statements scaffolding the cultural investigation can be simplified or modified (e.g., by using vocabulary students are already familiar with). Teachers should also use cultural investigation to maximize opportunities for targeted language instruction. These opportunities can happen spontaneously, as students reveal the need for certain vocabulary or make errors in production, or can be predetermined by the instructor based on learning objectives. For example, the teacher could incorporate instruction on hedging or qualifying assumptions (e.g., when developing a cultural generalization), supporting an argument with a dependent clause, expressing disagreement,

or understanding and producing the vocabulary needed to describe a story or evaluate the cultural evidence.

A final possible adaptation to this approach is its scope. In our example, this approach guided our entire course, though such curricular flexibility is clearly somewhat rare. In other cases, instructors can make as much or as little of this approach as fits their course situation and goals. Instructors wishing to maximize this approach with extended follow-up can turn in-class cultural investigations into projects where students take the model used in class and apply it to a cultural investigation driven by their own interests. This work can result in the production of a writing assignment or presentation reflecting on the linguistic and cultural outcomes of such an investigation. An instructor less sure of how to apply this approach or subject to a more constrained curriculum can likewise adapt the model to fill less class time. For example, an instructor required to use a course textbook may wish to supplement a unit on "Transportation" with a short piece of cultural evidence on a related topic, such as a TED Talk on infrastructure or a *New York Times* Room for Debate article about airport security, accompanied by two or three simple discussion questions.

CONCLUSION

The Cultural Facilitation Model offers an adaptable and student-driven approach to cultural instruction. Language instructors act as cultural facilitators by (1) selecting cultural evidence to bring into the classroom; (2) scaffolding cultural analysis and language use surrounding cultural discussions; and (3) supporting critical thinking. Students act as cultural investigators by identifying the perceived strange or different elements present in a piece of cultural evidence, and then investigating underlying cultural differences in order to arrive at a more sophisticated understanding of both the target and home cultures. As facilitators and investigators, teachers and students work together to process embedded cultural information, resulting in heightened cultural awareness and maximum opportunities to use naturalistic English.

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