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## Performed Culture 体演文化

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*Learning to Participate in Another Culture*  
学习参与另一种文化

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# Performed Culture

## *Learning to Participate in Another Culture*

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I've long ago thought that teaching and learning anthropology should be more fun than they often are. Perhaps we should not merely read and comment on ethnographies, but actually perform them. Alienated students spend many tedious hours in library carrels struggling with accounts of alien lives and even more alien anthropological theories about the ordering of those lives. Whereas anthropology should be about, in D.H. Lawrence's phrases, "Man alive" and "woman alive," this living quality frequently fails to emerge from our pedagogies, perhaps, to cite D.H. Lawrence again, because our "analysis presupposes a corpse."

Victor Turner: Dramatic Ritual/Ritual  
Drama: Performative and Reflexive  
Anthropology"

## **CULTURE AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY**

How would learners and teachers of a foreign language and culture go about taking seriously Turner's suggestion? Should we offer performance as a pedagogical alternative to the more common approach of seeking expert accounts in the humanities and social sciences? The answer may lie in finding the pedagogical analogy to treating culture as a corpse. When we humans have the resources and opportunities, we have an abundant variety of ways to deal with our dead: by the discrete weeping, noisy wailing, or stylized commentary of the still living. By doing something to or with our human remains: putting them out of sight, encasing or enshrouding them, preserving them, decorating them, transmuting them with fire, locating them with symbolic representations, distributing them over favored geographical formations, or feeding them to beasts. In some places we eat them. All this, it seems, is done with the general notion of creating memories of the deceased that please the still living and to

ease the mourning, i.e., the painful remembering of the deceased. Funerals are for the living — an understanding that makes good practical advice of Mr. Berra's injunction to "Always go to other people's funerals — otherwise, they won't go to yours." (Berra 1998:73)

Are curators, authors, social scientists, and critics the only ones who play metaphorically equivalent roles as the morticians and mourners of culture, or do language teachers contribute to this tradition? Observations of language classrooms often find the cultures of the societies we study safely out of sight, buried in the base culture of the learners, or conveniently encased in capsules. I once overheard a Japanese teacher respond to a student who made a mistake in the way he referred to the teacher in Japanese by saying: "Call me 'Kaz,' Dude." He later explained that he wanted his students to feel comfortable speaking Japanese, so he made sure he only talked about those things that were of interest to his high school students. In other classrooms at designated periods students are turned away from language to study culture, because, as I was once told at such a time, "language and culture cannot be separated."

Even sophisticated practitioners treat culture as a demonstration of the "knowledge about" found in eulogies rather than the situated "knowledge of" that we need when dealing with man and woman "alive". A discussion of the behavior and attitudes of native and nonnative speakers presents an example of French, American and German interpretations of a French advertisement that varied according to the nationality of the interpreters. (Kramersch 1997) Concerning the departures from the French interpretations we are told:

The interpretations of those American and West German readers were not wrong. All three meanings are potentially enclosed in the French ad...If the ad is used to teach French around the world, the diversity of potential readings will increase. Native and nonnative speakers will find in it different confirmations of their worldviews and different definitions of privilege, right, and prerogative. (pp. 361-2)

The concept of performed culture presented here draws a clear line in the sands of pedagogical intention. It contradicts Kramersch's assumption that the interpretations are "enclosed in the French ad" and that those enclosed interpretations will proliferate in proportion to the cultures of the readers that come upon it — like a string of peculiar eulogies at a memorial service. The

perspective presented here assumes that the interpretations exist in the cultures of the readers; therefore, the goal of persons wanting to learn French language and culture is to participate in the interpretations of any sector of French or Francophone culture within which they are likely to find themselves engaging in personal interactions or conducting social transactions. Furthermore, it is not a goal of persons wanting to learn to communicate within French-speaking societies to create interpretations that are characteristic of other languages and cultures.

Encountering a foreign culture with the intention to participate in the lives of people born and raised in it is a daunting challenge. In Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, Paulina, who is about to bring a statue to life, warns: "Those that think it unlawful business I am about, let them depart." In citing Paulina's speech, Frederick Turner concurs that "it ought to be dangerous to bring the dead back to life." (F. Turner 1985:47)

When evoking student performances of a foreign culture, this is an entirely appropriate caution: Playing in someone else's culture can be extremely disconcerting, if not actually physically dangerous. By not keeping the target cultures in our language classrooms safely inert, we abandon the singularity of the base culture and with it the security that what we intend is what our behavior actually means. Mark Turner, in a book about the study of English literature (p. 27), describes this insecurity well enough for an extensive citation:

Some of us are afraid of changing the language we speak, which is to say, of learning a foreign language. Accurately or not, some of us feel that to learn it in childlike ways would require us to open up a realm of competence we are afraid to open. There is a sense that language is a scary thing, and that we were lucky to have gotten through learning it the first time. This fear leads to the prevalent style of trying to learn a foreign language without changing or disturbing anything that is already in place — to learn in adult ways by controlling the learning, regulating the methods of instruction, insisting on seeing every phrase written down, and constantly translating everything into the mother tongue. The result, almost always weak, is nonetheless a level of competence that is acceptable to us because it causes nothing to be reopened or changed; the self, we feel, stays intact.

At the deepest level, we feel that we will lose ourselves if we change our default concepts. We feel that we were lucky to have become competent once. We do not want to be faced with it

again. Professionally and personally, we feel that a change in our default concepts will suddenly make us incompetent. As a defense, we tell ourselves that we do not have to pay attention to whatever would make us revise our default concepts. We call these things irrelevant. (M. Turner 1991:27)

This avoidance of a challenge to our defaults was clearly illustrated by a young American student interviewed on National Public Radio. When advised to conform to the cultural expectations of Parisians by refraining from smiling at strangers and being somewhat flirtatious with the opposite gender, she expressed her determination not to abandon her American defaults, but her wavering voice you will have to take my word for this in the medium of an essay betrayed an unmistakable trepidation:

If you flirt with the people here, you could get yourself into a kind of compromising situation. But just to smile...Maybe you can change the people...And if they don't want to smile back, it's their choice. I'm a happier person for it.

(National Public Radio,  
Morning Edition 12-29-94)

The student's suggestion that she might change French culture with her smile is a common kind of delusion with which many who find themselves challenged by the expectations of a still foreign culture comfort themselves.

Language teachers who set about to follow Victor Turner's suggestion by having their students actually perform culture must provide the possibilities of learning to converse in the cultures being studied. There is no way to learn a culture without talking with the folks who live it and create it day by day. Learners must perform the target culture as they perform the target language. Performing a culture in each case should aim to create a memory focused on pleasing the subjects of the remembering so they will want to continue the conversing. This contrasts with kind of memory that we seek to create by a funeral rite — a memory with appeal to the needs of the assembled mourners: the kind of memory that supports critiques and “war stories” told and retold back in the base culture, travelers' tales usually begun with the phrase: “When I was in (wherever)...” Again, in contrast to the “accounts of alien lives” and “alien anthropological theories,” performance as a way of demonstrating

*knowing* is significantly different from the conventional discourses revealed by conventional academic reading and commenting.

A culture is the product of complex social interactions and a performance of any fragment of it must involve a number of persons communicating in shared frameworks of agreements and expectations. To account for any specific part of a culture through performance should prove to be a more complicated matter than the creation or re-creation of any single person's interpretation. This is especially the case when the *interpretation* of a target culture is valued by its reception in the base culture (e.g., Kramsch), but the *performance* of a target culture is judged by its appropriateness to the target culture itself.

The discussion from here on regards conversations as performances within cultures and considers how adults from one culture learn to converse in another culture with something of the same purposefulness they evince in their native cultures. The assumptions behind the discussion revolve around the perspective that culture is the basis of meaning and that "language not only transmits, it creates or constitutes knowledge or 'reality'." (Bruner 1986:132)

## **CULTURE, LANGUAGE, AND PERFORMANCE**

The concept of a culture and behavior presented in this discussion is analogous to a grammar that subtends a language, the major difference being that a culture is many times greater and more complex than a grammar. My knowledge of English grammar can be identified with my ability to create utterances of more or less the right content and form at the right time without premeditation. When I want to speak, I begin an utterance with the confidence that I will be able to sequence sounds, words, and phrases without thinking about the process. In a similar way, my knowledge of American culture allows me to engage in social activities and interactions without a great deal of prior planning. Just as my knowledge of English grammar does not insure that what I say is always correct in fact or beneficial to me personally, my knowledge of American culture will not guarantee success in all my social endeavors. After all, we each too often experience failure in our own cultures. Knowledge of a culture provides the basis for participation in the social interactions and transactions that lead to success or failure. In short, it gets us into the game. In

foreign language study the goal is to inculcate the default behaviors in language and society that sustain culturally appropriate behavior.

Culture in an individual is a concept that is largely congruent with mind, memory, and meaning. It develops in the early years of life when the fictile brain itself is undergoing drastic restructuring — a process that to a significant degree proceeds under the influence of its social environment, i.e., its culture. Jerome Bruner (1983) tells us that children use culture before they use language. Hector Hammerly (1982:214) illustrates the development of second language competence within a communicative competence that is itself developed within a culture competence.

Culture is about as complex a phenomenon as humans are capable of contemplating. As language teachers we are not going to represent culture in a way that completely satisfies any number of academic traditions that claim culture as a subject, nor should we be expected to do so. But we can be expected to identify and stage performable “chunks” of the cultures we teach that can be rationalized within a coherent concept of culture. The main operational change this will entail is to require presentation of meaning to precede the presentation of the linguistic code, a view of communication that is not consistent with the way most linguists view language. Here is how Randy Allen Harris (1993:5) explains to the rest of us how professional linguists approach language:

Linguists examine language in a variety of largely opportunistic ways, as physicists examine matter, biologists life, but among their primary methods are those of the surveyor. They carve up the vast territory between sound and meaning into more manageable provinces. The borders between these provinces are frequently in dispute and hang on some very technical issues..., but their existence and their primary concerns are well established. Moving in the conventional direction, phonetics concerns the acoustic dimensions of linguistic sound. Phonology studies the clustering of those acoustic properties into significant cues. Morphology studies the clustering of those cues into meaningful units. Syntax studies the arrangement of those meaningful units into expressive sequences. Semantics studies the composite meaning of those sequences.

Randy Allen Harris,  
The Linguistic Wars

This explanation of the bottom-up approach to language is typical of a linguistics tradition which has meaning pieced together in a process of lining up increasingly complex units of a code. The epitome of this view is the essentialist belief in the existence of the sentence as the container of meaning, a belief that has a leading proponent of this view, Steven Pinker, identify the question he is asking himself as: “How does the brain represent the meaning of a sentence?” (New York Times, 1997:B16)

Performed culture as an approach to language study, starts with meaning and treats the linguistic code (and with it the concept of sentence) as a medium for accessing and thereby more fully participating in that meaning. H. Ned Seelye (1984:4) points out that this “language in culture” perspective is hardly new, citing John Dewey in 1897 and Yuen Ren Chao in 1968 on this point. I interject between them a pertinent later comment from Dewey that bears on the following discussion:

...language is almost always treated in the books of pedagogy simply as the expression of thought. It is true that language is a logical instrument, but it is fundamentally and primarily a social instrument.

John Dewey,  
“My Pedagogic Creed,” 1897

Language exists only when it is listened to as well as spoken. The hearer is the indispensable partner.

John Dewey,  
*Art as Experience*, 1934

...action and language are thoroughly mixed. (It is not most often in the form of the connected discourse of sentences and paragraphs.)

Yuen Ren Chao,  
*Language and Symbolic Systems*, 1968

As a subject of study, language which is framed in culture and inextricably commingled with action demands performance as a pedagogical necessity rather than inviting it as an option.

Performance in the pedagogy of studied languages accommodates the ambiguity of the term in social and literary studies. It includes the ideas of a “staged” event, of observable behavior rather than abstract categories of

behavior, as situated knowledge in contrast to essential or idealized knowledge. Victor Turner (1991:101) explains that “performance does not necessarily have the structuralist implication of manifesting form, but rather the procedural sense of ‘bringing to completion’ or ‘accomplishing.’ To perform is thus to complete a more or less involved process rather than to do a single deed or act.” (p. 101) Performance in foreign language study also bears an aesthetic aspect not unlike performance on a theatrical stage. A dramatic actor earns admiration by braving the boundaries of his art, giving his audience the sense of possible failure at every turn. Performing in a foreign language and culture is no less a risky business, no less a matter of flirting with failure.

Contemplating performable culture leads us to relate words and concepts that are as often as not confused and interchanged. Cultures are complex knowledge structures that exist in societies that, in turn, are identified with particular civilizations. Cultural performances then are isolated events of civilized behavior, that can be models of actual or ideal behavior in the target society. Such events can be as simple as a greeting or as complex as negotiating a disagreement while maintaining a relationship. To achieve the presence of a foreign culture in foreign language study requires the conscious repetition of events that conform to the expectations of the target culture. Thus, the main function of the design of a language curriculum is the selection, analysis and presentation of cultural events to be performed by learners and critiqued by teachers.

Performances, in foreign language pedagogy as well as in other venues, are conscious repetitions of “situated events” that are defined by five specified elements inferred from Carlson (1996): 1) place of occurrence, 2) time of occurrence, 3) appropriate script/program/rules, 4) roles of participants, and 5) accepting and/or accepted audience. (Carlson)

Performance in language pedagogy also evokes the matter of the cultural valuation of repetition. Howard Gardner (1989:261-262) compares the Chinese penchant for public performance to the American aversion, a contrast that may explain the relative success of *karaoke* in the two countries. While American students are learning Chinese culture through performance, they should also become aware that repetition of accepted understandings in Chinese culture may be more valued by the Chinese than the seemingly spontaneous insights prized by their fellow Americans.

## **PERFORMED CULTURE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY**

A program of foreign language study based on performed culture should be clear in its basic assumptions of goals and procedures. Those presented here focus on intention, situated meaning, memory, and pedagogical design.

**One: The purpose of learning to converse in a foreign language is to gain the ability to establish *intentions* in the foreign culture.**

Whatever you set out to accomplish in a social environment, whether by conducting business, research, or personal relations, your intentions must be recognized and accepted by the people with whom you are interacting. And you must be able to perceive their intentions as well. In the absence of mutual understanding of intentions, whatever you create with your use of language will rarely be what you intend. Most of the observed failure of cross-cultural transactions can be attributed to not knowing how to have intentions recognized or how to recognize the intentions of others. The act of being someone in a culture is framed by that culture. American students engaged in learning “truly foreign languages,” to use a phrase from Jordan and Walton(1987), often have great difficulty with the realization that as individuals in the culture they are studying they are only who they are allowed be by that culture. Recall Dewey’s observation: “The hearer is the indispensable partner.”

Given this understanding, the individual is presented with a “chain of being” in a culture:

1. Culture creates contexts
2. Contexts provide meanings
3. Meanings produce intentions
4. Intentions define individuals

The connection between language and intentionality was noted by Searle (1985:5):

Language is derived from intentionality and not conversely. The direction of pedagogy is to explain Intentionality in terms of language, the direction of logical analysis is to explain language in terms of Intentionality. (p. 5)

To follow Searle's definition of pedagogy, it must be assumed that the language serving as the medium of the explanation of intentionality is already understood. For the purposes of teaching, learning and performing an unknown language and a culture, it is necessary to approach the language through intentionality — the direction of logical analysis.

**Two: Culture is the source of meaning and conversations in a particular language require communication in the frame of a particular culture.**

This implies that conversations between persons from different cultures extract interpretations from either the target or base culture of the foreigner, who may be expected to have access to both the culture of the language he is speaking and to his own native culture. If two people from different cultures are conversing, the strategy most likely to obtain a desired understanding is to take the purpose of the exchange from the culture of the language being spoken. If both the native and foreigner have access to the foreigner's base culture, the next best strategy might be to speak in one language and interpret from the other culture. Confusion or miscommunication is most likely to occur when both parties interpret a conversation in their respective cultures.

Creating the roles of non-intimate host and guest in Chinese and American cultures provides an easy illustration. Two persons behaving in the most socially appropriate manner, say, an American inviting a Chinese guest to a join him in a bit of refreshment, nicely illustrates roles that exist in one culture and not in another:

An American host offers a choice of beverage or something to eat, but tends to not insist that the guest accept it. Many American hosts avoid any appearance of insistence, thinking it more "polite" to permit the guest to be in charge of making choices, even recognizing that guests might make choices other than those offered by the host. This is reflected in the phrase that American hosts often use: "Make yourself at home."

Chinese guests, on the other hand, are likely to avoid readily accepting proffered refreshments and avoid answering a question about what they would like, feeling it "polite" not to take the initiative by expressing a choice other than those that might be offered by the host. When offered a choice by the host, a Chinese guest will often repeat a formulaic phrase:

*"Ke sui zhu bian"* (a guest conforms to the host's wishes).

For a simple invitation to resolve itself to the satisfaction of both concerned — that is, for a host to feel he has been a proper host and for a guest to feel he has been a proper guest — our interlocutors have three basic options for conducting this interaction:

1. Use the Chinese contexts: The guest declines the offered refreshment an appropriate number of times and the host insists until the guest partakes or sets it aside.
2. Use the American contexts: The host mentions the refreshment options and awaits the guest's choice.
3. Adapt a meta-culture strategy: Host and guest recognize the conflicting behaviors required by the American and Chinese contexts and overtly negotiate how each are to behave for the nonce.

In performing even such simple social behaviors, the culture provides the contexts. If a particular culture does not provide the context for a proper guest who imposes his choices on his host, then one cannot be that kind proper guest in that culture. Anyone unknowingly performing such a role will be judged to be an improper guest, or, if the host is aware of what is being attempted, a foreigner who must be either accommodated or avoided. If both the host and the guest are aware of differing expectations while being unable to perform to each other's expectations, they can create a temporary state of expectations by remarking on that difficulty and agreeing for the time being that they will recognize each other's behavior as acceptable.

Although this nonce adaptation of a meta-culture strategy serves to validate unexpected behaviors sufficiently to resolve a particular situation, it has limited efficacy. It cannot be sustained for an extended period of time or through a complex transaction without transforming into still more complicated cultural quandaries or having the participants exhaust their motivations for engaging in such a relationship. The meta-culture strategy also has the stringent requirement that all parties be equally aware and willing to play the game. Such circumstances do not usually occur when one is operating in a foreign culture.

The meta-culture strategy often backfires, causing the resentment or misunderstanding that it is employed specifically to avoid. An example of this was observed at a conference of American and Japanese educators seeking ways to increase the numbers of Americans studying in Japanese universities.

The American director of the conference, an eminent educator who was chosen to lead the conference because of his knowledge of Japan and the Japanese, began the conference by announcing to the Japanese participants that although he knew he and the other leaders of the conference should have followed the Japanese custom of personally informing the participants of the content of the meeting ahead of time, circumstances prevented him from doing so. He would just go ahead in the program in the American fashion by dealing with items and decisions as the need arose. The effect on his Japanese audience was quite negative: They concluded that the “Japanese expert” was not so expert after all if he thought that explaining a Japanese custom that he had ignored was sufficient to impress them. Almost to a person, they judged the efforts of the conference director to be at least a mild affront: If he knew what to do and he did not do it, then it must be that he viewed the prior consulting to be superfluous. The two-day meeting failed to address the issues in any meaningful way, perhaps partially as a result of this bit of meta-culture discourse and partially just because meetings frequently fail to be productive.

Taking the ability to establish intentions in a foreign culture as the goal of foreign language study expands the focus of that study as it is commonly practiced: the *contexts* of the language are given a standing that is equal to the formal *code* of the language, if not the priority.

### **Three: Learning to perform a foreign culture entails constructing a memory of that culture**

If the core experience of a successful foreign language study career consists of a spiral of increasingly complex interactions within a foreign culture, gaining the ability to successfully complete these interactions is a process of constructing an extensive memory. While the complexity of such a memory is a constantly expanding story that cannot be explicated here, the pedagogical designs of our instructional devices and environments suggest operational assumptions about the nature of the memories we are building:

1. To function in a foreign culture an individual must draw on inculcated default memories of that culture rather than relying on a dialectic between base and target cultures. The flow of activity in a social interaction and the speed of human language production does

not permit one to constantly refer to the differing requirements of a base and target culture.

2. Memory subtending prolonged successful behavior in a target culture is not a translation or mapping from the base-culture memory to the target culture.
3. Memory is a complex of sub-systems that do not always interact. Thus, there are many processes of compiling memory and varied ways to evaluate it.

An important function of a memory is to provide contexts for communicating in a culture. Sustained by memory, our senses function in these contexts. Sensory systems do not simply let sensations in; they abstract multi-level features of the sensory data. Moreover, our sensory systems are constructed and modified as we develop our capacities; our surroundings determine what our eyes can see and our ears can hear and how to assign meaning, as we develop the abilities of these senses by exposing them to different contexts. If we are to think of our capacities for language and culture as sense systems that process incoming information and extract meaning and that constitute the most self-referential of all imaginable information systems, we need to consider how to create and construct contexts for developing such systems.

**Four: We can create pedagogical situations and devices that facilitate the construction of a memory of a foreign culture.**

Learning to establish intentions in a foreign culture involves learning the culture. Hector Hammerly (1982:512-514) divides the instructional discourses on the target culture into three parts:

1. Achievement culture: the hallmarks of a civilization.
2. Informational culture: the kinds of information a society values.
3. Behavioral culture: the knowledge that enables a person to navigate daily life.

As learners of a foreign language progress in their ability to function in the target culture, achievement culture and informational culture become increasingly useful knowledge. But from the early stages of a foreign language learning career, the focus is on behavioral culture, which is the knowledge that enables the learner to create sufficient comfort to encourage natives to

maintain the long-term relations necessary for accumulating experience in the culture.

Presentation of behavioral culture in the instructional setting can be further categorized by the ability of an instructor of a target culture to present the knowledge to a base culture learner:

1. Revealed culture: cultural knowledge that a native is generally eager to communicate to a non-native.
2. Ignored culture: cultural knowledge a native is generally unaware of until the behavior of a non-native brings it to light. This is what Edward T. Hall has called “hidden or covert culture.”
3. Suppressed culture: knowledge about a culture that a native is generally unwilling to communicate to a non-native.

While revealed culture is the main cultural content of textbooks and classroom lectures, it is the ignored, or hidden, culture that tends to occupy the attention of effective foreign language teachers. As we experience generations of novice learners generalizing behavior in the target language and culture, we are continually made aware of behaviors that reflect previously unsuspected cultural constraints. Although certain aspects of suppressed culture seem to fascinate novice learners, avoiding them can be justified on functional grounds except when they have direct bearing on the learners’ reception in the target culture.

Because many of us teaching an East Asian language are asked to consult briefly with business people who are off to deal with the folks across the Pacific, we are aware that it is possible to learn a small amount of culture without learning the language code. Conversely, we have all no doubt encountered many individuals who have learned to perform a foreign language code without having picked up any appreciable cultural knowledge. Many Chinese on official tours of America in the 70’s and early 80’s showed a remarkable command of English that was never exercised outside the contexts of the Chinese culture of the time. Indeed, for a Chinese person of that time to do otherwise would have invited doubts about his loyalty and attracted serious criticism from within his group. American missionaries and State Department employees are other groups that often demonstrate target language abilities outside the parameters of the target culture. If one’s intentions are narrowly defined, i.e., completing a foreign tour without betraying one’s cultural or

political purity, or promoting a singular base-culture message in the target culture, language without culture is an option.

If life gets any more complicated than that, say, anything involving reciprocal relationships, language without culture eventually leads to disappointment. The North American edition of the *Asahi Shimbun* from a Japanese housewife of 30, carried a letter to the editor that illustrates an event that involved a rather accurate linguistic perception with an insufficient cultural knowledge:

*Asahi Shimbun* (Satellite Edition) 21, September, 1993  
Have a Nice Day

“Is my daughter boring?”

“This happened when I took my one-year old to a prestigious department store in downtown Manhattan. When I was looking at the directory, a sales clerk walked by and started talking to my child: 'Hello, how are you? What's your name?'

Startled by this approach by a total stranger, my daughter became silent with a stiff face. The store clerk turned to another customer, shrugged her shoulder, and said 'She is dull.'

When I returned home, I looked up 'dull' in the English-Japanese dictionary and found as synonyms words like 'blunt' and 'boring.' Whatever it was, it did not have a positive sense. I used to think that Americans were kinder to children than Japanese. As I used to feel grateful to them for volunteering to help with the baby, I was all the more shocked by the incident. Even if she meant it as a joke, how could the clerk at such a first-rate store be so insensitive?”

A housewife (age 30)  
New York

Japanese housewife (age 30) expresses her hurt at having her daughter insulted by a target native (American); while it is clear to any target native that no insult was intended, indeed, the intent was just the opposite. Had Housewife (age 30) known something of the five elements of a “performance” in American culture, she would have not misinterpreted the sales woman’s intent:

1. *Specified place.* Customers are suppose to be made “at home” in American department stores.

2. *Specified time*: When on the job, salespersons engage customers in casual conversation on observable personal matters in order to show friendliness and trustworthiness. This assumes that the personal matter is either complimentary or likely to lead to a sale.
3. *Specified script/ program/ rules*: Babies are praised by comparisons to dolls. The adjective *dull* is not ordinarily used to insult people. The phrases “She’s a doll.” and “She’s dull.” are phonologically close but far apart as possible scripts. A shrug of the shoulders indicates that the lack of response from the child is not important.
4. *Specified roles*: Sales persons do not ordinarily insult customers (even in New York City), but do involve third-party strangers/onlookers/customers in conversational exchanges.
5. *Specified audience*: Babies are praised to favorably impress their parents and to show the praiser’s good will to onlookers.

Foreign language teachers learn much from this kind of failure in communication. Housewife (age 30) demonstrated a fair command of English phonology: She was able to remember the pronunciation *doll* long enough to go home to consult a reference work about the expression using standard English orthography. This is no small feat in a foreign language. Her apperception of the syntax was a bit less skillful, hearing *dull* instead of a *doll*. However, I would argue that her failure derived mainly from her inability to perceive her interlocutor’s intention; instead taking her interpretation of the event from the expectation that the sales clerk’s comment would be a critique of her daughter’s performance rather than an attempt at ingratiating herself with a customer.

Most foreign language pedagogues have a little secret: You cannot learn a foreign language, you can only learn to do things in a foreign language. This is a “secret” only because it is hard to explain to someone who is intent on learning (some say “mastering”) a foreign language that he or she has to learn how to converse with members of a target language community one “event” at a time until the accumulated effect is a generalized capacity. The adventure of our Japanese housewife (age 30) suggests how we can structure these events and what features we need to emphasize when creating culture learning opportunities in foreign language pedagogy.

## **CURTAIN CALL**

Conversing in a foreign language is dangerous. Ways of behaving that have served us well from an early age can suddenly betray us and land us in a swelter of misunderstanding and embarrassment. Most of the behaviors that we use constantly in conversations in our native languages have been learned and then the learning has been forgotten. We are likely to be unaware that they are indeed distinct learned behaviors; therefore, we are equally unaware that we have to learn to perform different (often contrasting) behaviors to converse effectively with a foreign language.

These behaviors are the means by which we enact the cultures within which we construct ourselves. As such, they are indispensable to creating a knowledge of a culture. To be useful this knowledge has to be a part of a memory that is instantly available in the heat of the culture game, not recalled at leisure and ruminated over in the safety of our base culture. Foreign language pedagogues will never eliminate the danger and the stress involved in learning to communicate in a foreign culture, but we can more clearly delineate the nature of the game, cultivate a healthy sense of adventure, and gain in our appreciation of what it means to be alive.

Yantai, Shandong Province

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