ESL Culture in the classroom

(Are you shooting an Elephant?)

Anna Franca Plastina
Università della Calabria,
Italy

Introduction

Although defining the term may seem quite a difficult enterprise, Lazar (1993) raises the issue in an interesting perspective, where the intrinsic meaning of the questions denotes a natural divide:

Is our definition to be an anthropological one in which culture is defined loosely as the values, traditions and social practices of a particular group . Or do we define culture as the discernment and knowledge traditionally possessed by the well-educated, enlightened and cultivated native speaker which is passed on in "good literature"? (p. 16) . Goodenough (1964) asserts that "culture is not a material phenomenon; it does not consist of things, people, behaviour, or emotions. It is rather an organization of these things. It is the form of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them" (p. 36).Goodenough elevates culture to a more cognitive status where tangible elements which contribute to the overall phenomenon are more importantly the result of mind models. In more or less the same cognitive perspective Bhabha (1994) emphasizes the developmental process of creating and activating new schemata, claiming that "To that end we should remember that it is the "inter" – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture". (p. 38)

Assuming that it is difficult to give a clear-cut definition of culture and willing to recognize the cognitive connotation of the term, what is the benefit of dealing with culture as an "in-between space"? Bhabha (1994) finds that "by exploring the Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves". (p. 39) Kramsch (1993) states that " the telling of these boundary experiences makes participants become conscious of the paramount importance of context and how manipulating contextual frames and perspectives through language can give people power and control, as they try to make themselves at home in a culture "of a third kind" (p. 235). In so doing, we are shifting away from our initial position of egocentricity to reciprocity (cf. Byram, 1989; Piaget & Weil, 1951). Hall (1966) theorizes that cultures have different perceptions of where boundaries of the self are located.

Orwell (1968) in *Shooting an Elephant* gives us a taste of what it means to cross cultures at one's own expense, declaring "I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool" (p. 242). Orwell was politically stuck in the Third Space between British Imperialism and Burmese culture admitting that "All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible". (p. 236) Orwell,

like many of us, has just been through what Archer (1986) calls a culture bump "when an individual from one culture finds himself or herself in a different, strange, or uncomfortable situation when interacting with persons of a different culture". (p. 170)

Is it, therefore, enough to learn about the mainstream culture of the target group or is it even more important to grasp the common, everyday culturally loaded patterns which enhance the relation of "the others of our selves", of our intercultural part to the perception, relation and interpretation that others have of themselves? Pennycook (1994, p. p. 62) identifies a number of different meanings for culture which seem to incorporate all the various elements in a reasonably acceptable summary: culture as a set of superior values, especially embodied in works of art and limited to a small elite; culture as a whole way of life, the informing spirit of a people; culture as a set of values imposed on the majority by those in power; and culture as the way in which different people make sense of their lives.

Pennycook (1994) firstly defines culture as "a set of higher aesthetic principles embodied in works of art, which informed much of the traditionalist thinking" (p. 62) which can suitably be compared to Tomalin & Stempleski's (1993) "Big C" or achievement culture. Bloom (1987) and Hirsch (1987) emphasize the importance of "The Great Books" or "cultural literacy", i.e., the Big C which dismisses "all other forms of culture, which are either taken to be the "low" culture of working people within the industrialized nations or the "primitive" culture (superstitions, rituals, and so on) of non-industrialized nations." (Pennycook, 1994:63) Though its prescribed canon of cultural knowledge, the Big C Culture attempts to gain ground constantly and to impose itself at the expense of little c culture, annihilating the lowbrow heritage of common people with its homogeneous frame.

Having discussed culture in a broad view , it is now worth considering the role of culture in communication in general terms before investigating and establishing its relationship with literature as a viable component.

Culture in Communication

Placing culture in communication implies either a monocultural or an intercultural encounter. While in the first case interlocutors share the same cultural background, in the latter they bring different cultural competence to determine intercultural communication. The term intercultural is worth considering to some extent to understand its intrinsic meaning. While it may be accepted as a synonym for cross-cultural, transcultural and multicultural, it can also be a superordinate for the various forms of intercultural communication: intracultural, interracial, interethnic, international. In all cases, however, intercultural communication involves recognized cultural differences which in some way affect communication.

One of the main issues bedeviling intercultural communication is ethnocentrism, i.e., the tendency to see other cultures by the standards of one's own culture. Ethnocentrism generates a variety of cross-cultural conflicts which often lead to miscommunication. Just as in the development of language competence, intercultural competence is best approached by pinpointing the variables which are integral to intercultural communication. The main factors which should be taken into account are:

- language - the most problematic variable since it develops in the context of a particular culture, and therefore reflects that culture;
- nonverbal communication: closely related to language, this factor is less explicit than the former although it can be more spontaneous, ambiguous and can carry a great deal of significance;
- world-view: the general cultural world-views to which a cultural group belongs (e.g., Eurocentric, Afrocentric, Asiocentric);
- cultural values and attitudes: differ from culture to culture, race to race, generation to generation;
- group identity: the identity which suits the individual placement within a group.

Bearing these factors in mind, how can we overcome the constraints related to our ethnocentrism to foster better communication? Firstly, it is unreasonable to advance the idea of giving up one's own cultural identity which eventually leads to cultural integration rather than to intercultural communication. In the second place, it is reasonable to state that intercultural communication implies creating an "in-between space" (Bhabha, 1994:38), a third place (cf. Kramsch, 1993) where a new culture site needs to be constructed. How can the intercultural site be constructed in an effectively communicative way? Given an intercultural situation, interlocutors from ethnocentrism A and B, i.e., from different cultural backgrounds, temporarily shift towards the Intercultural site where they adjust their behavior and patterns of communication to reach mutual agreement upon objectives. This shifting process is developmental, open-ended, expansive and responsive to new demands. It substantially involves the acquisition of "new culture" which may intersect only partially with the initial culture.

Awareness-raising of the variables involved in intercultural communication and of the process of "new culture" acquisition seems crucial before attempting to place culture within the field of literature and ESL/EFL teaching. In this view, it is interesting to attempt a brief survey of the common features of the New Literatures in English to provide a real instance of how intercultural communication can be set up.

The Cultural Process in The New Englishes

Bruce (1980) claims that "The same process of nation-building that led to the creation of national vernacular European literatures can be said to be still in progress in the new English-language states". (p. 39). By applying the cultural variables embodied in intercultural communication, it is possible to focus on the situation concerning the new English-language states. The cultural process in the New Englishes is clearly traced in Bruce's (1980) viewpoint:

- Language: In the new English-speaking nations, the choice of language is also controversial. Nigeria and India would use a local language if it were

possible, For writers in the new English-speaking nations, whether Nigeria or Australia, the problem is local versus standard British usage (p. 53).

- Nonverbal communication: Literary nationalism is a local branch of the general revolt in European and westernised culture against the effects of industrialism and urbanisation. The writer seeks an organic, vital, authentic, satisfying vision of life in other cultural ideas. (p.50)

- World-view:Thus the new national English literatures are part of international western culture and go through similar literary movements. There are two opposite leanings within each national literature, towards local assertion and towards a metropolitan point of view …(pp. 56-57)

- Cultural values and attitudes: English literatures … have emerged during a period when nation-states formed as a result of British imperialism are attempting to transform themselves into nations having the shared history, myths, habits and values of a people with a common culture. (p. 39)

- Group identity: Because of the wish to shift the focus of the arts to the "people", nationalist literature is often narrated from the perspective of the community, or places the main character's life against events or within a highly visible local society. (p. 54)

What then is the advantage of considering New English literatures in terms of developing cultural competence? In Culture and Imperialism, Said (1993) explains how the literary texts of the empire are "rich cultural documents". (p. 20) The imperial interaction experienced by both members of imperial hegemony and subaltern resistance provides an invaluable source of narrative production which acknowledges an innovative postcolonial perspective of culture viewed as an important vehicle for the formation of identity.

In this frame, literary texts in New Englishes are a fundamental representation of cultural identity. Consequently, the term postcolonial acquires a different semantic value from its usual historical connotation in that it refers to a new way of investigating issues such as cultural dislocation, racism, identity formation etc. where majority and minority cultural groups coexist.

Can postcolonial literary theory, therefore, be introduced into the classroom to provide students the necessary tools they need to analyze the cultural representations of New English literary texts? Are there possible postcolonial readings strategies which give students the opportunity to begin to grapple with their own identity problems?

The theoretical frame set up in the first part of the present paper has attempted to provide insights into the value of culture and more specifically into the reconciliation between Big C and little c culture through postcolonial literary theory.

In the rest of the work postcolonial pedagogy is brought into the ESL/EFL classroom and its effects are discussed.

Culture in the ESL/EFL classroom

Before introducing postcolonial pedagogy in the ESL/EFL classroom, it is first worth reviewing the models of Culture Teaching and Learning which are most currently applied. Byram, Esarte-Sarries, and Taylor (1991) distinguish four main models:

- *The Language enjoyment model* which "presents culture in terms of meanings for the new words which are to be learnt" (p. 374). This model basically extends learners' knowledge **about** another culture within the learners' ethnocentrism, without attempting to construct culturally different schemata to be located within the Intercultural site (cf. Culture in Communication).
- *The Language skills model* which "presupposes that language usage and culture can be separated, at least for pedagogical purposes" (p. 375). In this view, culture is an adjunct to language skills and as for the previous model, there is no need to move outside ethnocentrism.
- *Survival model*: model with a "much stronger emphasis on providing information, assumes that language system and culture are closely related" (p. 376). It is only in this model that culture acquires the same status as language learning which eventually leads to the construction of the more advanced area of the Intercultural site. If however, the model is not expanded to its full potential, the risk may be that learners add new schemata to the existing ones without challenging them or without being encouraged to analyze them from the native viewpoint. The result is a return to learners' ethnocentrism, frustrating for learners and teachers alike.
- *Academic model*: a model which "is examination-oriented and, because current examinations assess linguistic competence, this model concentrates on presenting language" (p. 377). This model implicitly creates a barrier between learners and culture whereby learners are not even made aware of ethnocentrism A, convinced that language learning is completely independent of culture.

While the issues hitherto discussed presume a total rejection of Models 1, 2 and 4, model 3 needs to be elaborated and expanded to its utmost potential to respond to our case. It is towards this objective that an attempt will be made through a postcolonial pedagogical approach.

A Postcolonial Model for ESL/EFL learning

Ashcroft (1995) suggests 'as a radical oversimplification of the history of European literary theory we could say that such history has been an arena in which all participants: the language, the utterer or writer, and the hearer or reader have been locked in a gladiatorial contest over the ownership of

meaning.' (p. 298). Intelligible meaning occurs because the variables of cultural communication (cf. Culture in Communication) are all located within an **event** which is mutually shared by interlocutors, meeting the Ethnocentric criterion. If on the other hand, the first and most problematic variable – language – presents considerable variance as is the case of postcolonial language, the issue changes dramatically.

Firstly, the writing event assumes primary importance in that it is the viable component of the illocutionary/cultural force inscribed in the message. Secondly, it opens a dialectical relationship between writer and reader in that the enormous cross-cultural distance created, leads to a Metonymic Gap. While on the one hand the metonym, the part which stands for the whole, is the true cultural signifier which characterizes the postcolonial text, on the other it may lead to incommunicability between writer and reader in that the cultural differences it represents may be ignored or misunderstood. The metonym, therefore, creates its own cultural space or **gap** between the English language and the postcolonial context. Signification is sought in the other cultural variables which are placed together in the Intercultural site. The **Metonymic Gap** therefore, has a twofold purpose:

- It impedes the hearer/reader to relate back to existing schemata and consequently to ethnocentrism;

- It challenges the hearer/reader to search for meaning by consciously investigating language, non-verbal communication, world-view, cultural values and attitudes and group identity to avoid total cultural incommunicability.

Furthermore, lexis acquires a powerful role within this process. It is never simply referential. Conversely, postcolonial lexis has a range of nuance and connotation which are the key to cultural identity. Ashcroft (1995) maintains that "Brought to the site of meaning which stands at the intersection between two separate cultures, the word demonstrates the total dependence of that meaning upon its "situated-ness"" (p. 301) and emphasis is laid on the process of reading itself as "a continual process of contextualisation and adjustment" (p. 301).

The structural anthropologist Lévi-Strauss (1972) recognizes the universality of narrative structures but emphasizes the undoubted central role of narrative in conveying cultural specificity. In the postcolonial model, narrative enables us to focus on the specifically local traits of universal structures in order to examine those aspects which create "small pockets of cultural identity ." (Rivers, 1983:33). Within the narrative patterning of selecting and organizing universal principles for the culturally specific text, the reader can examine which meanings are mostly articulated in a specific culture, which are the preferred ones by the target community and which contribute most significantly to the creation of unique cultural identity.

In sum, the Metonymic Gap is the gateway to the Intercultural site and "literature, and particularly narrative, has the capacity to domesticate even the most alien experience" (Ashcroft, 1995:302).

Implementing the Postcolonial Model in the ESL/EFL Classroom

Table 1 illustrates the main features of the postcolonial model by taking into account, on the one side, the pivotal elements in the ESL/EFL classroom: the educational policy, the teacher, the learner, language learning and on the other, the advantages and benefits of implementing this model rather than others.

In sum, the postcolonial model provides a more subtle and complex method of ESL/EFL learning and it can clearly be stated that the model achieves democratisation of educational policy, potentiality of ESL/EFL learning, enrichment of human profile.

In the last part of the paper, it is interesting to analyze the applicability of the model to sample texts.

Sampling the Model

Bearing the components of the ESL/EFL classroom in mind , the model will be presently applied to meet the fundamental pedagogical parameters for the ESL/EFL learning syllabus.

Given the following parameters: Objectives: Educational, language, cultural; Selection of texts: criteria, choice; Approach: comparative, learner-centered; Process: task-based; Materials: texts, supplementary materials; Language learning: process-based; Cross-curricular activities: ESL/EFL in interrelated subjects; Evaluation: formative, summative, we will proceed to illustrate our model. It, however, by no means is intended to explicate lesson plans on the issue.

a. Objectives: Education, language, cultural

- *Educational*: to focus on the idea of *Otherness* in monoglossic communities where language variance is given by the local development of the English language.

- *Language*: to recognize the linguistic function of the metonymic gap.

- *Cultural*: to retrace the culture of many people and many times by inferring cultural identity in a comparative approach.

b. Selection of texts

Criteria: the "white areas" of colonial dominion: Australia and New Zealand;

modern narrative which retrospectively evokes intercultural conflicts (Maoris/Aborigines vs. Europeans); the cultural identity of common people and their *lost* heritage.

Choice:two monoglossic passages (cfr. Appendices 1 and 2) taken from the novels **Once Were Warriors** (Duff, 1990) and **Oscar and Lucinda** (Carey, 1988).

c. Approach: learner-ethnographer/cultural worker approach

d. Process: intercultural task-based

e. Materials: New English texts, supplementary texts (intertextuality), authentic material and documents.

f. Language learning:

- *Reading*: language variance, textual analysis (grammatical, tropes, metonyms, language texture, colloquial register)

- *Lexis*: cultural cohesion/coherence, collocates, connotations, glossing, code-switching

- *Writing*: intercultural creative writing – letters, songs, poems, story-writing, legends/tales

- *Cognitive skills*: inference, generalization, cultural schemata development, interpretation

g . Cross-curricular activities:

L1 literary comparisons ; History: The Origins of Different Races: The Maoris, the Aborigines and the Native People of Learners' Homelands; Religion: primitive vs. modern creeds; Geography: flora and fauna in Oceania/Homeland; Social studies: anthropological research work on beliefs, customs and traditions; project work on the use of glass and tattoos in Modern society.

h. Evaluation: intercultural educational, language, cultural objectives (e.g. culture tests) (cf. Valette, 1986); multicultural literacy competence; interdisciplinary competence; new Englishes language and literature development. At this stage, it seems crucial to focus on the approach and the process to some extent in order to consider how the model works.

In applying the model, teachers would be expected to advocate a learner-centered approach primarily characterized by the learner's role as ethnographer or cultural worker whose aim is to investigate, identify, describe and interpret cultural patterns and/or representations within the target community. In the present case, learners reach out into the New English communities of Australia and New Zealand as seekers of information through literary texts. Learners should, therefore, be encouraged to focus on the cultural significance of the texts, to deconstruct and interpret language in meaningful contexts as in the case of the following instances:

> Are you my Maori ancestors? … We are not of your cowardly blood for we know that you are knowing fear. We are warriors. Nig gestured frantically toward his face, his new tattoos just like theirs and freshly swollen from doing. And their tattooed faces were deeply etched, whilst his manhood markings were but lightly marked. (Duff, 1990:188-189)

so as to compare language meaning in relation to other cultural contexts:

> The white men came out of the clouds of Mount Darling. Our people had not seen white men before. We thought they were spirits. They came through the tea-trees, dragging their boxes and shouting. The birds set up a chatter. What a noise they all made. Like twenty goannas had come at once to raid their nests. (Carrey, 1988: 472)

and to relate to their ethnocentric reality in a cyclic process which enhances the construction of the Intercultural site. Within this cyclic process, intercultural development is fostered through task-based activities in which students draw on prior knowledge (e.g. on Maoris/Aborigines), set up hypotheses, create and/or expand cultural schemata, adjust their ethnocentric view towards the Intercultural site and generate discussions, debates etc., to expand on cultural issues deemed to be important.

The following two statements, for instance: "He no longer thinks as we do" (Duff, 1990:189) and "Naturally the Narcoo men misunderstood many things, but many things they understood very well""(Carrey, 1988: 473) could trigger off the process of cultural communication which strongly recommends co-operative learning tasks whereby students work in pairs/groups to investigate and identify new cultural information. They then share intercultural information by describing, reporting, discussing and exchanging views within the intercultural dimension. In this way, language is processed and interpreted in authentic intercultural contexts where an understanding of the cultural factors at work leads to increased language proficiency.

It could be argued that the postcolonial model has limited applicability in that it addresses a specific area of learning. By its flexible nature, the model can be adapted to a different number of pedagogical purposes as follows:

- to question ethical beliefs (e.g. moral, religious and political prejudices);

- to develop cognitive strategies (e.g. contextualisation, adjustment) and representations (new cultural schemata);

- to learn to use supplementary materials to integrate silent communication (e.g. integrating verbal and non-verbal materials);

- to activate cross-curricular activities (history, geography, sociology etc.);

- to improve literary competence in the field of mainstream literature and other (e.g. immigrant literature);

- to explore computer-mediated intercultural communication (internet, e-mail, chat-lines, hypertext computer programs with cultural contextual links etc.);

- to access and decode media literacy (films, magazines, television shows, music videos etc.) with a more conscious attitude;

- to improve interpersonal relationships within increasingly multicultural societies in order to understand that " The preoccupations change and interweave, but societies and groups have had to face basically the same issues.   (Rivers,   1983:   33)

Conclusion

In the present work an attempt has been made to underline the invaluable insights gained through a detailed analysis of culture, of its extensive value and of its role in establishing beneficial educational and language learning principles. In particular, it has been shown how postcolonial literary theory can negotiate opposing viewpoints by turning to the Intercultural Site as a meeting of minds. Within this focal point literature, and in particular narrative, emphasizes the importance of understanding the role of culture in both the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language. In Rivers' (1983) view:

> Our students need literature, poetry, music, and other artistic manifestations, not only of a literate elite, but also of the common people in oral traditions, folklore, the arts of the people, the history and stories that make small pockets of cultural identity unique. Through this content they can share the culture and the concerns of many times and many peoples, faraway and close at home. The preoccupations change and interweave, but societies and groups have had to face basically the same issues. (p. 33)

In this sense, an endeavour has been made to propose a postcolonial model which may shed new light on culture teaching and learning as a fundamental component which contributes to the lifelong growth of ESL/EFL learning. On the short-run the outcome may probably be that we are no longer shooting an   elephant.

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APPENDICES

Table 1

The Postcolonial Model

Educational policy®Teachers®Learners®Language® develops the dynamic notion of intercultural identity;aims at making students better, more tolerant citizens;develops multicultural curriculum;broadens learners' horizons.encourage learners to problematize Eurocentric representations of minority cultures;help learners to understand how to interpret/deconstruct textual representations of specific cultural discourse;develop awareness of how learners engage in dynamic identity formation;position themselves on the other side of the Intercultural site to understand the Self in Intercultural communication.perform more complex interpretations of texts;are ethnographers (cultural workers) investigating intercultural similarities and differences;are more effective intercultural communicators;become multiculturally literate.explores the illocutionary cultural force of lexis to build on language skills;exploits its cultural function (cultural competence);emphasizes metonymic gap value;encourages intercultural communication. perpetuates the static notion of ethnocultural identity;is unaware of issues related to xenophobia;focuses on monocultural curriculum;underestimates cultural acquisition.encourage learners to accept uncritically problematic representations of various cultural groups encountered in literary texts;help learners to know about what universal truths are depicted in texts;know about what stereotypes are employed;remain as teachers on their ethnocentric side of the Intercultural site.give less complex, more second-hand responses;are in a reader-response position unaware of Eurocentric biases;are ethnocentric communicators;are unable to interpret the world beyond the ethnic view.locates lexis in language context.neglects the binomial language-culture;limits linguistic assumptions about other cultures;generates cultural bumps.

The ESL/EFL Classroom	Postcolonial model	Others
Educational policy	develops the dynamic notion of intercultural identity;aims at making students better, more tolerant citizens;develops multicultural curriculum;broadens learners' horizons.	perpetuates the static notion of ethnocultural identity;is unaware of issues related to xenophobia;focuses on monocultural curriculum;underestimates cultural acquisition.
Teachers	encourage learners to problematize Eurocentric representations of minority cultures;help learners to understand how to interpret/deconstruct textual representations of	encourage learners to accept uncritically problematic representations of various cultural groups encountered in literary texts;help learners to know about what universal truths are depicted in texts;know

	specific cultural discourse;develop awareness of how learners engage in dynamic identity formation;position themselves on the other side of the Intercultural site to understand the Self in Intercultural communication.	about what stereotypes are employed;remain as teachers on their ethnocentric side of the Intercultural site.
Learners	understand the Self in Intercultural communication.perform more complex interpretations of texts;are ethnographers (cultural workers) investigating intercultural similarities and differences;are more effective intercultural communicators;	give less complex, more second-hand responses;are in a reader-response position unaware of Eurocentric biases;are ethnocentric communicators;are unable to interpret the world beyond the ethnic view.
Language	become multiculturally literate.explores the illocutionary cultural force of lexis to build on language skills;exploits its cultural function (cultural competence);emphasizes metonymic gap value;encourages intercultural communication.	locates lexis in language context.neglects the binomial language-culture;limits linguistic assumptions about other cultures;generates cultural bumps.

Appendix 1

Sample Text A

He dreamt he came upon several men with facial tats of exquisite design. They were beating someone. Over and over with steady, rhythmic punches going thud…thud…thud into the man's face. Nig askin em: Are you my Maori ancestors? Because they looked so much like him, mirrors of himself. They paused from the beating to give a kid hostile looks, and one answered, No. We are not of your cowardly blood, for we know you are knowing fear. We are warriors.

Nig gestured frantically toward his face, his new tattoos just like theirs and freshly swollen from doing. But when he looked into the eyes of them all at once, he saw that terrible glaze of reason gone. Quite gone. And their tattooed faces were deeply etched, whilst his manhood markings were but lightly marked. Then they had blue and white bandanas around suddenly wildly frizzy locks. And they kept punching this face till he rattled. Yes, rattled. Nig could hear it as clear as anything the broken shattered bones like bones in a jar, or a gourd made of skin.

He asked them: But why are you doing this to him? And one replied: Because he is no longer one of us. And Nig said: Isn't there a way he can make up? And the warrior said, No. He no longer thinks as we do. And for this he dies. And Nig said: For that you kill a man? You beat him till his shattered bones rattle inside him? Because he does not think like you? And they looked at him and laughed. (….) (Duff, 1990:188-189)

Appendix 2

Sample Text B

The white men came out of the clouds of Mount Darling. Our people had not seen white men before. We thought they were spirits. Thy came through the tea-trees, dragging their boxes and shouting. The birds set up a chatter. What a noise they all made. Like twenty goannas had come at once to raid their nests. Anyway, it was not nesting time.

We thought they were dead men. They climbed hills and chopped down trees. They did not cut down the trees for sugar bag. There was no sugar bad in the trees they chopped. They left the trees lying on the ground. They cut these trees so they could make a map. They were surveying with chains and theodolites, but we did not understand what they were doing. We saw the dead trees. Soon other white men came and ring-barked the trees. (….)

The white men spoke to two men of the Narcoo tribe. They were young men. They gave the white men a big kangaroo, and some coberra. The white men would not eat the coberra. They told the Narcoo men to show them the way to the Kumbaingiri, although the Narcoo men had never seen anyone from that tribe. They were neighbours, but they did not visit.(….)

The Reverend Mr Hopkins told the Narcoo men the story of St Barnabas eaten by a lion. He told them the story of St Catherine killed with a wheel. He told them the story of St Sebastian killed with spears.

Naturally the Narcoo men misunderstood many things, but many things they understood very well. One thing they did not understand was the boxes on the wagons: they got the idea these boxes were related to stories. They though they were sacred. They thought they were the white man's dreaming. (….)

One of the boxes fell. Straight away the white fellows opened up this box. Naturally the Narcoo men were keen to see what was inside.

You know what they saw? It was glass. Up until that time they had not seen glass. There was glass windows down in Kempsey and port Macquarie, but these fellows had not been to those places. They saw the glass was sharp. This was the first thing they noticed – that it cuts. Cuts trees. Cuts the skin of the tribes. (….) (Carrey, 1988: 472-473).