

Lesson Context and Pedagogical Reflection

Level: 3rd semester Dutch

Lesson Topic: The phenomenon of “open curtains” and (non)generalizability of statements about cultural norms.

Lesson Context and Reflection This activity is my own expansion of a reading selection out of the Dutch language text *Intensive Dutch Course* (Routledge, 2005). In that passage students are introduced to the “typical” practice in Dutch homes to have no real curtains on the front windows on the first floor of homes. These windows are (were) typically large picture windows which offered a view from the street into the house’s living room. The impression from the text is that this practice is nearly universal in its distribution and currency. The text (Internet forum) of this lesson is intended to stimulate reflection on the legitimacy of universalist claims about cultural practices and products. As such it could be viewed as a lesson in culture as well. As the medium of study, however, is a written text, with attendant expectations and assumptions about audience, genre, medium, etc. it is approached here as a lesson intended to develop reading skills. In point of fact, however, this is merely an organizational distinction; culture is a constitutive dimension of any of the “other” four skills.

As the above discussion has already indicated this lesson has two broad goals. First, it intends help students glean key information from a familiar text form, the online forum. This is consistent with our discussions of the role that multiple literacies can have in facilitating reading development. The second goal is discussed below in the context of culture.

Integrated Modules **Culture** —Just as prominent, however is the goal of developing intercultural inquiry skills. The lesson consistently prompts students to reconsider first the universality of any cultural claims. Next, students are guided to reflect on similarities and differences with their own culture (vis-à-vis text type and topic). Third, students return to the cultural claim at hand and, using data from the target text, come to a conclusion about the original claim’s legitimacy. This reading lesson therefore embeds a culture lesson, reinforcing the integrality of culture with all of the “other” four skills.

Vocabulary —students explore a variety of ways to describe the appearance of homes as well as accumulating vocabulary do describe window treatment. It might seem an esoteric topic to spend time on, but is relevant to the more culturally important theme of “open curtains.” Moreover, the vocabulary becomes bound to meaning as students read NSs voicing their opinions on the topic.

Lesson Objectives:

- TSWBT 1) identify text-type and the relevant expectations for the reader;
- 2) identify relevant parts of the text (web forum) and their the intended uses/functions for the reader;
 - 3) compare the Dutch text form with typical website for an American-English speaking audience;
 - 4) generate categories and organize forum posts accordingly;
 - 5) summarize in sentence form the general trends/categories of posts;

Lesson Plan

1. Pre-reading

1. Students were assigned to bring a photo of a “typical” residential street in American, with preference for neighborhoods where they have lived or are currently living. They then consider the following prompt and in a brainstorming session offer their input: Consider these images. What do you see? What are the houses like?
2. Students look at pictures of some Dutch houses and brainstorm impressions and comparisons with their American schemata.

(See last page.)

1. While Reading

1. Students view first screen of the website: <http://www.bokt.nl/forums/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=544054>
2. Answer the following questions with specific reference to the relevant parts/sections of the website:
 1. What sort of website is it?
 2. What are the purpose and the topic of the site?
 3. Who might be the audience?
 4. What role does the audience play in the development of the site?
 5. Compare this site with any American site of a similar type. What are the differences and similarities?
 6. Students are assigned to small groups of 3-4 students. Each group is assigned a set of posts from the website. Groups are to complete the following:
 1. For each post identify whether the writer:
 - keeps curtains open,
 - closes the curtains, or
 - has a different response altogether.
 2. Describe your findings with two or three sentences comparing these response groups. (More people ;Fewer people...; We can't generalize because...)*
 3. Why do people keep their curtains open or closed? Identify at least two or three reasons for each group.
 4. Many entries describe in more detail various types of window treatments. Identify at least three Dutch expressions that do this and hypothesize what they could be in English. At home compare your guesses with the descriptions and images on the following sites:
 - <http://www.raamdecor-roelofs.nl/index.html>
 - <http://www.debijldebie.nl/raambekleding.htm>

2. Post-reading

Homework: Consider the topic of “open gordijnen” as you have read about it in both our textbook and in the website from today. (In Dutch)

1. Imagine that you are in Holland at the Zomercursus in Zeist. Your group has just talked about Dutch houses and has addressed the topic of “open gordijnen” in a remarkably similar fashion to our discussion today. Now you have to describe your situation to your classmates who come from 7 different countries (no one else is from the U.S.). How would you describe your house in contrast to the Dutch homes you’ve seen? Write a short list of sleutelwoorden (5-6 key words) to help you think about what to say as you speak. Practice describing your home using only these words as your guide. You will do this tomorrow in class.
2. With this description in mind, write your own response to the forum we read today. Use the Discussion forum topic in Blackboard. Respond to one of your peers’ posts as well.
3. Finally, based on your observations, write down at least two questions for a native speaker (your docent at the Zomercursus) which you would like to have answered.

Foto's van Nederlandse huizen (Images of Dutch houses)

