

## **Beyond Language**

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### **Introduction**

*“The dilemma of the global age is that, while we have finally discovered that we are one people who must share one precarious world, we are profoundly divided by race, culture and belief and we have yet to find a tongue in which we speak our humanity to each other. To find that tongue must be our first and last endeavour, for the pursuit of peace, and freedom from pollution and poverty, are merely means to an end and that end is the celebration of our human possibilities”. (Young, 1996)*

The authors of this paper invite you to imagine you are holding a kaleidoscope. As you put it against the light, an orderly pattern of pieces of glass creates a design pleasing to the eye; but when you give it a shake, the design changes completely. The colours are still the same but the design has reconfigured itself into a different pattern. In the same way, at strategic points in time, history shakes up the world and our perceptions of it. The evolution of globalisation and the rapid growth of computer technology have created precisely one of those strategic points and the world of education is no less shaken-up than any other aspect of our lives. (Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic, 2004) Perhaps there is a need to remind ourselves, every now and then, that the world our students inhabit is very different to the one lived in by previous generations.

### **Some key epistemological questions**

In the face of these changes, those of us involved in teaching languages are faced with some critical epistemological issues. As we know, epistemology focuses on the critical exploration of the nature of knowledge. It asks deceptively simple questions such as:

- What is knowledge?
- How is knowledge acquired?
- What do we know?
- How do we know what we know?

Relating specifically to language education we might add:

- In what context is this body of knowledge negotiated between teacher and learner?
- In what context will this knowledge be used?
- What social or intellectual capital is gained by this knowledge?

Language teachers might also ask: is a foreign language a body of knowledge or something more? Or something less? What does it mean to be ‘competent’ in a language? What is the relevance of what we teach to our students’ future lives? Do we want our students merely to

‘survive’, to ‘operate’ in the language, or do we want them to ‘enter’ somehow into another’s culture and to make their contact with others in that culture more meaningful and effective?

Or, in contrast, do we hope, by teaching another language to enlarge and refine our students’ worldview (and maybe our own) in a quest for more connection, more interdependence, in today’s divided world?

On a practical level, how can what we teach ensure a higher level of shared meanings between, say, a Europe-based Hungarian manager in a multinational company and the Indian supervisor in Mumbai providing a crucial service to that multinational? Both are speaking English, but may not have very much else in common. How will they reach proper understanding?

### **The impact of globalisation and the structure of cultural identities**

Let us place these key questions in the context of globalisation,

Anthony Giddens (1999) the internationally acclaimed sociologist who for several years was Director of the London School of Economics, has described globalization “emerging in an anarchic, haphazard fashion, carried along by a mixture of economic, technological and cultural imperatives”. It is no coincidence that Giddens’ celebrated BBC Reith Lectures in 1999 were entitled *The Runaway World*.

He has also reminded us that globalisation is not only an “out there” phenomenon but also an “in here” one, inside our heads. “We continue to talk about the nation, the family, work, tradition, nature, as if they were all the same as in the past. They are not”. (Giddens, 1999)

Eva Hoffman, in her compelling book *Lost in Translation*, describing the evolution of her own cultural identities as a Polish exile in the States, writes:

The weight of the world used to be vertical: it used to come from the past, or from the hierarchy of heaven and earth and hell; now it’s horizontal, made up of the endless multiplicity of events going on at once and pressing at each moment on our minds and our living rooms. Dislocation is the norm rather than the aberration in our time. (Hoffman, 1989)

In other words, the cultural identities of our students are no longer regarded as ‘fixed’ or solely defined on a vertical axis (nation, history, family, religion, etc.) but rather on a horizontal one, as the media bombards us with images from around the world, one minute Kabul, the next Michael Jackson’s funeral in the United States. Their sense of self/their cultural identities (gender, socioeconomic class, education, family values, perceived place in the world etc.) are, as a result, relatively fluid and complex, one might say in constant flux. As language teachers, we can capitalise on this.

Among those influences operating on this horizontal axis and feeding into our cultural identities, is the dramatic proliferation of online communications and collaborations. (Thurlow, Lengel and Tomic, 2004) These add a new dimension to social interaction - especially in business ventures. These activities require a specific range of cognitive and affective skills if those ventures are not to collapse before they have even taken off. If it is difficult to find shared meanings when we are face to face, how much more difficult it is when we cannot see the other person and pick up the clues of body language.

### **The need for “cultural re-thinking”**

Professor Ron Barnett of the University of London, who has a strong voice in debates surrounding future developments in university education in the UK, has described life today not only as ‘complex’ but as ‘supercomplex’ (Barnett, 2000) and it is against this reconfigured background -‘dislocated’, ‘anarchic’, ‘haphazard’, ‘supercomplex’ - that our paper will propose we do some ‘cultural re-thinking’ (Swanton, 1998) as individuals as well as language teachers. This ‘re-thinking’ is particularly relevant in the context of teaching languages for business in a globalised world.

The concept of ‘cultural re-thinking’ is appropriate because it encourages all of us engaged in language teaching and learning to re-examine our own cultural standpoint, the goals of our work, the nature of our students and the quality of the education we offer them and its relevance to their futures. It also helps us to appraise, ever more closely, how all these fit into the wider socio-political picture.

### **Our students as future “shape shifters”**

Never before has there been such a strong imperative for education to prepare students for interaction with people who are different to them, not only in language but also in their world-view and value systems. “Post-modern survivors will learn to become ‘shape-shifters’ with multiple identities as a source of strength.” (Lifton quoted by Pedersen, 1996) In their future careers our students will consistently be required to move between cultures, (whether geographically and physically or online) constantly “learning from” other cultures rather than “learning about” them.

However, this process of becoming ‘shape-shifters’ cannot be left to chance. Students can either acquire these life skills of cultural flexibility, resilience and reflexivity by default or through bitter experience (from the failed business venture, for example,) or we can stimulate their development in the education we offer. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, that a central theme of the critical pedagogy proposed in this paper is precisely the concept of multiple identities and their cultural re-inscription and re-location which becomes more and more relevant in direct proportion to the speed of the changes around us.

Reflecting this sense of flux in the world around us, therefore, and emphasising the need for reflexivity, (one of the key characteristics of a modern society, according to Giddens,) our argument will be that we serve our students’ interests best by exploring new conceptual frameworks in order to meet the evolving needs of our students and the world in which they will be operating. The main thrust of our argument is to put less emphasis on ‘language competence’ and more on those factors *beyond language*, issues of Intercultural Communication. Far more business deals have failed because of ignorance of intercultural communication and resultant socio-pragmatic failure than from using the wrong word or phrase or grammatical construction in the new language.

Rather than focussing on discrete aspects of the language acquisition process, it is much more likely in our view that we need to address first and foremost the extent to which our students show a willingness<sup>i</sup> to understand and to make themselves understood in another language and in another culture. In other words, we need to be able to demonstrate the authenticity and the advantage to their future lives of engaging in a particular intellectual process, *beyond language competence*. This process constitutes the critical pedagogy we are about to describe in greater detail.

### **The indivisibility of language and culture: Agar’s “Languaculture”**

As language teachers we are familiar with the rigours of teaching grammar and pronunciation but if we focus exclusively on the 'mechanics' of a language, unconsciously reducing language to a 'science'; (which it clearly isn't) we are sending out the wrong signals to our students.

Agar (1994) argued that foreign languages are too often taught and learned as 'technical competencies' only, a mechanistic and systematic acquisition of the grammar and vocabulary of a different linguistic system. Agar's point was that many language teachers separate language from culture, rather than having them intersecting or overlapping. This, he claimed, conceptualises language as a mere tool to communication rather than central to it. His notion of 'Languaculture', the necessary tie between language and culture, is at the heart of this paper in which the undeniable significance of the target language is never underestimated, but which will argue for the overriding importance of something *beyond language*, placing intercultural awareness at the heart of language education.

### **Critical pedagogy: "An unexamined life is not worth living"**

Socrates' well-known saying serves to introduce a description of critical pedagogy. Emerging from the work of several educationalists, notably Freire and Giroux, has been an approach which strives to encourage students to regard their learning less as passive consumers of knowledge, more as constructors of knowledge, as those engaged in creative cultural process. This is a crucial part of a critical pedagogy.

In his seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, coming out of his work with the disenfranchised sections of society in Brazil, Freire describes the limitations of the "banking" concept of education where the teacher (who is the all-knowing purveyor of "knowledge") fills the "containers" or "receptacles" represented by the students who, in turn, "patiently receive, memorise and repeat" what they are taught.

The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world." (Freire, 1993)

He offers as an alternative what he calls a "humanist revolutionary" education, what Giroux later developed into the concept of a critical pedagogy, where the teacher's

efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanisation. His/her efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this they must be partners of the students in their relations with them (ibid.).

A critical pedagogy encourages the kind of critical analysis which is one of the qualities most sought by employers of the graduates of our programmes. This critical thinking asks us to question "the ostensibly unquestionable premises of our way of life" (Baumann, 1998) by inviting both teacher and learner to explore the transparency of their "common sense" perceptions and assumptions, to critique the power structures under which they have been raised and the ideologies underlying their education up to this point "as arguably the most urgent of the services we owe our fellow humans and ourselves". (Baumann, 1998.)

Included in the questions which a critical pedagogy asks are precisely those with which we started out at the beginning of this paper: *who are we, the teachers? Who are those we teach? What do we want to teach them? And for what sort of world? Whose voices are heard in the class?* In seeking to find answers to these and other questions, a critical pedagogy moves

away from the concept of Knowledge as an “I/It” phenomenon (I teach it, you learn it) to a teaching method which problematises the very concepts under scrutiny: in language teaching, for example, we might ask what is “culture”? what is “cultural identity”? “What part does language play as a carrier of culture?”

In the context of language education, Henri Giroux’s concept of a ‘pedagogy of difference’ is strikingly appropriate. A pedagogy of difference, he wrote, enables students

to cross over into diverse cultural zones that offer a critical resource for re-thinking how the relations between dominant and subordinate groups are organised, how they are implicated and often structured in dominance, and how such relations might be transformed....**Difference in this case does not become a marker for deficit, inferiority, chauvinism or inequality; on the contrary it opens the possibilities for constructing pedagogical practices that deepen forms of cultural democracy that serve to enlarge our moral vision.** (Giroux, 1993) (authors’ own emphasis)

In other words, a critical pedagogy sees ‘difference’ not as problematic but as a resource. It sees each individual as containing multiple identities with multiple subjectivities and multiple discourses. In simple terms, we change our ‘shape’ and we change our ‘voice’ and our ‘language’ depending on the cultural context within which we find ourselves.

### **“Moral vision”, issues of power and the classroom as an ethical site**

When we use critical pedagogy in our teaching we are able to increase not only the technical skills and competences of our students but also raise their sensitivity and awareness about ethical dilemmas and help them to develop a positive and responsible sense of morality. This can provide a challenging and exciting opportunity for educators. Tangible knowledge can be taught by applying only our intellect, however if we want to inspire our students to bring the best out of themselves and find the courage to speak the truth and stand by their values and principles, first we need to bring out the best qualities in ourselves.

The global turmoil in the financial markets shows very clearly that without the right morality knowledge, talent and effort can cause a lot of harm to society. It is easy to appreciate that someone who has a talent for languages, who puts in a lot of effort in perfecting the knowledge and understanding of foreign languages but chooses to use this talent for creating conflicts, and deceiving people will cause harm to society.

Sandor Kopatsy, the Hungarian economist argues that the most important asset of any society is its intellectual capital. He argues that intellectual wealth cannot be treated like any other resources. Intellectual Capital cannot be purchased or acquired by someone else. It can only be employed or rented and used effectively when there is a common interest for the owner of the Intellectual Capital and the individual or organisation that employ it.

### **Intellectual Capital = Knowledge X Morality X Talent X Effort**

Kopatsy claims that each of these components is equally important and when all four are present with a positive sign they can magnify and multiply each other. If any of these components is missing the total intellectual capital will be zero. He claims that only the multiplication and not the sum of the components will show us the size of the Intellectual Capital. In accordance with the law of multiplication when one factor is zero the product will also be zero. In our case it means that when there is zero knowledge, zero talent or zero effort the Intellectual Capital is also zero. But it is also zero when there is zero moral intent.

Kopatsy explains the four components in the following way:

- a. *Knowledge* is only valuable for society when it appears with the right morality. With the wrong morality knowledge causes only harm to society. When there is no talent knowledge on its own is meaningless. Without effort one cannot achieve a lot even though there is knowledge, the right morality and talent. So knowledge in itself is not a value. It is made valuable by the other three components of the equation.
- b. *Morality (Moral intent)*. Morality is considered to be valuable for society only when it comes with knowledge, talent and effort. The wrong intent causes damage to society. The higher the talent, the knowledge and the effort the bigger the damage when it is combined with bad moral intent.
- c. *Talent* is only valuable when the owner of the talent is able to guide it by knowledge and combines it with good moral intent and effort. A society loses most when its talents are not developed properly and are not equipped with the right morality and effort.
- d. *Effort* has become the main virtue in modern society. Effort also includes ambition, initiative and enterprise. In modern societies the majority of the lower strata consist of people who lack effort. It is easy to accept that without effort, for example, it is not possible for the talent to show outstanding results. (Kopatsy, 1999)

It is even more important to point out that three of the four factors can only be positive as their starting point is zero. On the other hand morality can be negative as well as positive. Consequently Intellectual Capital can only be positive and add value to society when it is accompanied by good moral intent. On the other hand the more educated the more talented and more diligent the individual is, if lacking moral intent, the bigger the damage to society (Illes and Laáb, 2007).

Kopatsy's economic model of Intellectual Capital resonates closely with the ideas we discussed earlier in the paper. By opening up language teaching and by using critical pedagogy we can start an exciting new chapter in education. We can benefit from the insights of other disciplines and provide a rich and thought provoking context for classroom discussions and individual reflections. Integration of Intercultural Communication theory can provide an additional ethical dimension to language education and increase social, intellectual, and arguably moral capital of our students and ourselves. There are striking resonances of Freire's references to "effort" and of Giroux's concept of "a moral vision" with the work of Sandor Kopatsy.

When we talk about "moral vision" we must include an understanding of where power lies which, in turn, must be a central concern in any Intercultural Communication. The argument of Giroux and other critical pedagogy theorists is that you cannot teach without exploring issues of power<sup>ii</sup>. In all human communication there are issues of power at work and in an intercultural communication it would be naive to ignore them. If you look back at the case mentioned at the beginning of this paper between the Hungarian manager of the multinational and the Indian supervisor in Mumbai, it might be asked where the power lies and why?

No classroom is ideologically neutral. In referring to both the process and the outcome of formal education, Giroux dislodges the classroom from the locus of "a neutral or transparent process antiseptically removed from the concepts of power, politics, history and content." (Giroux, 1995) For Giroux and other critical scholars including feminist theorists like bell

hooks, it is unethical to reduce the classroom to a mere instructional site. There are issues of power at work in the classroom which need to be critiqued and understood.

Rather than the 'sage on the stage' style of teaching, this pedagogy requires teachers to take a back seat, not to teach from the front but to encourage debate and the exchange of views within the classroom and, where appropriate, to participate in those activities. It is the students' voices which are more important in this context rather than the teacher's.

### **Intercultural Communications theory as part of a critical pedagogy in teaching language**

If we return to Agar's concept of 'Linguaculture', the study of a foreign language must imply the study of another culture, or the study of the Other. This term, commonly used by anthropologists and critical theorists, necessitates the location of oneself before one can locate the Other. To locate oneself 'on the map' so to speak, requires reflection and commitment but is a task that students find authentic and rewarding.

When illustrating Agar's concept of Linguaculture, it is useful to use the metaphor of an iceberg. If the part of the iceberg above water-level represents what we see and hear (in other words, what we can 'read' not only from the language of the foreign culture but also the prompts and clues to meaning offered by body language) then the underwater mass of the iceberg (reputedly seven eighths of the whole,) represents the hidden beliefs and value systems of that other culture.

Using the tools of IC theory critically the exploration each individual student undertakes into his or her own cultural identity is an activity resonant with self-discovery, intellectual stimulus and a shared experience of learning which can re-vitalise the language classroom. The relative egocentrism of the young can be exploited to great effect and it is rare to find a student who is not keen to put themselves under such close scrutiny.

Whatever the age group, students welcome the opportunity to reflect on who they are, where they come from, where they are hoping to go, what it means to be part of the world as it is today. The result is that a staggering range of difference emerges but the activity also reveals a range of unexpected and unpredictable similarities. The students learn that to generalise is dangerous since it becomes increasingly difficult to say with any conviction "All Hungarians are such-and-such" which may make them more cautious about starting sentences with such phrases as "Germans always do such and such" or "The Japanese are very.....' The students look at each other with new eyes, with more interest, with more empathy and a new understanding. It is this 'looking with new eyes' that can be used reflectively in approaching a new language and a new culture.

Emerging out of this serious exploration of their own lives and cultural identities is a complex picture of what it means to be someone entering a career at the start of a new millennium against the shambolic socio-political backdrop already described.

The skill of the teacher lies in creating an environment based on trust in which self-disclosure is paramount, mutual respect a given, confidence respected. The place of trust is at the heart of critical pedagogy. The authors define trust as action (Illes, 2009.; Illes and Harris, 2008). Trusting is a key component of human life. It emerges in response to consistent action and behaviour demonstrating good intent. We need and rely on trust in different forms in all areas of life. We need to trust ourselves and others to make choices that will have an impact on our lives and on the lives of others today and in the future. There are ample examples of trust as a

scarce resource and it is often noticed and defined by its absence. We easily pick up signals of suspicion and are acutely aware of the contractual limitations of trust in organisations. Without trust the workplace and the classroom is a group of individuals who focus on personal survival rather than creation and contribution. Trust is strong or it is weak in human relationships. It is not quantifiable because its quantities and qualities are in continuous motion. It is a basic human need like love without which life can be bleak, meaningless and insufferable. The ability to translate good will into actions that embody the intention is an ability - a virtue - that we can cultivate and share and use as a guiding principle in life. When this becomes embedded as a way of behaving and is reciprocated, trust emerges and can be recognised as present. But in this context, the word is a descriptor of the result of a process being lived.

It is a truism to point out that the best way to learn a language is to form a close, trusting relationship with someone who can only speak that language. The learner is so highly motivated that 'language' and 'culture' remain indivisible in the struggle to reach understanding at a deep level. It is no accident that, under schemes like ERASMUS, language students sojourning in the culture of the language they are learning are increasingly being invited to look ethnographically at their experience, to observe and record the interaction of their multiple identities with those of members of the host culture (Jordan,2001).

We propose the expansion of ways for students to enter another culture with that 'willingness' and 'mindfulness' already mentioned, by using all aspects of that culture as windows. Whereas the history of a culture can tell us a great deal, watching a feature film or reading a novel from the culture can tell us even more about 'social realities': relationships, familial structures, issues of gender, education, issues of class or socio-economics, interpretations of history, hopes and ambitions, even dreams. Such insights act as a counterbalance to the would-be scientific theory that currently informs much of the Intercultural Communications literature.

The authors of this paper suggest that applying a critical pedagogy to the very discipline of Intercultural Communications is a fruitful enterprise for students *and* teachers to pursue. A critical review of two well-known texts illustrates this point.

It is important of course to synthesise, as Helen Spencer-Oatey and Peter Franklin's recent book does, all the ideas that have built up in this academic discipline, of longstanding in the United States but much more recently explored in Europe. But what is striking about their book (which does precisely that, collate exhaustively the 'knowledge' that has been gathered over recent decades,) is that there is no 'heart' to the book; the reader has no sense of why this information might be important to us, how it can be applied, why there is a moral imperative to take this 'knowledge' further.

In contrast, Maureen Guirdham's book *Communicating Across Cultures at Work* (2005) manages to introduce Intercultural Communications theory while showing its application to 'real-life situations', case studies which do not shy away from the cultural complexity of human interaction. Her book includes, for example, an interesting description of a native English speaker confronting an audience of Hungarian business people where a level of cultural knowledge would have been very helpful. (Guirdham, 2005. p.20)

Time and space do not allow for a critical and comprehensive review of the current theory in Intercultural Communications scholarship except to point out the growing literature from African American scholars challenging the mainstream teachings of a scholarship from a



cultural viewpoint which is not their own.<sup>iii</sup> Equally there is a groundswell of publishing from Hong Kong of the work of scholars from China and the Pacific Rim subverting predominantly Western scholarship. Both these cases demonstrate the flux in power relations in and between nations and cultures that are such a critical part of globalisation.

### **The new Discourse**

If teachers are going to apply some of the theory and practice of Intercultural Communications in foreign language classes, are we equipped with the 'language' to do it?

Gee (1997) has distinguished between two types of discourse: "discourse" ("just stretches of language") and "Discourse" ("a way of being together in the world".) In entering a new discursive space to explore cultural aspects of language learning, those of us engaged in the task of introducing some of these ideas to our students move in and out of other disciplines such as anthropology, literature, cross-cultural psychology, cultural studies, and psycholinguistics, to try and make sense of our explorations. Students can participate in a new Discourse which is meaningful and can be a richly rewarding educational experience.

For educators as well this interdisciplinary approach is enriching as the authors of this paper have discovered: one coming originally from a background in Humanities and now working in Management Education, the other coming from an English Language and Literature education and a professional academic life embracing the design of an undergraduate degree in Communications. When discussing the idea of a joint paper the authors benefitted from their broad understanding of education in different disciplines. By sharing their knowledge freely they created an interesting learning opportunity for each other and broadened the discussion in this paper way beyond the technical challenges of language teaching.

In his research into higher education, Phillips (1999) has emphasised the challenges involved in discourse dynamics but has also pointed out the richness of the results: in addressing certain realities by means of the Discourse, students have their voices validated and they acquire a particular kind of social and intellectual, even, we would suggest, moral capital. Above all, using the particular Discourse of exploring cultural identity, whether one's own or someone else's, teaches perhaps the most important lesson of all – that we are only truly educated when we know the limits of our knowledge; when we are aware of what Bakhtin has called "the unfinalisable" in ourselves. (Morris, 1994)

However, the most substantial claim that can be made for this Discourse in language education is the dynamic it creates which, ideally, becomes part of each student's life-long learning pattern. In asking language learners to locate themselves culturally and ideologically on the map, the mental activity involved seems to coincide with an appropriate episode in their cognitive and affective development. Students are engaged in a process of "deep" rather than "surface" learning. (Brockbank and McGill, 1988) Our argument is that they are motivated to respond actively when they:

are challenged by deep human issues which can shake up identities and values, and set off some ontological alarms. Equally, they discover constraints and freedoms in their subject, and savour its epistemology as they come up against limitations on knowing, as well as new ways of expressing themselves. (Phillips, 1999)

### **Conclusion: "a way of being together in the world"**

This paper has attempted to answer some of the epistemological questions posed at its start. It has also, against the backdrop of a complex and shifting world, raised concerns around the

concept of 'language competence' as an adequate goal for language teaching. Offered in its place is the opportunity for a critical pedagogy incorporating the discipline of Intercultural Communications. What this requires from the students, and perhaps from us, are critical thinking, creativity, and involvement in a cultural process- activities which can re-vitalise a language class.

Humans relate to their world by responding to the challenges of the environment...they begin to dynamise, and to humanise reality. **They add to it something of their own making.** (Freire quoted in Lankshear, 1997) (Authors' own emphasis).

This paper looks for something beyond language and beyond 'competence' for our students. It strives ambitiously towards the goal of "life world becoming" (Barnett, 1994) or "planetary humanism" (Gilroy, 2000), and perhaps it takes us a little way nearer to finding a tongue with which we can communicate with the rest of the world.

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Endnotes:

i. "Willingness" as a key factor in Intercultural Communication is convincingly described by Shi-Xu (2001). This Chinese scholar spent several years studying and teaching in Europe and then returned to China to become its first Professor of Intercultural Communications. He also launched The Journal of Multicultural Discourse "Mindfulness" appears in Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009). The key qualities of a 'mindful state' are (a) the creation of new categories, (b) openness to new information(c) awareness of more than one perspective.

ii. For more about power relations in Intercultural Communications see Young (1996), Shi-Xu and John Wilson (2001) and Roy and Starosta (2001).

iii. An undergraduate class, taught by one of the authors, was studying an American text in Intercultural Communications. Suddenly a Thai student rose to his feet. Jabbing with his finger at the book, he said "This 'we' they keep talking about, I am not this 'we'".