

Commercials and Signs as ESL/EFL Teaching Tools

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- Many ESL/EFL learners are unaware of the societal issues associated with English-speaking cultures.
- This creates a gap in their learning process because they are unable to understand specific references or discussions within the new culture.
- Commercials in media and various signs are excellent tools to fill this gap for ESL/EFL and also for TESOL classes.
- They can help the students increase cultural awareness, which facilitates the students' second language acquisition process (Gupta, 2019; Lee et al., 2023; Mashito et al., 2023)
- It usually involves three types of authenticity, which are linguistic (the use of authentic language), cultural (related to the target culture), and functional (relevance of the materials or activity to the learners) (Buendgens-Kosten, 2013)
- So it is motivating and fun!

Commercials as an ESL/EFL Teaching Tool

- It has been incorporated in a TESOL doctoral and a master course of the TESOL program at Alliant International University as an assignment called “Culture in Commercials.”
- The instructions of the assignment: This is a pair/group assignment. With your group find three commercials in Media (e.g., TV commercials, or internet commercials) which contain cultural aspects in them and discuss these items in 4-5 page long double-spaced paper (except the reference page) in the following format:

(1) Mini-literature review: Do a mini-literature review with a minimum of 5 references (including at least three articles) on cultures and media.

(2) Describe the commercials briefly.

(3) Describe/Explain the cultural aspect(s) included in the commercials.

(4) How would you use the commercials to teach cultures and English in your ESOL class?

NOTE: You may discuss a commercial of a country other than the United States if it is delivered in English. If it is not, discuss it with the instructor.

- The students made a presentation at a regional conference with their work, which shows it can also be a good tool for professional development.
- This can be applied in an ESL/EFL course as well. Some implications will be discussed later in the Implications section.

Some Student Examples

1. Cultural Difference: “Eels”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_WAmt3cMdk

Misunderstanding of cultural differences

A bowl of eel noodle soup with cooked whole eels in it in order to show the freshness of the eels. The noodle soup baffles the British client. Another bowl of eel noodle soup is served to the British client for hospitality.

2. Gender Equality and Empowering Women

<https://youtu.be/XjQBJWYDTs>

A challenge to the mainstream stereotypical view about women

Empowering women to maintain their confidence

Discussing this issue helps them recognize their real worth as a woman, reshape who they are, and adjust to the norms of the new environment.

3. Cross-Cultural Etiquette-Mr. Baseball

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdeFdFEbuqk>

Not a commercial, but a good short video clip for ESL/EFL students.

The video clip presents differences between Japanese and American culture in a comic way.

The teacher can have students find and discuss differences between the two cultures.

Some More Commercials with Cultural Aspects in them.

Series of HSBC Ads about Culture

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALWwK7Vz4gY>

HSBC Lemonade

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOct05ANPC4>

Cultural Differences

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXI2_ZimlCk

Implications

- The students are able to listen to the commercials and discuss the themes within them.
- They can also do research on cultures in various media commercials and make a presentation of what they have found in class.
- They can even create a short commercial video clip in groups related to their own culture.
- The teacher can have students find a given cultural theme in commercials online and make a presentation of the commercials, explaining how the given theme is incorporated in the commercials.
- Students can discuss cultural differences in a commercial video clip or between two commercial video clips.

- It shouldn't just be a culture in commercials. It can apply to any topic. Just be creative!

Signs as an ESL/EFL Teaching Tool

Like commercials in media, various signs can also be used in ESL/EFL classrooms to help the students increase cultural awareness because they involve current events and language, which cannot be found in textbooks.

Some Examples

(1) The teacher has the students guess the “WE ANSWER” part below in groups. She/he can have the students discuss any cultural differences related to that.



(2) The teacher has the students guess the meaning of the first sign in groups. She/he can show the answer sign later and have the students discuss any cultural differences related to that.



(3) The teacher has the students finish the following sentence in groups. She/he has each group report their answer to the class later. She/he shows the actual sign later and discusses some health-related topics.

A Mask a Day



(4) The teacher asks the students the part of speech of “through.” She/he can give this as a group activity. She/he shows the following sign later and gives the students an assignment where the students in groups find and take a picture of signs showing multiple parts of speech of a word.



(5) The teacher explains blending, which occurs commonly in English.

- Blend: A word made by combining parts of two words together (Denham & Lobeck, 2013)
- Examples:
 - ❖ Brunch (breakfast + lunch)
 - ❖ Blog (web + log)
 - ❖ Beefalo (beef + buffalo)
 - ❖ FedEx (Federal Express)
 - ❖ Aerobathon (aerobics + marathon)
 - ❖ Carpeteria (Carpet + Cafeteria)

Then, she/he shows the signs with blend examples and has the students guess what the two original words are. After that, she/he can give the students this activity:

- Planning a business with a “blend” name in groups
- Finding and Reporting Blend examples in Korea
 - ❖ In English
 - ❖ In Korean

Example 1



Example 2



Example 3



Example 4



NOTE: Teachers can take a picture with or without themselves of the places they visit or signs they meet and use them for their class activities. It would be authentic and motivating for the students, then.

References

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Thank you!

If you have any questions, feel free to email me at peter.byun@alliant.edu.