

4 Public spaces

This chapter continues to encourage learners to think ‘ethnographically’. The activities leave the private, domestic sphere and begin to explore public spaces, particularly places of commerce and leisure.

As in the previous chapter, the emphasis initially is on exploring the learners’ own culture and their own behaviour. That being said, most of the activities can also be adapted for use on language courses in English-speaking environments. Wherever they are, the learners are sent into the cafés, shops and leisure spaces of their own everyday existence, and invited to develop their skills of systematic observation and description. They continue to observe, describe and reflect on their own rituals of daily existence – as if they were visitors from another culture. They look critically at the role of English in public spaces in their home culture in *An A–Z of signs in English* (4.1), and reflect on an important area in their village, town, or city in *Comparing places* (4.2). Learners consider the behaviour and views of people in different settings, in *Café society* (4.3), and in *At the hairdresser’s* (4.4). They examine the behaviour of people in public in *Behaviour on public transport* (4.5) and in *Exploring an art gallery or museum* (4.6) while they investigate the phenomenon of street performers in *Street performers* (4.7). Learners also reflect on their own leisure pursuits: when they go out for an evening’s entertainment in *Going out for the evening* (4.8) and when they go elsewhere on holiday in *Holiday photographs* (4.9). Overall, the activities offer examples of different kinds of ‘field research’.

All of the activities can be done as self-contained projects, with discussion in class. However, the activities are further enriched if the class is participating in an online intercultural exchange (see Chapter 1). As well as reflection, the activities can then stimulate comparison between the learners’ own experiences and those of their e-partners.

Intercultural Language Activities

4.1 An A–Z of signs in English

Outline	Learners look systematically at the use of English in public spaces in their own community.
Focus	Learners collect and discuss examples of English used in advertising in their own community.
Level	Elementary and above
Time	15–20 minutes in the first lesson and 30 minutes plus in the second lesson
Preparation	Ideally, learners should have access to a camera to photograph signs. Alternatively, they need paper so they can copy by hand the signs they see. You will need a computer and projector to display the photographs in Box 4.1a and pieces of A3 paper for step 3. This activity will need to be spread over two lessons and involves learners looking for English signs in the community in their own time.

Procedure

- 1 Divide the class into groups and tell each group that its members are required to go into their community, after school, and collect examples of signs in English (and/or other languages used in the area). They can copy down the examples on a piece of paper, or, if they have digital cameras or camera phones, they could take pictures of them.
- 2 Explain that each group should collect signs that represent as much of the alphabet, A–Z, as possible. This will obviously depend on how much signage in English there is in the community. Show learners the photographs in Box 4.1a as examples. They can be flexible about which word in the sign represents a letter in the alphabet; for example, the sign *Just Love You* can be used to represent *J*, *L* or *Y*. The learners simply need to specify that ‘L is for Love in *Just Love You*.’
- 3 In a following lesson, the learners share their signs and see how many letters of the alphabet they have covered. Then they re-classify them according to their content, e.g. advertisements for food, drink, clothes, information notices, etc. They should then produce a poster arranging the signs on it according to their content, which they can share with the other groups and discuss their findings, e.g. were most of the signs in English for food?
- 4 More advanced learners can then discuss some of the following questions:
 - What kinds of products are advertised in English?
 - Do any signs use a mixture of languages?
 - What reasons can you think of for using English on signs in a non-

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English speaking country? Is this use of English changing the English language as a whole?

- Is the English language displacing other languages in your community?
 - Is the use of English on signs something you should be angry about, or afraid of – or is it a development that you welcome?
- 5 If learners are participating in an online intercultural exchange, they can go online and share their experience of signs in English with their e-partners. Are similar things advertised in English in different places?

Variation for learners in an English-speaking environment

This activity can be adapted for other languages – for example, is there evidence of signs in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Spanish, Polish or Punjabi in public spaces in Australia, the UK or USA? Particularly fruitful areas for exploration are restaurants and employment agencies.



Box 4.1a: An A-Z of signs in English

Photos: Signs



A restaurant in Taiwan



Belly dancing classes in Brazil



Poster for a café franchise in Brazil



A tattoo parlour in Singapore

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Intercultural Language Activities

4.2 Comparing places

Outline	Learners reflect on and describe an important area in their village, town or city.
Focus	The language of location and physical description.
Level	Elementary and above
Time	30 minutes plus
Preparation	Choose a possible local area to describe, e.g. the village, town or city centre, or the centre of the local community and find a map of it if possible. Learners will need pieces of paper in step 2.

Procedure

- 1 Draw a map of the local area or project it, if you have a photo, onto the board and name it, e.g. *this is the High Street, etc.*
- 2 Ask the learners, in pairs, to make a rough copy of the map from the board or screen, and then add four or five well-known buildings, shops or other landmarks onto their own copy.
- 3 Ask some of the pairs, in turn, to name one of the buildings, shops or landmarks they have chosen. When each pair names something, add it to the map on the board and introduce some language to describe its location, e.g.
 - The shopping mall is at the end of the High Street.*
 - The town hall is opposite/beside the cathedral.*
 - A river runs through the park.*
 - The post office is inside / beside / next to / on the left of the shopping mall.*

Write out some of these sentences on the board.

- 4 The pairs then write a brief description of the locations of the other buildings, shops and landmarks they have named on their own map.
- 5 Nominate some of the pairs to read out their descriptions.
- 6 To practise the language of location further, ask questions such as:
 - Where's the cathedral / park / shopping mall / community centre?*
 - It's on / beside / next to / in the middle of / behind / on the right of . . .*
- 7 If learners are participating in an online intercultural exchange, they can post their description of their chosen locality to their e-partners, and compare responses. With the class, rehearse a discussion opener, e.g.
 - Hi! I'm curious about where you live. In the centre of my city you can find . . . When you walk down the street, the X is on the left and Y is . . . I'm really interested to know more about your town/city/village!*

4.3 Café society

Outline	Learners consider local and global manifestations of 'café culture' in both local, independent cafés and in international café franchises.
Focus	Observing and describing two types of café in the community as an example of ethnographic 'field research'.
Level	Intermediate and above
Time	30–40 minutes in the first lesson and 40 minutes plus in the second lesson
Preparation	To help rehearse the language involved, it would help if you could take some photographs of a local café before class, and have photos to show of the decor, the menu, the staff dress code, etc. Learners also need copies of the observation schedule in Box 4.3a. The activity needs to be spread over two lessons and involves learners visiting cafés in their own time.

Procedure

- 1 Introduce the topic of cafés and raise the following issues and questions:
 - Identify and classify types of café in the community, that is, independent cafés, and franchise operations, e.g. Starbucks®, Costa, etc.
 - Which (if any) do the learners prefer and why?
 - What is the process of ordering a coffee or other drink in different cafés – is there table service, do you order at a bar, is there a special language involved (e.g. *regular cappuccino to go*)?
- 2 Divide the class into groups and give each group the task of visiting and observing the behaviour of people in either an independent café or a franchise operation. Together work out a schedule to make their observation more systematic, or use the observation schedule in Box 4.3a.
- 3 Once the observation schedule has been designed, show the class photographs of a local café, and get them to answer as many questions on the schedule as possible, using the photos as input. Check the answers and help with necessary language (e.g. to describe the staff uniforms). After the lesson, learners visit a local café, and complete their schedules.
- 4 In a following lesson, when the groups have carried out their research, get them to prepare their presentations and then report their findings back to the class. If the class is participating in an online intercultural exchange, they can share their findings with their e-partners.

Intercultural Language Activities



Box 4.3a: Café society

Observation schedule: Visiting a café

Name of café:

Franchise or independent?

Time of visit:

Time spent there:

What kind of drinks are available (e.g. speciality coffees, tea, alcohol, other)?

What kind of food is available?

In which language(s) is the menu?

Are the drink and food associated with particular national cultures (e.g. Italian, American, British)?

Is the decor (pictures, style of furniture, etc.) associated with a particular place (e.g. a country or a city)?

How do you order and obtain drink and food?

Are there particular expressions used to order the drinks (e.g. *grande mocha*, *skinny latte*, *cappuccino to go*)?

Are the staff in uniform? If so, describe it.

Describe the staff (age, gender, ethnicity). *Note: You may have to guess some of these.*

Describe the customers (age, gender, ethnicity, profession; single, couples or family). *Note: You may have to guess some of these.*

How do the males greet each other?

How do the females greet each other?

Are other facilities available (e.g. newspapers, magazines, wireless internet access)?