On the Notion of Culture in Second Language Lectures
John Flowerdew and Lindsay Miller

Abstract
This paper reports on one aspect of the findings of a three-year ethnographic study into academic lecturing conducted at a university in Hong Kong, where native-speakers of English lecture to English as a Second Language ethnic Chinese students. Developed from a "thick" description of a rich body of ethnographic data, the paper develops a framework for the analysis of second language lectures, which may be applied, it is proposed, in the analysis of cross-cultural lectures in any geographical context. The framework has four dimensions: ethnic culture, local culture, academic culture and disciplinary culture. Each of the dimensions is illustrated by means of data from the ethnographic research. The paper concludes with the claim that application of the model, because of its potential for developing cultural synergy, is likely to be of value in the preparation of both lecturers and students for lectures in a second language.

Introduction
As ethnographers since Geertz (1973) have been aware, every community has its own distinctive culture, although the members of a given community are often not themselves explicitly aware of the nature of their culture, especially as it may relate to other cultures. As Moerman, (1988:4) puts it, "All natives take their native knowledge for granted, take it to be nothing other than the nature of the world." Since the time of Geertz (1973), again, educational communities have been recognized as fruitful sites for ethnographic research (see e.g. Benson, 1989, in press; Canagarajah, 1993; Davis, forthcoming; the papers collected in Trueba, Guthrie and Au, 1981; Watson-Gegeo, 1988). In developing "thick" descriptions focussing on the values, roles, assumptions, attitudes, patterns of behaviour, etc. which operate in classrooms, ethnographers have attempted to provide descriptive theories capable of accounting for the ways teachers and students interact with each other and with texts and of how learning comes about or, in some cases, fails to come about.

In educational contexts where students and teachers share the same language and have similar cultural backgrounds, a common set of assumptions, or "structure of expectancies" (Klukholn and Kelley, 1968:209, cited in Jin and Cortazzi, 1993) is likely to underpin the acts of all participants. In situations where students from non-Western countries study in English-speaking Western countries (as they are doing in ever increasing numbers), or where expatriate teachers coming from Western universities and colleges are teaching students brought up in a non-Western culture (as again is happening more and more frequently), there is a danger of a clash of cultures. Ethnographic research, by bringing the cultural assumptions of lecturers and students to consciousness, can be of particular value in providing a basis for developing mutual understanding.
As already suggested, the concept of culture is integral to the ethnographic enterprise, the aim of ethnographic description being to provide a descriptive theory, or what Watson-Gegeo (1988, cited in Benson, in press) has called a "descriptive and interpretive-explanatory theory", of the particular culture which is the focus of the given research. The purpose of the present study is to develop a framework for an interpretive-explanatory theory of the culture of second language lectures. Based on a "thick" description of expatriate lecturers in Hong Kong and their Hong Kong Chinese students, the intention is that the resulting theory will be of explanatory value in accounting for lecturer and student behaviour in second language lectures in other contexts. As such it will provide input for lecturer and student training where lecturers and students come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

An analysis of our Hong Kong data leads us to the conclusion that there are four primary dimensions of the notion of culture which are likely to be of value to lecturers and students — and those concerned with the training of these two groups — in helping them to prepare for and reflect upon their practice in cross-cultural lectures. These four dimensions are: ethnic culture, local culture, academic culture and disciplinary culture. This paper will describe what we mean by each of these terms and how we have come to believe that the framework we propose is likely to be of use to others working in second language lecture contexts. Because our theoretical framework is developed in the context of ethnic Chinese students the description of our data will be of particular interest to those concerned specifically with Chinese students. However, we emphasise that the cultural framework we propose is likely to be applicable in any context where cross-cultural lectures take place.

**Methodology**

Our data was collected over a period of three years at an English-medium university in Hong Kong. Prior to this, in order for the researchers to gain insights into the most appropriate methodology to adopt and likely areas of focus for the research, a pilot study was conducted over a period of one semester with one lecturer in Manufacturing Engineering. An earlier study, focussing on students (Flowerdew and Miller, 1992), provided us with insights regarding appropriate methodology and areas of interest for the students.

The data for the main project was collected in the following ways:

- questionnaires and at least two in-depth interviews administered to 10 lecturers before and after they conducted a lecture course. All lecturers were native-speakers of English (American, Australian, British and Canadian), and were selected from a range of subject areas and with a range of experience. Table 1 shows the background of the lecturers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Reader</th>
<th>Senior Lecturer</th>
<th>Lecturer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lecturing experience</th>
<th>1-5 yrs</th>
<th>5-10 yrs</th>
<th>10-20 yrs</th>
<th>20 yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lecturing experience to Chinese students</th>
<th>&lt;1 yr</th>
<th>1-2 yrs</th>
<th>2-4 yrs</th>
<th>4-6 yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of lecturers with foreign language learning experience</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of lecturers with experience of learning in a foreign language</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of lecturers with knowledge of Cantonese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survival</td>
<td>Above Survival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Number of lecturers using Cantonese in their lectures | 0 |
| Subject areas of lecturers | Accountancy | Business Management (2) | Building and Construction | Computer Science | Economics | Electronic Engineering | Information Systems | Law | Public and Social Administration |

Table 1: Background information on the lecturers

- questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted with students of the selected lecturers. All students were L1 Cantonese-speakers and had been through the Hong Kong secondary system where a mixed mode of Cantonese and English instruction is used. To gain entry to a university level institution in Hong Kong students need a minimum grade E in their Hong Kong Certificate of Education Use of English Examination, which correlates to around 450 on the TOEFL test. Of course, many students achieve higher than the minimum grade E. As a point of comparison most U.S. universities have an entry level for non-native students of about 550, which correlates to a grade B on the Hong Kong equivalent examination.
further, more intensive discussion, often on a daily basis, with three lecturers with whom the researchers built up a particularly good rapport, over the whole three year period of the research.

- participant observation of a wide range of lectures by the two researchers.
- reflective diaries kept by lecturers and students during their lecture courses.
- field notes arising from less formal discussion with and observation of lecturers and students (the 10 lecturers and their students referred to above, but also others).
- recordings and transcriptions of lectures.
- other artefacts of the lecture situation, such as textbooks, handouts, student notes, etc.

Questionnaires were designed to provide “standardized” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983) basic data on the lecturers and students and their attitudes towards lecturing. The interviews were “reflective” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983), i.e. the interviewer did not start with a specific set of questions, although he did start with a set of areas to be covered, this evolving as more interviews took place. The aim of the interviewing was to minimize the influence of the researcher on what the interviewee said, while at the same time providing some structure in terms of what was or was not relevant and eliciting clarification where ambiguity occurred. The approach to diary keeping was broadly similar to that of the interviews, i.e. lecturers and students were encouraged to report on what they felt to be significant aspects of their lectures, but some broad guidelines and on-going feedback were provided so as to ensure some sort of structure and relevance to the research. Focus groups conducted with students either took the form of small group discussion following on a lecture or sometimes students were asked to write down their impressions of a lecture.

In this paper we will only refer to that data which we use to develop our theoretical framework for the notion of culture in second language lectures. In terms of the EMIC principle of analysis (Pike, 1964; Watson-Gegeo, 1988), according to which theory develops out of the data intrinsic to the given situation, the emphasis in this paper is on the theory (supported by extracts from the data), rather than a detailed description of the data or “story” of the situation. In Watson-Gegeo’s (1988) terms the emphasis in this paper is on the “analysis, interpretation, and explanation” resulting from the “thick” description, rather than the description itself. A detailed description of the data is available elsewhere (Flowerdew and Miller, in preparation).

Our theoretical insights were arrived at in the following way. The data was collected and discussed on an on-going basis by both researchers. Having data from a variety of sources and subjects and having two researchers, ensured an element of triangulation to the data and to theory building. As hypotheses were generated, the data was sorted and resorted into categories by the researchers, using either the word-processor or photocopying and physical cut-and-paste. Gradually patterns emerged, one of which being the cultural framework which is the focus of the present paper.
Ethnic Culture

In referring to ethnic culture in the context of cross-cultural lectures we are concerned with social-psychological features which affect the behaviour of students and which may contrast with the social-psychological make-up of Western lecturers. In some cultures there are certain taboos which Westerners are usually warned about — physical contact between the sexes, for example, in Muslim countries, touching on the head in Thailand — which can be traced to psycho-sociological cultural traits. Sometimes foreigners learn about these features the hard way, as when one of the researchers, when teaching in an Arab country, in order to demonstrate what a rivet was in English, raised his shoe — which happened to contain rivets — above the level of a student's desk. Because revealing the sole of one's foot to another is an insult in Arab culture, the student, who had very weak English and did not understand the context of the action, was insulted and walked out of the lecture.

To our knowledge there are no such taboos in Hong Kong which stand out so strongly as the above. However, certain social-psychological features affect the behaviour of Hong Kong Chinese in lectures and are susceptible to cross-cultural misunderstanding in more subtle ways. Perhaps the most salient features of the social psychology of Chinese people reported in the literature is the influence of their confucian heritage, with its emphasis on the family, filial piety and respect for one's elders in general (Bond, 1986, 1991). For Confucius, one's teacher is on a par with one's father, in terms of the loyalty and deference that is expected to be shown towards him (sic). In accordance with this cultural trait, most expatriate lecturers find their students to be extremely deferential, a feeling corroborated by us in our interviews with students and our observation of lectures (as well as from our own experience as teachers of Hong Kong students). As one student said to one of the researchers when he asked her why she returned a copy of an article he had lent her in the traditional Chinese way, with both hands, “To show respect to my teacher”. A similar expression of respect is evident in a statement from business students when asking for detailed notes from their lecturer:

LJ: when I asked them why they wanted such detailed notes and said they weren't necessary, the students said that it was because they respected me as a teacher and that they would not ask me if they did not have such respect for me.

As another example of respect for one's teacher, we might cite here the fact that, at undergraduate level, it is very unlikely that Hong Kong Chinese students would ever question the grades awarded by their lecturers.

It may be felt that there is no problem if students show respect for their lecturers. Indeed, many lecturers in the West might well feel that a little more deference from their students would not be at all amiss. However, another behavioural feature of Hong Kong students which might be related to respect for one's teacher is students' reluctance to give their opinions, even when asked. Hong Kong students often decline to give an opinion, or if and when they do give one,
it is after careful consideration. This can be frustrating for expatriate lecturers. As lecturer O commented on her earlier experience of lecturing in multi-ethnic classes in the U.S.:

LO: American students start to answer a question before they know what they are going to say. Chinese students wait until they are sure of what they are going to say before they speak. That makes the American professors really mad.

Scollon (1994) has traced this ethnic characteristic to the teaching handed down from the time of Confucius. The Confucian classics contains numerous passages on the need for care in speaking. As explained by one ethnic Chinese lecturer, if a student asks or answers a question, he or she will be seen by his or her peers as “showing off”; he or she will become “an outcast”. This brings us to another behavioural trait of ethnic Chinese commonly cited in the literature — their collectivist approach to human interaction (Hofstede, 1983; Bond, 1986, 1991, forthcoming). In our research students were observed to engage in a high level of peer assistance. In focus group sessions conducted with students after lectures, in answer to the question, “If you had any problems understanding, what will you do about it?”, by far the most common answer was, “Ask my classmate”.

A further feature of Chinese ethnic culture is a high level of achievement motivation (Bond, 1986, 1991, forthcoming). In Chinese culture, achievement, for young people, is defined almost exclusively in academic terms (emphasis switching later to financial success [Lau and Kuan, 1986]). Our interviews with both lecturers and students and our observation of lectures provide ample evidence of the motivation of students to do well. High achievement motivation of their students is something which was identified by the lecturers in our study, although they were at times somewhat taken aback by the pragmatic nature of this motivation. Many statements by lecturers in their interviews indicate that they would like to feel that students are motivated by a genuine desire to learn and to discover things about themselves and the world around them. In the words of one lecturer:

LI: [I want a] more interactive and participatory [style] ... I want the students to question me about my experiences.

However, students are much more likely to be motivated by a desire to obtain good grades and to thereby be able to get a good job:

LB: They ... try to learn what they need to learn to pass the test, very few of them think outside that framework.

This can lead to cross-cultural problems in that lecturers may expect students to find out things for themselves, while students are more likely to want lecturers to tell them exactly what must be learned and to give them the relevant information so that they can go away and learn it.

A final example involving a contrast in ethnic culture in our data is that of humour. This is a
cross-cultural feature not commonly noted in the literature on Chinese ethnicity. However, it seems to us to be a significant potential problem area in cross-cultural communication. Occasions, frequently noted by lecturers, when they discover that things that they find funny are not appreciated as humorous by their audiences can be interpreted as a mismatch, or case of negative transfer, between the conception of humour in the host culture and lecturers' own ethnic background. In contrast, when lecturer J finds that he is able to use self-deprecation effectively as a humourous device, this can be interpreted as a case where the two ethnic cultures overlap, or a case of positive transfer of ethnic culture. Most lecturers, in their interviews, stated that they found difficulties in using humour in the way they would do in their home countries, many claiming that they had given up on making jokes, as they were not understood.

Local Culture
The second type of culture we will call "local culture". Here we are referring to aspects of the local setting with which the members of a particular society are familiar. The importance of local culture manifests itself in the need of the lecturers to use local examples, or examples which will be recognized locally, in their elucidation of concepts. The following quotations illustrate the difficulty experienced by lecturers in adapting to the local culture:

LG: I have a lot of trouble with many of my illustrations [which are not local].

LF: You can use a car as an example for something in North America as most people have one, but that's not the case here.

LA: I talk about the Bond Centre or Pacific Place [well-known building projects in Hong Kong]. There's no point in talking about a project in Liverpool, but they will recognise international projects like Sydney Opera House.

LE: Hong Kong students don't know about fields and cows but they know about currency and share prices.

A common complaint of students was the difficulty they found when lecturers based their examples on their experience outside Hong Kong. As one public administration student put it:

Usually he [the lecturer] takes examples from U.K. and sometimes I don't understand because I am not familiar with U.K. housing, because he is British he is familiar with the U.K. situation but not Hong Kong.

And a law student:

The lecturer may use U.S as his home country but not Hong Kong when talking about cases.

The importance of relating material to the local context is highlighted when consideration is
given to the fact that locally produced textbooks are not available at the tertiary level. This fact means that lecturers either have to rely on lectures and handouts alone, or, if they use a book, have to devote a lot of their attention to bringing the material in the book closer to the students. As one lecturer put it:

LI. The material on Hong Kong available in textbooks is extremely limited in my subject. That means I have to try to respond and redress an imbalance or sensitivity i.e. I have to bring the material into the Hong Kong context for students to understand.

With time, lecturers can adapt to local culture, as they can begin to find local examples to illustrate their points. Lecturer G described her strategy in lecturing on marketing as follows:

What I do is make sure I know as much about the local market as possible. While the examples are English based I look for examples in Chinese magazines, newspapers, t.v.. I encourage them [the students] to bring in examples of Chinese so we have a mixture.

The more familiar lecturers become with the local setting, the more easily are they be able to come up with suitable examples.

In interviews, one group of public administration students were almost unanimous in seeing the use of examples taken from the British context as a problem in their understanding of their lectures on public housing policy. However, as the following lecture extract on public housing shows, later the lecturer responsible for the course was able to adeptly use Hong Kong as an example and to even contrast the Hong Kong situation effectively with overseas settings by referring to the reaction of foreign visitors when they encountered this example:

LI. and so the government went about providing the first permanent housing programme at the same time / and within a year there were eight of these six storey mark one blocks which were built / you can still see them just off / ah / Wo / ah / Wo Chi Street / are they still there / the first eight / em / just off Wo Chi Street / just the other side of / ah / Shek Kip Mei station / em / and that was the origins really of the first permanent public housing in Hong Kong / down in Shek Kip Mei / ... CONTINUES WITH DESCRIPTION OF THE ACCOMMODATION / ... we've had visitors to the department on several occasions and I've taken them down to the estate next door / em / and just showed them some of the older blocks myself / and walked them around / the point I point out to them / which they can hardly believe it / is that cooking was carried out on these areas as well ...

In spite of such success in adapting, local culture can still prove problematic, even for those lecturers who have lengthy experience of local life. One lecturer claimed in interviews to have
little difficulty relating to Hong Kong students, as she was married to a local Chinese and had been in Hong Kong a long time. However, some of her students still said that they had problems with her examples, which, they claimed, were often taken from the U.S..

**Academic Culture**

The third type of culture we can refer to as "academic culture". Here we are concerned with those features of the lecture situation which for their interpretation require an understanding of the particular values, roles, assumptions, attitudes, patterns of behaviour, etc., which are specifically academic in nature. Academic culture may be identified at various levels: at the level of a group of countries (e.g. "Western" countries); at the level of an individual country; at the level of a group of institutions within a given country; or at the level of the individual institution within a given country. The academic culture of any given group of countries, individual country, group of institutions or single institution, is likely to be imbued with the values and practices of the ethnic culture within which it is situated (Flowerdew, 1986) and it may be difficult, in analyzing a given instance of behaviour in an academic context, to ascribe such behaviour to ethnic or academic influence.

One of the most significant factors in any analysis of Chinese academic culture is the role and nature of literacy within Chinese society as a whole. As Bond (1991) notes, the achievement of literacy by an individual in Chinese is a truly formidable task. Some 3,500 individual characters need to be mastered before even a rudimentary understanding of a book or newspaper is possible. In order to achieve literacy, from kindergarten age, Chinese are subjected to lengthy classroom and homework assignments involving the intensive rote learning of characters. It is not surprising that, as a result of this training, Chinese students have a highly developed skill in memorisation, a skill which is carried over to other learning tasks in the primary and secondary school and which students expect to continue to use at University level.

Given the large size of classes, coupled with the well developed skill of memorisation and the confucian values of deference to teachers, the stereotypical style of teaching in Hong Kong schools is very much teacher-centred (Johnson and Lee, 1987). Because of this academic background, such a teaching style is also likely to be expected at university level by students who receive no induction into the academic culture of a Western-oriented tertiary academic institution. That is why, although many lecturers in our study expressed a desire to use a participatory style of teaching, acceptable in Western classrooms, they find it difficult to apply in Hong Kong. As one lecturer stated:

> LC: They [Hong Kong students] have been conditioned to expecting a [non-participatory] delivery system. In one way it would be difficult to break that down.
And another:

**LH:** They are not accustomed to participating in lectures. They feel quite threatened when they have to do so.

Confucian values and a collectivist approach to social interaction can be identified as the source of another feature of academic culture in Hong Kong; the propensity for students to help each other. One aspect of peer help noted by us in our observation of lectures was that of linguistic informant, one student glossing in Cantonese a word, phrase or stretch of talk for another student or group of students who were less proficient in English. As a result of this peer assistance during lectures, lecturers may feel that they do not have the full attention of their audiences. In addition, the noise level tends to be higher than most lecturers are used to and can be quite distracting. While it was clear from their interviews that some lecturers realized the importance and need for peer help, others thought their students were merely inattentive.

A final feature of academic culture in Hong Kong which we may cite as diverging from the Western norm concerns the question of original thought. As one lecturer, who had obviously given cross-cultural issues some thought, put it:

**LJ:** In Europe you are valued for independent thought — here you are not. If you are in a junior position you’re not expected to voice opinions or make recommendations.

In their interviews, many lecturers expressed their frustration with students’ lack of creative thinking:

**LA:** The main problem I find is if my ideas don’t feature in a standard textbook, then the students seem to be lost for a point of reference ... I try to encourage them to do the thinking and analyzing but at best they will only do this after I have shown them how to do it once.

**LF:** In putting up ideas for design where there are alternatives. The students’ requirement for the right answer is at odds for a balanced argument.

In setting an assignment, a Western lecturer may be looking for originality of thought (although this is usually an unstated assumption). Because for Chinese students the teacher is viewed as an authority who is not to be questioned, their view of an assignment may be that it is expected to reflect what the lecturer has told them in the lecture course rather than to present original thought.

**LD:** They only experience a system which requires them to learn the ‘right’ answer and to regurgitate (it) — the concept of evaluation, analysis etc. appears to be totally lacking.
Disciplinary Culture

Fourthly, we can refer to “disciplinary culture”. Here we are referring to the theories, concepts, note, text, etc. which characterise a particular academic discipline. This is a notion which has been developed previously by Becher (1981, 1987). One particularly important dimension of disciplinary culture for the applied linguist is the relation between the structure of the body of knowledge which belongs to a given discipline and the particular forms of language use which this gives rise to. Much of the research conducted throughout the short history of English for Specific Purposes has been interested in this question, although most studies have focussed on written text (see e.g. Swales, 1992; Bhatia, 1993 for review). With regard to the lecture, Brown (1987:287) notes that, “The experience of giving and receiving lectures in different subjects has not been fully explored, yet it is clear that the structure and content of subjects have a marked influence upon the mode of lecturing”.

Among lectures observed and recorded by the present researchers a considerable variation in discourse structure was noted across disciplines. In law, for example, the lecture discourse was found to be often structured around a series of problem-solving tasks designed to illustrate a certain legal concept. In computer science, lectures typically followed a repeated pattern of problem-solution (Hoey, 1983). In economics, lectures were sometimes structured around a “story”, to show the progression of a particular economic development. A more thorough study, however, would be required to determine to what extent the variation we noted was due to disciplinary culture, on the one hand, and personal preference, on the other. Nevertheless, lecturers do seem to have some idea about the typical characteristics of lectures in their particular disciplines. As one law lecturer (LM) was recorded as saying in an inter-department discussion, “In true legal fashion, let’s attempt a few definitions.”, and as an engineering lecturer (LN) stated, when beginning a presentation at a similar forum, “As I’m an engineer, I’ll use graphs and overhead transparencies”. Sometimes lecture structure can be identified in our lecture transcripts explicitly stated at various stages in the lecture, particularly at the beginning. This phenomenon is illustrated from the following extract from the beginning of a lecture on public housing policy in Hong Kong, where the lecturer indicates that the lecture will be structured around a description of the origins of a policy and an analysis of possible reasons for this policy:

LI: what I want to do is set out the origins of the very major public housing programmes which are such an important feature of Hong Kong social welfare / ... / to take those as a starting point / and set them in the broader context of the development of public and social welfare services / the context of / why did government intervene? / why did it choose the particular steps it did? /

Since Kaplan (1966), researchers have been aware of the potential for cross-cultural variation in academic discourse. However, this research has centred on expository prose. To our knowledge, no work has been conducted to investigate to what extent lecture discourse might be subject to cross-cultural variation. Given that there may indeed be cross-cultural variation
in lecture discourse structure, it would be wise to alert non-natives to the typical structures which they are likely to be exposed to in English.

The relation between knowledge structure and the structure of lecture discourse is but one aspect of disciplinary culture as it relates to lectures in a second language. Another aspect, of particular significance within the second language context, concerns the rate at which a particular discipline is developing. All disciplines evolve, but a discipline like computer science, where even the fundamental concepts are developing at an extraordinary rate, contrasts strongly with a discipline like history where knowledge within the discipline is relatively static. Because the university where we conducted our research is oriented towards "applied" disciplines, they tend to be dynamic in terms of their development. Significant ramifications for lecturing follow from a discipline which is experiencing rapid evolution. First, because the field is developing so fast, lecturers are forced to deal with a host of new vocabulary. Referring to the main difficulties in lecturing to Hong Kong students, lecturer J stated as follows:

LJ: A huge amount of vocabulary. And the area I'm working in a lot of it is evolving and you are constantly coming across new words in the commercial world or new computer terms.

And, as lecturer F pointed out, these new technical terms are unlikely to have an equivalent in the mother tongue:

LF: (in answer to the interview question, "What are the main linguistic problems of the students?"") Lots of jargon. But in our discipline, electronic engineering, there is no equivalent in Cantonese so they are forced to use the English word.

Fig 1., which is extracted from a local Hong Kong Chinese (sic) language newspaper, gives an indication of the extent to which Chinese has to rely on the English lexicon in a rapidly developing field such as computers.

One effect of this situation of a rapidly developing vocabulary is that Hong Kong students, who in secondary school have relied on glossing their English texts and handouts in Chinese, now have to adopt an alternative strategy, there being no Chinese equivalent with which to gloss the English term.

A second result of the rapid development of certain disciplines of particular significance in the cross cultural context, is that text books are not available as a teaching and learning resource, because the publishers cannot keep up to date with the field. As a consequence, students have to rely more on lectures (and accompanying handouts), as they become the sole source of information. The importance of lectures vis a vis other learning media is thus enhanced and the need to depend on the spoken medium, as opposed to the written, increased. The effect of this situation on students is doubly hard, because at school students have been used to using an English text, but with a largely Cantonese commentary (teaching at secondary level in Hong
Kong is officially largely English medium, but in practice, while the texts are in English, much of the teaching of the texts is in Cantonese (Johnson and Lee, 1987). Students are now faced with no set text to refer to and a commentary only in English.

Space has only allowed us to discuss two features of disciplinary culture as they relate to the second language lecture. Researchers in English for Specific Purposes have devoted considerable attention to the analysis of written text from a disciplinary perspective; Dudley-Evans and Henderson (1990), for example, is a recent example of work on Economics written text. It would have been interesting, however, if the contributions to this book had included something on Economics lecture discourse. The whole question of how the different types of text within a discipline relate one to the other and how students relate to these different types of text is a ripe field for research. The concept of “disciplinary culture” would be a useful one if such an agenda were adopted.

Conclusion
Based on an ethnographic study of second language lectures given at a research site in Hong Kong, this paper has outlined four aspects of the notion of culture which it is claimed underly the process of lecturing to non-native speakers. Our ethnographic study has allowed us, as Geertz (1973:27) would put it, “to uncover an important conceptual structure [that] informs our subjects’ acts”.

The context of the present study is Hong Kong, where considerable numbers of Western lecturers lecture to non-Western students, but the findings are equally of value in contexts where non-Western students study in Western countries. Indeed, those concerned with the latter situation, where overseas students are in the minority and are interspersed, perhaps thinly, with their native-English-speaking peers, and are thus less easily identifiable, may find particular value in having the cultural assumptions, ideas and beliefs relating to academic listening of a homogeneous group of non-native-speaking students (albeit from only one cultural background) revealed to them.

As stated in our introduction, it is a premise of ethnographic research that communities are often unaware of the assumptions, ideas and beliefs that constrain their acts. In putting forward a framework for the analysis of the culture of second language lectures it is our aim to provide a means for lecturers and students (and those involved with the training of these two groups) to develop a conscious awareness of their own and the other culture. Having developed such an awareness, the basis is provided for a mutual coming together, or “cultural synergy” (Jin and Cortazzi, 1993), which can in turn lead to more effective communication in the cross-cultural lecture theatre. Further research in this area, an agenda for which we have sketched out in this paper, will be of value to lecturers, students, and those responsible for their training, who want to work towards greater cross-cultural understanding.
Notes
1. See Scollon and Scollon (1994) for a bibliography on confucianism and its influence among the contemporary ethnic Chinese people.

2. Readers who have experience of teaching Arab students will note how this attitude contrasts strongly with that of Arab students, who tend to treat grades as negotiable and who will sometimes expect the teacher to "help" them by raising the grade awarded. This attitude can be related to teachings in the Koran.

3. Although a contrast is often made between Western and non-Western academic cultures (KaiKai, 1989; Bellows, 1994) (Dudley-Evans and Swales, 1980 refer to "pre-Western" educational systems), there is of course variation between Western countries. Leow (1994), reporting on the University system in Spain, where American students from Georgetown University are seconded, has noted how a failure rate of some 70% is quite normal, how students may resist exams up to 5 times, how most serious work is only done as the examinations approach, and how little time is spent in lectures. These features of Spanish academic culture, Leow reports, all contrast with what North American students are used to at home and may lead to disorientation. Just as there may be variation in academic culture between countries, there may also be variation between institutions in the same country. For example, the one to one tutorial system of teaching at Oxford and Cambridge contrasts with the lecture/group tutorial pattern of most of the other universities in the U.K.

4. This helps to explain why the mainland Chinese government, in order to increase literacy, introduced a set of simplified characters and has also experimented with a romanized alphabet. However, in Hong Kong, these reforms have not been tried and the traditional characters are still used.

5. The habit of glossing English texts in Chinese has also been noted at the secondary school level (Johnson and Lee, 1987) and in tertiary level lectures at our own research site (Walters and Balla, 1992).

6. One rare example worthy of mention is Dudley-Evans (in press), who has shown how the discourse structures of lectures in two disciplines — Highway Engineering and Plant-Biology — vary, Highway Engineering employing a so-called (after Olsen and Huckin [1990]) point-driven strategy, while Plant Biology is more likely to follow a framework built around the the systems of plant classification developed by various biologists.

7. Bhatia (1993) suggests that research writing is not subject to cross-cultural variation, due to the need to conform to international standards if one is seeking publication in international journals. However, as far as lectures are concerned, where there is no international standard, there is prima facie a stronger likelihood of cross-cultural divergence.

8. It was only when Swales attended a lecture course in law that he realised the purpose of reading in law was to "spot the crucial facts on which the decision (rightly or wrongly) rested and not to understand the "story" of the cases" (Swales, 1990:70, cited in Bhatia, 1993:195).

References


Davis, A. (ed.) (forthcoming) Qualitative Research in ESOL. TESOL Quarterly, Special Issue.


Flowerdew, J. and Miller; (forthcoming) Lecturer and Student Perceptions, Problems and Strategies in Second Language Lectures. Research Report; English Department, City Polytechnic of Hong Kong.


**Acknowledgment**

We are extremely grateful for the willing cooperation and interest of the anonymous students and lecturers who took part in this study. We also acknowledge the helpful discussion and comments of Vijay Bhatia, Bertha Du-Babcock, Belinda Ho, David Li, Martha Pennington, and Ron Scollon, during the preparation of this paper.