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'Rules' as a cultural dimension of ESP

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**‘Rules’
as a Cultural
Dimension of ESP**

Introduction

The research points

3. ESP must have culture content as it cannot be culture-free.
4. An ESP program written by Western writers for 'Eastern' learners introduces Western values in the form of cultural concepts.
5. Through a socialization process, VELT, an example ESP program, introduces American 'business' (Aramco) values to Saudi learners/employees for them to adapt to its organisational culture. One of the values is the concept of '**Rules**'.

- 1. Methodology: content analysis of an ESP program**
 - Aramco (Arabian American Oil Company) in Saudi Arabia**
 - VELT (Vocational English Language Training Program) - sponsored by Aramco**
 - designed for Saudi national new hire workers (trainees)**

1. Organisational culture

Organisations have cultures. Hofstede (1991) talks about cultures and organisations and calls culture the **'software of the mind'** or **'collective programming of the mind'**, that distinguishes members of a group from another.. He thinks of culture as **socialisation** that he defines as

"The acquisition of the values and practices belonging to a culture, by participating in that culture" (Hofstede, 1991:263).

1. Culture and ESP

"Communication is not just a question of learning the language ...,but also of an integrated learning of language and culture" (Byram, 1993:13).

Some linguists considered the cultural content in ESP programs.

Barron (1991) argues that learners' cultural background should be considered in the variables of ESP syllabus design.

Jacob (1987) investigated cultural competence in ESP (EST) curriculum.

Lynch (1981) mentioned crosscultural differences as a part of an ESP syllabus.

Billett (1994) stresses the importance of the values beyond providing the workers, for instance electricians, with the required practices of their jobs, with the help of experts, and he calls this 'culture of practice'.

Robinson (1991:98) also discusses ESP in terms of business English.

■ 5. THE CONCEPT OF 'RULES'

■ 5.1. Introduction

- -An **ESP program** will be part of the **socialisation** process that the company wants the trainees to go through before going to job.
- - The **notion of company rules** is an area where Western American culture is introduced, injecting the company workers with its Western values and ideology in an ESP program.
- - The rules operate on **socialising the new** and **maintaining the socialisation of the old**.
- - VELT tells trainees **what** and **why** as part of company cultural socialisation.
- - In industrial companies, **the individual has to work :**
- - **as an independent individual** performing a certain job,
- - **in a group of workers** that belong to a shift, a department or division in charge of a certain group of tasks, and finally
- - **in a large company** that has many departments and divisions, with rules and regulations aiming at controlling everybody in it.

- **5.2. 'Rules': a Western value system**
- **5.2.1. Rules as a system of control of behaviour**
- **'Rules', 'regulations', and 'laws' are all words with similar meanings, or at least share the same purpose. They are used to control behaviour of people in the community and workers in the work place:**
- **"Laws and rules were mentioned ... as ways in which society tries to prevent uncertainties in the behaviour of people..... There are ... many internal rules and regulations controlling the work process,..." (Hofstede, 1991:120).**

- Rules achieve:
- a high rate of productivity,
- harmonious work as a group,
- an understanding of why workers should do so
- control of the work process
- representation of the company's mind, the culture, or 'mental software' as Hofstede (1991) calls it.
- Showing power of the company
- More stability of the system of work
- Better and more successful communication in the company
- controlling conflict in all its forms in the company: between the worker and the system, the boss, the group, and the environment.
- Precision and punctuality

- Hofstede (1991) explains:
- "The ... need for rules ... can be turned into a talent for **precision and punctuality**
- If you want a competent person to do a job properly, it is often best to provide him or her with very precise instructions on how to do it" (Hofstede, 1991:122).

- **5.2.2. Rules and legitimation at work**
- **- ESP training can**
- **1- provide the knowledge and understanding of the occupational culture values.**
- **2- develop the new worker's occupational cultural identity as he recognises the significance of key issues in his occupation.**

- - The knowledge has to be **convincing** and **proved to be true and legitimate**, otherwise, it will not be accepted by the workers.
- - **Legitimation of knowledge** can take place on the job when workers observe and understand relationships between work behaviour and the process and product on the work activity, and **how** this contributes to the whole work activity, which is called '**the totality of the occupational activity**' (Billett, 1994:9).
- - **The value of the culture is made explicit as work practice becomes legitimated.**

- **5.2.3. Rules as an expression of power of the company**
- Rules can express **the power of the company** which impresses the workers and **provides them with:**
 - - **feeling of confidence**
 - - **respect**
 - - **pride.**

- **Some sources of the power of the company**
- 1- the workers' positive attitude toward the organisation.
- 2- Obedient and realistic workers
- 3- Workers who accept rationality and legitimacy of the existing system: acceptance of the organisational values and obedience can be called **organisation's 'conditional love'**, (Presthus, 1989:55)
- 4- Mutual help at work (Hofstede, 1991:187).
- 5- Hierarchy rules:. Persons at the top of the hierarchy have a great influence, but not close supervision of the details of the operation.

- - Americans justify the need and natural creation of the **hierarchy based on differences in ability**" (Presthus, 1979)
- "... superiors and subordinates consider each other as existentially unequal; the hierarchical system is felt to be based on this existential inequality (Hofstede, 1991:35).
- - A model of authority of the **organisation** is represented in the **combination and co-ordination of personal power and power of the rules**
- - **Rules govern everybody in the organisation, even those who give commands.**

- **6- Equality before rules: all workers are equal before the rules. Equality among individuals is a basis of respect of others in American culture. (Condon, 1986)**
- **- Rules represent the ideology (ideological power) of huge organisations. (Fairclough, 1989).**
- **- Rules and ideological concepts can actually create unity among all new workers through the acts/tasks they have to perform in their training and in their work.**

- 5.3. Rules in VELT: the introduction of a Western value system in the Saudi context
 - VELT teaches rules for **comprehensive company culture awareness**. Aramco is an oil company and the work system is serious and needs full attention and control. VELT reflects this seriousness when it comes to rules as **safety, work, health care, travel, handling machines and tools**, for example.

■ 5.3.1. Rules as a control system in VELT

- 1- In Driving: A driver's license is an essential document. One cannot get it unless he takes a test in which he has to show that he can the rules of driving and rules of the road. In lesson D71, Hassan takes a driving test.

- "fasten seat belt
- check brakes
- check gears
- look in mirror
- signal before starting...." (D71-1, SB).

- The trainees have to be aware of the need of
- - **safety on the road** while driving,.
- - **following driving rules** as routine practices
- - **observing road signs** while driving (D71-2&3).
- - **observing road conditions** of a dangerous bend, uneven road, sand and camels on the road, wet road, and men working (B25).
- By **describing many accidents** that happened because the driver was
- - smoking a cigarette,
- - talking to his friend,
- - or listening to the radio (B22-B24),
- VELT expresses the Western way of thinking on safe driving rules.

- In lesson D72 - **Driver Orientation** - Hassan's friend, Omar, orientates him on rules of the road:
- **observing the speed limit**, one of the basic Western driving rules.
- **"Be careful of animals"**
- **"Never drive when you are tired"** (D75).
- **Other important rules** are given to be checked 'False', to train workers to differentiate between right and wrong practices, such as:
- **"Don't forget to drive faster when the weather is bad", "Don't use mirrors while you drive", "You don't have to stop when traffic lights are on red", "Eat while you drive"** (D75).

- -2 **Work shift schedules** represent **rules of internal control and organisation of jobs**:
- *"Group A has four days on and three days off. They work Saturday through Tuesday, and they have Wednesday through Friday off. group B has five days on and two days off. ...Group C has five days on and two days off" (B216-2, SB).*
- -3 **Tools and machines** have to be **used, maintained,** and **kept** according to some rules that 'company men' have to be aware of.
- - **Rules of handling tools can increase their productivity and lifetime.**
- - The tools are the **tools of production**. They represent the **power of the company**. To maintain the power of the company, the workers have to maintain their tools.
- - The trainees learn the **Lockout procedure** which is relevant to using **hold tags** on machines that need repair as a system controlled by supervisors.(C20-C23)

- - **Location of the tools (arranging tools in the workplace)** A98 (p.2, SB)
- - **Using the right tool for its right function** (knife, hammer, chisel, drill, saw, ruler) (A256-1, SB).
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- ***"1. Don't hammer with a wrench.***
- ***You cut bolts with a chisel.***
- ***2. Use a wrench.***
- ***You turn screws with a wrench.***
- ***It is difficult to turn nuts with pliers.***
- ***3. Don't drill holes with a screwdriver.***
- ***You turn screws with a driver."*** (A257-1, SB).
- - The company prefers observing the rule of **'appropriacy' between jobs and tools.**
- ***"Abdullah cannot use his saw. It is (rusty). It needs cleaning. Mousa cannot use his chisel. It is not (sharp). It needs sharpening"*** (B58-2, SB).

- Rules are issued in the **imperative form** in lesson B60.
- ***"Sharpen your tools often.***
- ***Oil your tools often.***
- ***Clean your tools often" (B60-1, SB).***

- -4 **maintenance and good housekeeping** in VELT and the way it handles them come to the standard of **formal teaching/learning**,(do, don't do.)
 - **Safety on the job involves handling**
 - **the need to use safety clothes (A254),**
 - **dangers of gases and Chemicals (B137, B190, B197),**
 - **using Scott Air-Pack and H2S tester in case of gas leakage (C37),**
 - **lifting correctly as a personal safety hazard (A286),**
 - **causes of fire on the job (B40 & B43),**
 - **using fire extinguisher correctly (B48)**
 - **cause of electric shock (B37).**

- **5.3.2. Legitimation of workers' behaviour in the areas of safety and maintenance**
- Aramco's rules reflect the **mentality of the world of industry.**
- **Facts and figures** are most important in the industrial world
- **Workers, equipment, product, and money** are the first concern of industrial companies.
- **And rules are the only possible way of putting all the factors together in a meaningful form.**

- **Legitimation of workers' behaviour in VELT is established through the convincing knowledge and accepted practices in the areas of safety and maintenance.**
- **Rules of safety and rules of the tools are explicit in VELT.**
- **The ultimate purpose is**
- **1- the safety of the personnel, the environment, the machines, and the company**
- **2- the saving of the company's time and money,**
- **3- and the contribution to good performance and the productivity in the company.**
- **Billett (1994) calls this 'the totality of the occupational activity'.**

- **Safety rules protect the reputation of the company.** Lesson (B200) presents an accident of acid getting into a worker's eyes and on his hands because he was careless as he did not wear his safety gloves and goggles.
- **Wearing safety clothes is one of the rules that work**
- **at the surface level, for personal safety,**
- **at a deeper level, to save the company's time and money that will be wasted when a worker needs to stay in hospital.**

- **VELT has four levels, A through D.**
- **Level A starts with simple rules, warnings and directions accompanied by relevant pictures that make them more meaningful. (A87)**
- **Examples.**
- **- 1) 'No smoking'. 2) '-danger'. 3 & 4) 'caution'.**
- **Then 'wear your hard hat, safety shoes, safety glasses'.**
- **- Reporting an accident: The rules of safety require a report from anybody who witnesses the accident.**
- ***"Mohammed Ali reported the accident. His badge number is 75256" (B200).***
- **According to the rule, the accident is reported as a number having an accident in this large world of numbers.**
- **Teaching Aramco workers the international rules of safety and travel on the plane and at the airport relates the workers, the company and its industrial community to the wider international world context.**

- **5.3.3. Rules and the power of the company in VELT**
- - Rules express the power of the company.
- - Rules are part of the process of socialisation as well as the core of socialisation
- Rules and regulations in VELT are sometimes used to impress the trainees:
 - The new workers need to respect the company
 - the old ones have to maintain this respect
- With all this amount of dominating rules in the indisputable information the program disseminates to the workers, they feel the superiority of the company and their inferiority to it. The trainees have to feel the power of the organisation for necessary obedience to the rules, being proud of belonging to a huge and powerful company.

Aramco hierarchy is handled in VELT.

- **"The Chairman of the Board of Aramco is responsible for Aramco.**
- **He is the most important man in Aramco.**
- **The President reports to the Chairman.**
- **He is the 2nd most important man in Aramco" (B135).**

- **This system of hierarchy is presented to socialise trainees into 'respect for hierarchy' where everyone on the hierarchy line is shown as being superior and subordinate.**

- **There are Vice-presidents (V.P.) who are also responsible for Aramco.**
- **"The V.P. of G.O. is responsible for**
- **The V.P. of O.O. is responsible for**
- **The V.P. of M.S. is responsible for**
- **All the Vice Presidents _____ the President of Aramco" (B136).**

- **The trainees are introduced to the nearer hierarchy to them in the form of a hierarchy chart placing the foreman, supervisor, specialist operator, operator 1, operator 2, and operator 3 on one line (A273).**
- **The Chairman, the president, and the Vice Presidents represent a hierarchy of power, but the rules rule them all. There is no power beyond the power of the rules, as argued by Weber (1976) and Hofstede (1991).**
- **In Aramco hierarchical system, there are supervisors and subordinates; subordinates do jobs they are told to do.**

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- - In the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, the most important opinion in the group is **the opinion of the oldest person** (Osterloh, 1986:81), **the father or the grandfather, or perhaps, the oldest son when the father is dead.** When the group is not the family, again **the oldest person in the group represents the most respected voice.**
- - In the industrial environment, the basics of the relations in the group are different; the voice of the company comes down through a supervisor who is not necessarily the oldest person but he represents the **powerful rules of the company.**

- - In lesson (C33), because the supervisor trusts his workers and he represents the company that needs to trust the departments and their decisions, he asks Omar to tell Mohammed to go to the clinic right away because he was too sick.
- - In lesson (C34), the supervisor advises a sick worker, who called reporting that he was sick, to go directly to the Emergency without an appointment, and to call him the following day if he can't come to work.
- **The rules are flexible enough** to permit the supervisor to allow a worker to do so. This reflects the power of the situational requirement as well as the power of the hierarchy.

- **Procedures**
- There are other factors that remind Aramco workers of the power and authority of the company. **Aramco services and procedures (B225-226, 229-230) are based on rules to be carried out. A worker can get a house loan from Aramco, but there is a procedure.**
- *"Abbad: I need a loan for a house. What should I do?"*
- *Ahmed: You should talk to Mr. Al-Safani about a loan" (B226).*
- **Workers have to ask if they need a service following a specific procedure.**
- - **At the deeper level, asking for a loan and having to refer to a person who is in charge of the procedure for giving a loan can be interpreted as a systematic organisation in referring to authorities.**

- However, the **procedures for these services are also governed by rules. To get a loan to get married, a worker has to have served a certain period of time.** Ahmed needs a loan to get married and he asks Mr. Al-Safani for a loan.
- ***"Could you help me, please? I need a loan." "What should I do?" he asks.***
- ***"You should come back next year," Mr. Al-Safani says." (B225-1, SB).***

When a worker works for Aramco the power of the company can affect his decisions and plans, and all his life.

- **Power relations in health care are shown in lessons B33 & B34 through doctors' instructions of what Khalid and Moosa should and should not do. Therefore, Khalid should stay in bed and should sleep a lot, whereas Moosa should drink a lot of water and should not smoke. Who gives instructions? The doctor has a kind of authority to instruct in form of recommendation and advice; they care for patients.**
- - **Good health results in good performance.**

In lessons D91 & D92 the medical staff exercise a lot of power on a patient who had a car accident. The medical staff decide what should be done and how many days the cast should stay and how long the patient should be away from work.

- **5.3.4. The ideological indoctrination of work in Aramco**
- - Aramco's system requires **rules that have to be respected and obeyed.**
- - **Workers cannot argue** about them.
- -**So, the company can impose its ideological power on its employees.**
- **The rules** included in VELT, whether **explicitly or implicitly, represent the ideology of Aramco presented in the form of required practices and way of thinking that the workers have to conform to, because**
- - **that is the only possible way accepted and wanted by the company.**
- **Aramco has what can be called a 'modern industrial ideology', for example, in case of emergency, safety hazard situation, reporting accidents, and so on,**

- **Aramco needs a 'real' job community that has the characteristics of one ideology that relates to concepts, rules, and behaviour of work, such as:**
 - **safety measures**
 - **when** the workers are asked to wear the appropriate safety clothes at work (A254),
 - **when** handling dangerous chemicals (B187),
 - **when** smoking and throwing cigarettes in a garbage can that is full of oily rags (B186),
 - **when** removing a live electric wire using a metal bar (B196), or
 - **when** not being careful and getting acid in the eyes (B200).

- **This ideology is a requirement for the success of company socialisation in its training program.**

- **Social and intellectual power.**
- **The company represents the two categories of social and intellectual power. The workers are the weaker party** because they need a job, they do not know the work system, they do not have the complete qualifications to work in the company; the minimum qualification they have is the wish to work for the company. **When they are given the job, their wish is fulfilled, and it is their turn now to fulfil the company's plans and to meet its standards.** And there the exercise of the company's power starts.
- - **The complete socialisation process is the ultimate aim of the company that tries to adapt the workers' mentality to accept and cope with the work system, values and job principles, that is, the organisation's culture. Which Hofstede (1991) describes as the 'software of the mind'.**

- - The company is the body that also has the social power and the workers have to fit in the social community of the company. The company provides the workers with knowledge, work, money, and prestige, and this all represents the body of social power it has.
- - The workers will never be able to have more power than the company. However, the more they are socialised, the closer they become to the company system, until they start operating from within the framework of the company's intellectual and social power. They will start to be part of these powers, but never use them against the company.

■ **6. Summary**

- The concept of 'rules' is an important **Western, American industrial business value system**.
- Rules function as a **company cultural socialisation system for controlling the workers' way of thinking** that influences their behaviour in terms of precision, punctuality, and competence.
- To Americans, **rules express the power of the organisation and organisational ideology** through which workers can be indoctrinated.
- Rules aim at **providing the knowledge** that justifies and rationalises work behaviour with reference to their significance and contribution to the totality of the occupational activity.
- Rules also aim at a change towards **the building of the identity of a worker** who serves the purposes of the organisation through its own cultural identity.

- **VELT**, as an American ESP program, **socialises the new Aramco workers into the American concept of rules** which are taught as the expression of the power of Aramco and its ideological system to control the workers' way of thinking and behaviour.
 - Rules **legitimate the workers' required behaviour**, mainly in the areas of safety and maintenance, **rationalising** the ultimate purpose and effect of behaviour in the operational system of the company and **providing** the knowledge, **explaining** how these practices in these areas contribute to the total work atmosphere.
 - Rules in VELT also have the role of **indoctrinating the workers' into the ideology of work** as the only accepted way of successful operation through a 'modern industrial ideology' and way of thinking in the company.
 - VELT generally demonstrates how the company aims at **socialising the workers into a new, changed image of a company man** who has an adapted mentality to accept and cope with the demands of the modern industrial work environment.
- * As an institution, Aramco practices **social and cultural control over its workers** in a way that shows the institutionalisation of a huge organisation aiming at making the individual **workers adapt to its regulations, rules, way of thinking and system of work**. This is why the first mechanism of control for new employees in Aramco is its training programs.

1. Conclusions and Recommendations

3. If we agree that 'the concept of Rules' is an original component of Western culture, and the concept is valuable in the field of work and in normal life, it will then be valid to state that ESP is not culture-free. It will also be acceptable to include this value in ESP programs designed for similar learning situations in any part of the world.
- 5 Research should focus on the load in ESP common core.
- 3 A socialisation process through an ESP program can be effective and can socialise new employees into the new cultural world of work.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- 4 Adapting to new work cultural values does not necessarily mean losing one's identity. On the contrary, it can be a gaining process in which the learner gains a new image of a more capable individual who can stand the challenges of the work environment.
5. Language training is a fast approach to cultural learning in companies that need employees with a high level of foreign language command and adaptation to the new organisational environment.
6. Because the current research has been tested only on one example ESP program, this approach to the teaching of ESP and the inclusion of the cultural dimension in it needs further study to test its validity.

The End