

BREXIT: WHAT DOES IT ACTUALLY MEAN AND HOW CAN IT BE EXPLOITED IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM?

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Abstract

When the result of the so-called Brexit referendum became known early on the morning of 24 June, 2016, it had a profound effect on British society. Not only did it expose and exacerbate some existing fault lines in different parts of Britain, but it also became the number one topic of conversation in the media and on a day to day basis in people's homes. Perhaps inevitably, the ongoing arguments over the meaning of the referendum result and the future course of the United Kingdom has come to exert a huge influence over the culture and language of the four countries involved. This paper will first give an overview of the events leading up to and following the referendum and then focus on the main ideas which have come to dominate the Brexit conversation on a public and personal level, examining such terms as Brexiteer and Remainer, hard and soft Brexit, the Irish backstop, the People's Vote and so on, through authentic texts. The paper will then look at how the fascinating phenomenon of the Brexit debate can be exploited in the foreign language classroom using existing approaches to the teaching of culture and finish with some practical suggestions for activities in the EFL context.

1 Introduction

On the morning of 24 June, 2016, the world awoke to the news that the result of the so-called Brexit referendum was an unexpected one, even though a close result had been predicted. In fact just over fifty-one percent of the voters (17,410,742 million (51.9%) to 16,141,241 million (48.1%) on a 72.2% turnout (The Electoral Commission)) had chosen to leave the European Union (EU). The surprise, indeed shock, was widespread due to the unexpected result. The predictions in the media in the final days of campaigning and the last polling figures before the actual vote had all indicated that the UK would vote to remain. The immediate effect was dramatic. David Cameron, the Prime Minister, who had led the unsuccessful remain campaign (Britain Stronger in Europe), announced his resignation within hours of the result being confirmed, having previously promised to remain in office even if he lost the vote (Watt, 2016). This immediately set off a leadership contest to select the next leader of the Conservative party and the new Prime Minister, which was resolved on July 13 when Theresa May was the sole candidate left standing. Then began a long and tortuous process of negotiating with the EU to agree the terms on which the UK would leave. It was the difficulty of this process and the failure to get approval in the UK Parliament for the deal she had negotiated that eventually led to the end of May's own leadership, announced in May 2019. Politically the situation remains unclear as Britain waits to see who the next leader will be more than three years after the referendum.

In the country at large the immediate effects were confused as people began to take stock of what had happened and what it might mean. One sign of this was the google search trends following the result being announced, with a spike in searches for topics relating to the EU and Brexit (Google trends, 2016; Selyukh, 2016). More alarmingly there was also a spike in reported racist incidents in the following days and weeks (although the causes and indeed reality of this increase in hate crimes has been disputed (Civitas, 2016; Schilter, 2019) and this reflected one of the central campaign topics leading up to the vote which was immigration and how to control it. The media in all its forms has continued to play a prominent part in keeping the topic of Brexit in the public eye and frequent polling suggests that the division between those who want to leave and those who want to remain continues to be stark, although more recent polls indicate that the proportion of those wishing to remain in the EU may be increasing. There have also been several major anti-Brexit protests around the UK with the biggest occurring on 23 March, 2019. The purpose of this march, organised by the People's Vote campaign group, was to call for a second referendum and the turnout was estimated to have been in the hundreds of thousands, possibly even a million according to the organisers (Full Fact, 2019). The People's Vote group is itself formed of nine different anti-Brexit groups and is a good indication of the continuing effect of the original referendum to promote grassroots activism and protest throughout the UK and of the growing discontent on all sides with the political deadlock in Parliament. Again it is unclear how this discontent and division within British society will affect relationships between different groups and between the constituent parts of the UK.

Not only has the result had a profound effect on UK society, but it has also caused great anxiety for EU nationals living and working in the UK and for young people from other EU states thinking of working or studying in the UK. Moreover, in Hungary and many if not all of the countries around it, the variety of English taught in the classroom is usually British and the coursebooks used to teach it are written largely by British writers and give a British viewpoint, not to mention featuring cultural topics that are typically oriented towards British culture. This raises the question of how Brexit may affect students' views of British culture and language. At the very least, the overriding importance of the ongoing national debate about the UK's future course and its relationship with the rest of Europe is something which would be strange to ignore in any classroom in which there is a focus on British culture. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore ways in which the topic of Brexit can be explored through a language and cultural lens: to break it down and show how it might be handled in the classroom. First, though, some context will be given to enable an understanding of the issues underlying the referendum and the larger debate about Britain's relationship with the EU.

2 Historical background to the referendum

The United Kingdom joined the European Communities, the predecessor of the European Union, in 1973, and its membership was endorsed by a referendum in 1975. At the time of its entry, necessitated by economic imperatives, there was a feeling in more conservative quarters of reluctance to accept that Britain was no longer an imperial power and was compelled to join a trading bloc with other European countries to maintain its status (Davies, 1997; James, 1998). Over the years since then the UK has been a core member of the EU, playing a crucial part in the drawing up of treaties and charters, and becoming one of the most prosperous of its trading partners. However, in the 1980s under the Premiership of Margaret Thatcher, there was a rising wave of Euroscepticism in British politics as the EU sought to change the nature of the contract between its members to one not only of trade but of a closer political union. This Euroscepticism was exemplified most famously and starkly in Thatcher's scathing dismissal of Jacques Delors, then President of the European

Parliament, and his idea of giving the administrative bodies of the EU more power (Thatcher, 1990). Ironically, it was this speech that precipitated the end of her own period in power a few days later.

Following Thatcher, the Eurosceptics gained more and more prominence, leading to the formation of the right-wing UK Independence Party (UKIP) in 1991 and a widening rift within the Conservative Party between pro-EU members and Eurosceptics (some of whom even formed their own group, the European Research Group, in July 1993, the sole aim of which is to support the UK's withdrawal from the EU). Succeeding Tory leaders have experienced increasing pressure from within and without from the Eurosceptics and it was this pressure that led then Prime Minister David Cameron to promise to hold a so-called in-out referendum on the UK's membership of the EU after the 2015 general election. Cameron hoped that the referendum would enable him to solve the problem of the constant dissent from the back benches within the Conservative Party over Britain's membership in an increasingly integrated EU and the external electoral threat represented by Nigel Farage's UK Independence Party (UKIP), whose single issue was to be independent of Europe (Glencross, 2018). He was confident of victory and ran a campaign based on the severe economic damage that would be done by leaving, which was characterised as Project Fear by the Leave campaign, a term first used in the 2014 referendum on Scottish Independence and reintroduced with great effect by Boris Johnson (Jack, 2016). In contrast, the Leave campaign appealed to a patriotic belief in British strength and love of freedom, and made a series of promises about the economic benefits of being independent, most notably on the side of the famous red bus, which was painted with the promise of 350 million pounds extra every week to spend on the National Health Service (Merrick, 2017). In the end, it was the promises and positive message of the Leave campaign combined with a distrust of the political elite, especially in the North of England (Glencross, 2018), along with immigration fears stoked by UKIP (Hall, 2016), that won the day.

These are the basic facts which led to the result announced on the 24 June in 2016, but of course the actual causes of that result are far more complex and are still being argued about as I write. The aim of this paper, however, is not to explain or propose a theory of why it happened, but rather to gain a deeper understanding of what the vote and its consequences may reveal about the culture of Britain today and show how that understanding can be exploited in the language classroom in the form of intercultural learning activities. The next part of the paper will attempt to define Brexit as a cultural phenomenon and make it easier to comprehend by breaking it down into constituent elements using an existing approach (Moran, 2001) to teaching culture.

3 What is Brexit? Beginning to get a grip on a complex cultural phenomenon

Giving even just a cursory overview of the political and cultural context in which the June 2016 referendum took place is not easy to do, but for an English language teacher in another country, possibly even on another continent, it is a daunting task and one which may seem impossibly difficult and off-putting for her students. Therefore, the question of just how to approach the topic in order to make it both accessible and interesting arises. Of course, this is the same challenge which is posed when dealing with any aspect of a seemingly strange and largely unknown culture. One way of dealing with this problem is to break it down into constituent parts or components and use them to help learners work with the content and so get to understand the cultural phenomenon better. Moran (2001) outlines just such an approach to the teaching of culture in the language classroom and it is his model of the five dimensions of culture which I have chosen to use in this paper, primarily for its clarity and ease of application. Taking the example of a drive-through restaurant, a common cultural phenomenon in his own culture (the

United States), Moran shows how using the five dimensions of products, practices, communities, persons and perspectives can help to “develop a more profound and informed picture of a culture” (p.26).

Even though Brexit is a far more complex and wide-ranging phenomenon than a drive-through restaurant, I will apply the same five dimensions to it and, as Moran goes on to do (Moran, 2001, p.35), look at how for each dimension language forms an integral part and also consider the possibilities in terms of language learning.

3.1 Products

Moran (2001, p.25) states that the products connected to a cultural phenomenon “are all artifacts produced or adopted by the members of the culture” and they can be tangible and intangible. Arguably the first tangible product of Brexit was the referendum question itself: “Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?” (European Union Referendum Act, 2015). It was created by civil servants and is interesting to look at in terms of how such an important question should be asked. In fact, forming this particular question was far from a simple process and itself involved a process of argument and compromise between the interested parties (Electoral Commission, 2017: Green, 2017). The final form of the question has been criticised for a number of reasons, among them being that it offered the illusion of a simple choice to a highly complex reality (Colignatus, 2017). However, as an artefact it offers great potential for analysis and discussion, and through that deeper understanding of the issues involved in making such a momentous decision.

The other products of Brexit, both tangible and intangible, are both extremely varied and extremely numerous. In the media thousands of hours of interviews and millions of words of reporting have been produced and continue to be produced. Some media organisations, such as the Guardian, the BBC and the Independent, are freely accessible on the net, and many interviews and discussions are available online on YouTube. There are also many short explainer videos produced by media outlets and individual content creators. One of the most useful for teachers may be the TLDR News channel (n.d.), which has numerous short videos explaining all aspects of Brexit in clear and easy to follow language with subtitles. These are suitable for intermediate level students and above. It also has useful explainer videos on other political issues in the news.

Other tangible but less obvious products are billboards and cultural jamming in the form of art works. Some of the most interesting examples which have been inspired by Brexit are the ‘guerrilla’ billboard posters begun by a group of four friends calling themselves ‘Led by Donkeys’ in reference to a poem about the soldiers who were sent to their deaths by incompetent generals in the First World War (Sherwood, 2019), the provocative stencils of the street artist Banksy (Munoz-Alonso, 2017), and the satirical digital collages of Cold War Steve (Gurney, 2019). Another interesting set of products are the banners and placards used by anti-Brexit and pro-Brexit protestors, and these, of course, rely principally on language for their effect, often making clever use of puns and other forms of wordplay. All of these are easily accessible on the net and could form the basis of interesting visual literacy activities and promote vocabulary building at the same time.

The unique language of Brexit is itself a product, one which is continually being created and changed. The original term, Brexit, made up of the words Britain and exit, based on the existing word Grexit (used to describe Greece’s potential withdrawal from the euro), actually appeared before the referendum was even discussed (Moseley, 2016). Other similar words have been generated in the media or in political debate, such as Brexiteer, coined to make Leave supporters sound more exciting,

and Remoaner and Remainiac (both derogatory terms) used to make supporters of remain seem like bad losers (Seargeant, 2017). Some terms, such as the Irish backstop, describing the mechanism necessary to prevent a hard border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland which would threaten the Good Friday Agreement signed to end the hostilities in Northern Ireland¹, come from the official negotiations between the UK and the EU. Still others, such as hard and soft Brexit, which describe more extreme and less extreme versions of a withdrawal from the EU, have been coined by politicians or their advisors (Sims, 2016). The ever-increasing lexicon of Brexit has given rise to many glossaries of key terms including one by the House of Commons itself (House of Commons Library, 2019). Many of these words could be used in class as the starting point for engaging language activities.

3.2 Practices and communities

It is difficult to talk about practices in relation to Brexit as distinct from the communities in which those practices occur, so I have chosen to deal with these two dimensions at the same time. The most obvious community involved is the political one and they have a whole set of practices which could be interesting to look at for learners and for them to compare with their own political system. The House of Commons and the House of Lords in particular are a relic of Britain's past both in image and in practice and have many curious customs and obscure traditions. As an object of study in itself, students may find these strange traditions and ways of working of interest, especially when compared with their own parliament. TLDR News (n.d.) has several short videos explaining how the UK parliament works and similar videos about the EU can also be found on YouTube. These could be used in class or students could watch them at home before discussing them in class.

Another type of community is the mass media and here there are a range of practices apparent related to the different forms of media, from television news broadcasts with their particular format and style differing between companies, interview and debate programmes, such as Question Time on the BBC, to traditional print journalism, which now is more often read online than in printed newspapers. There are also various independent media entities, such as political bloggers and YouTube channels, all offering comment and explanation of current events. All of these can be used as authentic texts for students to analyse and discuss, and also use as models for producing their own texts or staging their own debate.

Communities can also be seen as "the special social contexts, circumstances, and groups in which members carry out cultural practices" (Moran, 2001, p.25), and these can be very large groups, such as national cultures, or "more narrowly defined groupings" (p.25), even as small as colleagues at work and the family. For students, it might be interesting to look on the one hand at the different nations and regions in the UK and see how they differed in their voting patterns and also what makes them different in terms of their local practices and ways of life, and on the other hand at smaller groups such as voluntary organisations and protest groups, as well as individual families who have been divided by Brexit and have to find ways of dealing

¹ The Irish backstop is an insurance policy to prevent a hard border (i.e., a border with physical infrastructure) between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland which was part of the withdrawal agreement reached by Prime Minister Theresa May and the EU. It would mean that the UK would stay closely aligned with the EU's trading systems until a final deal could be agreed. The fear that the return of a hard border between Ireland and the UK could lead to renewed violence between Protestant and Catholic extremists (nearly 3600 people were killed in the Troubles, which were brought to an end by the Good Friday Agreement in 1998) is because it would lead to increased tension between the countries and the border checkpoints would again become targets for paramilitary groups.

with their different viewpoints. There are many interesting video and written reports about this topic (see, for instance, Channel 4 News, 2018). Generation and social class are also ways of distinguishing communities, and these two groupings have particular relevance for Brexit and therefore are interesting to explore with students, particularly in terms of their differing perspectives (see 3.4). A possible classroom approach to understanding such differing perspectives might be, following some initial research, to organise roleplay activities of families split by their differing views of Brexit. Each group could be asked to roleplay a family from a particular area of the UK and be asked to create their roles based on their research.

3.3 Persons

According to Moran (2001), this dimension constitutes “the individual members who embody the culture and its communities in unique ways” (p.25). The most important persons associated with Brexit can be identified both in a general sense and also specifically, in the form of a relatively small number of key players. In a general sense, the main persons involved are the politicians and the voters (the electorate). The politicians were responsible for bringing the referendum into being and for passing the motions and laws connected with its implementation and then for arguing about and debating on how to follow through on the result. Another group of politicians are the EU leaders and members of the negotiating team responsible for reaching an agreement with representatives of the Conservative Government on how the UK will leave the EU. From the politicians, it is possible to single out certain key individuals: there is the previous UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, who promised to hold an in-out referendum if he won the 2015 general election, the Prime Minister who replaced him, Theresa May, who had to take charge of the situation following the unexpected result of the referendum, and there is the President of the EU Commission at the time, Jean-Claude Juncker, the most senior representative of the EU, and the head of the EU negotiation team, Michel Barnier, along with the several British politicians he has had to negotiate with. However, the list of politicians who have had a significant influence in the unfolding story of the Brexit vote is too long and too complicated to list here, and continues to grow.

As for the voters, it might be thought that their role ended with the referendum itself but this is not at all the case in part due to a third group of persons, that is, the persons of the media. Rapidly following the result of the referendum, the media became fixated with the reasons for the result and then what the result might mean in terms of the UK's future. The voters, as well as those who had not been able to vote because they were not yet 18, then became objects of interest and have continued to be so. Interviews continue to be made with ordinary people in all parts of the UK. Many voters and young people who were not able to vote have now become campaigners or protesters on both sides of the argument. Frequent polling done by professional organisations also tries to measure the current views of the electorate to see how opinion might be changing and what the result of the next election or a second referendum might be.

Not many voters or even campaigners have achieved individual recognition but there are some business people, former politicians and celebrities that have become prominent for supporting one side or the other or for trying to force politicians not to take Britain out of the EU without a negotiated deal (Brexit: Campaigner Gina Miller threatens no deal court battle, 2019). Doing some research about some of these people could be an interesting way to engage students in finding out more about the basic arguments for and against Brexit.

3.4 Perspectives

This is perhaps the most interesting but also the most complex dimension to consider. The perspectives which underlie the phenomenon of Brexit are many and consist of the beliefs and attitudes of all the different communities and persons involved. These perspectives are often implicit rather than explicit and as such they provide an interesting task for students to try and work out. Using the many different products available students can begin to build up a picture of some of the perspectives of the different groups and individuals. Interviews, speeches and debates are one way of exploring different perspectives but another way which is potentially engaging is to look at what ordinary people say about Brexit. The best way to do this would be to actually speak to people in the streets but as EFL students do not often have this opportunity, then video interviews are the next best thing. *Brexitannia* (Karykalin, 2017), a documentary film made by an Australian film maker, is a particularly useful resource in this regard. The first part consists of monologues to the camera by ordinary people in their home or the streets of their town from all over the UK about what they think of Brexit and taken together it gives many different perspectives which can be the basis of classroom work. And once students have got the idea of interviewing people, they can make their own interviews in their own town on similar or different issues. This idea will be discussed along with several other ideas for practical classroom activities in the next section.

4 Brexit in the language classroom

This section will look at some practical suggestions for teachers to help their students gain an understanding of what Brexit is and how it may be relevant to their own lives. The activities will be aimed at upper secondary level (15-18 year olds) and will draw from all the dimensions already discussed in the previous section. I will begin with very simple activities based on the language which has been produced by Brexit and then more complex activities will be outlined using ideas from the other cultural dimensions as well. As the activities become more complex, the opportunities for self-reflection and for comparison with aspects of the students' own culture will become more pronounced. These activities will involve research, presentations, debates, role play and critical analysis of texts.

4.1 Playing with the language

As already mentioned, Brexit has produced its own lexicon and many of these words are the result of invented language. Brexit itself is a portmanteau word (a word consisting of two words combined to make a new word) and many other Brexit terms are the result of different kinds of language play. These words can be the object of study in themselves but students can be asked to make up new words for other countries (along the lines of Grexit and Brexit) and play around with words such as Brexiteer and Remainiac to describe different types of people. By analysing slogans and placards used in the campaign and in the protests following the referendum, students can also learn how to play with language in different ways and even be given the opportunity to make up their own slogans and banners about different topics that might be relevant to them.

4.2 Discourse analysis of texts

The referendum question itself can be the basis of some interesting critical analysis for students, asking them to consider what the problems are with the question and then come up with an improved version. They can also be given the task of writing similar questions about a current issue in their locality or even within their school or class and then deciding whose question is the best and why.

Short news stories and articles are a staple of English language teaching activities and there are a wide variety of language analysis exercises that can be done based on news reports. A particularly useful resource in this regard is Danuta Reah's (2002) book on working with the language of newspapers. Students' visual literacy can also be engaged by analysing YouTube videos of television news and interviews and looking at studio design, graphics and body language and discussing the intended meanings or underlying messages they may have. Students can then be given the task of writing their own articles and recording their own news broadcasts or interviews. These kind of tasks could be approached in many different ways, for example, by asking the students to write articles or do interviews about current events of interest to them or by asking them to compare articles or broadcasts about the same topic (it could be connected to Brexit or any current issue in the news) from an English-speaking source and from a source in their own language and present their findings.

4.3 Doing research

Students can of course be given research topics to work on in a traditional project based learning approach. These could be based on their own choice with some guidance, for example, students could be given the task of explaining a particular aspect of Brexit such as the Irish backstop or the difference between hard and soft Brexit. Another option would be to ask students to choose an important person connected to Brexit and give a presentation explaining the part they have played. Students could be offered a list of persons to choose from with a little information about each. Still another project idea could involve researching the different perspectives of groups involved in Brexit, for instance, students could find the main arguments used by the Vote Leave campaign and the Britain Stronger in Europe campaign and present them, or they could be asked to present the main concerns of the EU regarding any deal with the UK to leave.

All of these research projects could be done in groups, thus promoting collaboration. Another kind of research which could be engaging and involve plenty of authentic language practice for students would be doing fieldwork and recording short interviews with people on topics such as their view of the EU. Of course, this might not be possible to do in English if there were no English speaking tourists available to students to interview (this is not usually a problem in capital cities but would obviously be difficult or impossible in smaller towns). However, vox pop (voice of the people) type interviews could be done in the students' mother tongue and then the students would need to translate the interviews or present a summary in English, thus giving them further valuable practice. Using digital technology, they could even edit their videos so that the translated voiceover would be heard. A further benefit of doing field research is its awareness raising potential for the students' own thinking about topics related to Brexit, their relationship with other European countries, and key questions of identity and nationality.

4.4 Campaigning and debating

One step further would be to actually involve the students in simulating democratic processes by getting them to run their own campaigns on an issue relevant to them – it could be something to do with their school life or even an issue within the class such as the need for homework – and then vote on the question. The students could be divided into two sides and have to run campaigns and produce campaign materials in a similar way to the Brexit campaign. Interviews could also be roleplayed with campaign leaders. Such an approach would have the advantage of deepening students' understanding and feeling for democratic processes and their strengths and weaknesses.

Classroom debates could also be held using the same rules as the UK Parliament, with students assigned different roles including that of the Speaker. Students could present their own bills and vote on amendments, thus gaining insight into the workings of a Parliament. Many useful videos explaining how the UK Parliament works can be found on the internet (see for example, UK Parliament, 2014). As a follow up they could be asked to find the similarities and differences with how their own Parliament operates and then perhaps they could design an ideal Parliament with different groups taking it in turns to present their ideas.

4.5 Online materials

In addition to all the resources already mentioned, there are many teaching materials freely available online on the topic of Brexit. Just to mention a couple, Busy Teacher is a site full of useful resources designed by teachers for teachers and has a page with some activity ideas for helping ESL students to understand Brexit (Dixon, n.d.). The collection of resources for British schools on the tes (formerly known as the Times Educational Supplement) website (SimplePolitics, 2017) also offers a lot of downloadable useful materials.

All of these activity ideas have the same aim: to raise awareness, allow deeper understanding and promote cross-cultural comparisons and so thus allow the possibility for self-reflection. The purpose of this section has not been to provide readymade lesson plans but just to plant a few 'seeds' or starting points for teachers to be able to devise their own activities for their own learners.

5 Conclusion: where do we go from here?

An intercultural approach to teaching English is predicated on the assumption that language and culture are inextricably connected and that to learn a foreign language fully means learning about its cultural contexts also. However, today we live in a globalised system in which English is a world language used much more by non-native speakers than by natives and in a wide variety of cultural contexts which may be constantly shifting and unstable. Given this reality, the value of looking at the Brexit phenomenon in the classroom may well be questioned. Apart from being highly complex in its causes and continuously unfolding effects and involving a difficult and somewhat abstruse political hinterland, its relevance may seem to be limited to a declining and relatively small union of island nations.

On the other hand, in-depth learning about the elements of any culture in the EFL classroom is good preparation for successful intercultural communication with people from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In addition, Britain is still widely seen as the original home of the English language and its culture remains a source of interest for many groups of learners around the globe (see for instance the strong interest

in British culture and etiquette in English language courses for Chinese students (British Council, 2017; Thorniley, 2010)). Within the context of the author of this paper, who teaches in a Central European country as a teacher trainer for future teachers who will most likely find themselves working with coursebooks offering a strongly Anglocentric approach to the language, British culture still features largely though by no means exclusively in school classrooms. Moreover, in many parts of the world the unfolding events surrounding the Brexit referendum are an object of fascination and in some regions which may be affected by the fallout, of genuine concern. This is definitely the case in Eastern and Central Europe where a large number of young people are drawn to western European countries in search of better job opportunities and more secure futures. For them Brexit is not just a topic of interest but one which has the potential to directly affect their future lives. Taking my own adopted country as an example, there is a Facebook page created specifically for Hungarians living in London called *Londonfalva* (London village) which refers ironically to the fact that the approximately 30,000 Hungarians living and working in London would form a medium-sized town in Hungary (the Office of National Statistics gives a figure of 57,694 Hungarians officially working in the UK for January to December 2015 (ONS, 2016)). For these mostly young people and for many of the following generation, the changes in British society brought about by the result of the Brexit referendum and the outcome of the negotiations with the EU are a source of concern and anxiety, and this situation is mirrored in the other Central and Eastern European countries who are members of the EU.

Therefore, it seems that for learners in this part of Europe, Brexit and its meaning for British society and culture and the relationship of Britain with the rest of Europe is potentially of great interest. British society is of course a multicultural one including the thousands of EU nationals who are presently living and working in the UK, and many of the students studying English in classrooms in Hungary and its neighbouring countries will know people, friends and relations, who are in the UK or who are planning to go there. Moreover, by studying the Gordian knot that Brexit has created in British society, students can be opened to reflecting on their own society and key issues of identity and belonging that relate to their own cultural contexts. It may even have the potential to stir within students a genuine interest in local issues, which could eventually lead to them finding their own voice and becoming active participants. Active citizenship is an educational aim discussed by many prominent educationalists both past and present. This means that Brexit is a topic that is actually highly suitable to form the basis of engaging language activities in the classroom which explore cultural practices, connections and meanings, and it is hoped that some of the suggestions and ideas laid out in this paper may help form the basis of these sort of activities or at least stimulate creative and productive thinking on how to use Brexit in the classroom.

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