

## EXPLORING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN A VICTORIAN NOVEL

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Although the characters speak English, Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* explores interactions among representatives of different speech communities. The protagonist, Helen Graham, moves through communities differing enough from hers to create misunderstandings. Her difficulties can be clarified through Hymes' model of the speech community and communicative competence, with speakers separated by cultural assumptions rather than linguistic diversity. Helen sometimes fails to perceive conventions that govern other participants and sometimes refuses to submit to those conventions. She compounds her problems through several interaction strategies, judging others by standards derived from her home community, closing off communication when she encounters unexpected responses, preferring solitude to social interaction and communicating through writing rather than face-to-face encounters. These strategies limit Helen's integration because she remains unaware of her neighbor's conventions, inadvertently provoking hostility through unconventional conduct and because she uses her own conventions as standards for judging others. Her avoidance of encounters limits her opportunity to improve interaction skills. Helen's experiences can help readers gain awareness of how differing expectations and lack of empathy can cause misunderstandings and exacerbate cultural differences. L2 readers may recognize parallels between Helen's experience and their own, leading to greater awareness of issues involved in intercultural competence.

When we speak of intercultural communication we tend to focus upon interactions between people who are native speakers of different languages. But it may be possible for speakers of a common language to find themselves in situations where cultural divergence leads to misunderstanding. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë (1848/1966) recounts the history of Helen Graham during two periods of her life in which she is seeking to adapt to communities that differ from the one that she grew up in. The first section of the novel describes her experiences in Lindenhope during the months she lives there in 1827-1828 from the perspective of a neighbor, Gilbert Markham. The middle section, recorded in her diary, describes her experiences from 1821 to late 1827, ending five days after the first section began. During this period, she marries Arthur Huntingdon and moves to her husband's home called Grassdale. In both Lindenhope and Grassdale Helen encounters cultural assumptions unlike those she expects.

One of the narrators, Helen has grown up in a household apparently oriented to Methodist beliefs and moral earnestness. Upon leaving her home, she moves through two communities, one a leisure class group of gentry who live off their estates and engage in little work or significant activity and the other a farming community depending upon agricultural production. The novel allows us to see the process of Helen's gradual but limited adaptations to and eventual exclusion from communities embodying conventions other than those she is used to.

One significant clue to the focus of the novel is offered by the author in the title, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. The word 'tenant' implies the presence of an outsider, temporarily occupying property that belongs to another. It reinforces the outsider aspect of Helen's position in the community and thus maneuvers our attention toward the problem of integration into a community. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* illustrates how differing cultural expectations can interfere with communication even among members of very similar communities of speakers of the same language. All the characters of Wildfell Hall are English country gentry or farmers, living within short distances of each other. Though they vary somewhat in socioeconomic condition, they can all be considered to some degree privileged. Smith (2003) uses Pike's concepts of etic and emic to explain cultural misunderstanding among native speakers of the same language. He argues, "unique systems of meaning are found in many areas of behavior besides speech and in many kinds of community other than those defined as groups sharing the same language" (Smith, 2003, pp. 75-76). Smith suggests that the desire of social scientists to discover universals leads them to focus more upon similarities than upon differences between individuals and groups. He divides the emic/etic dichotomy into two contrasts: between what is common to all human experience and what is unique to a particular group interacting in a specific historical moment and between theoretical versus experiential thought. Many aspects of culture at the level of unique experience are tacit, capable of being reflected in behavior but not expressed in language. This contrast is useful in attempting to understand Helen's struggles in related but not identical speech communities. Often her inadequate competence is apparent only in a barely noticed gesture or a silence. Though the reader may become aware that different characters use certain words with slightly different meanings, the characters themselves seem not to notice.

Because the novel is written essentially as a series of reports on communication events, the techniques of Hymes' ethnography of communication and Goffman's interaction ritual are especially useful in helping us to see what is happening in the narrative. Through analysis of the communication events, we can see how Helen Graham regularly misinterprets what is said to her and misreads what is happening in

interactions. Through analysis of the processes of interaction, we can see how the characters inadvertently challenge each other's face, fail to take the appropriate corrective actions and depart from encounters frustrated and angry. As an outsider, Helen lacks a kind of communicative competence that Crozet et al.(1999) call 'intercultural competence'. They argue:

The difference of being a servant of one's cultural boundaries and to be free from them does not lie in the annihilation of one's own boundaries (e.g., through the adoption of another culture or parroting foreign cultural codes) but in the awareness of what those boundaries are. This is the essence of intercultural competence: the ability to recognize where and when culture is manifest in cross-cultural encounters and the ability to manage an intercultural space where all parties to the encounter are comfortable participants. (p. 13)

Intercultural competence involves awareness of cultural differences and the ability to interact smoothly with others from different cultures. Some of Helen's problems are problems of cultural awareness. Some are problems with her characteristic strategies of interaction. Much of Helen's difficulty at Wildfell Hall derives, not from the differences in beliefs and expectations that separate her from members of the communities she interacts in, but from her inability to perceive that these differences exist. Rather than looking for misunderstandings when people do not fulfill her expectations, she is likely to become judgmental. Gumperz (1982) and Goffman (1967) have both spoken of the various non-verbal signs and gestures in interaction that may be culturally determined and not perceived by outsiders as meaningful in the same ways. Gumperz insists that we commonly attribute differences in gesture and tone to character traits rather than cultural conventions. Goffman describes some of the subtle signs that can determine the flow of interaction and which might be obscure to outsiders.

In any society, whenever the physical possibility of spoken interaction arises, it seems that a system of practices, conventions, and procedural rules comes into play which functions as a means of guiding and organizing the flow of messages. An understanding will prevail as to when and where it will be permissible to initiate talk, among whom, and by means of what topics of conversation. A set of significant gestures is employed to initiate a spate of communication and as a means for the persons concerned to accredit each other as legitimate participants. (Goffman, 1967, pp. 33-34)

Helen is at a disadvantage in Grassdale and also in Lindenhope because she does not always share the systems of practices, conventions and rules that govern interaction in these communities. When she arrives at Lindenhope, she already knows that her speech practices and interpretations sometimes conflict with the practices of others. She had found it difficult to make the transition from Staningley to Grassdale, where she developed few satisfactory friendships. Nonetheless, she continues to betray marked failures of perception in her attempts to interact in Lindenhope. She seems unfamiliar with the conventions of neighborly discourse. She does not perceive the implications of gesture and expression, nor does she perceive how her own gestures are interpreted. She is not aware of appropriate responses to others. Because she dismisses small talk she appears secretive. She also appears disrespectful because she does not show proper deference to those who would expect it. She sometimes misinterprets the entire tone of conversations. Friedman and Antal (2005) suggest a view of culture that helps to explain much of the inadequacy of Helen's perceptions. Depicting culture as an iceberg, they argue that misunderstanding occurs not only through the misinterpretation of observed events but also through lack of awareness of 'submerged' assumptions. They predict that conflicts will occur, as they do in Wildfell Hall, "when people interpret and judge what they see 'above the waterline' according to their own norms, values, and assumptions" (Friedman & Antal, 2005, p. 72). The authors suggest that surface similarities mask major differences at deeper levels. It is these surface similarities that mislead Helen and her neighbors into believing that they are acting on the basis of similar assumptions.

Helen's failure, as an outsider in the communities in which she interacts, to notice many aspects of the interactions is apparent throughout the narrative. From the first chapter the neighbors are put off by her failure to return visits and apparent lack of interest in receiving them. She does not perceive the implications of gesture and body language in the people she talks with. In Chapter 3, for example, on her first visit to the Markham family, she cuts off and lectures Mrs. Markham, dominates the conversation, and dismisses the opinions of others. But she seems completely oblivious to the significance of the silence of her audience. Just as she fails to interpret the gestures of others, she does not perceive how her own body language is interpreted by others. When Gilbert and his sister visit her in Chapter 5, she sits them in her studio, only half turns toward them as she speak, and continues to dabble sporadically at her painting, yet she seems genuinely surprised when he suggests that they may be intruding on her work. She is not aware of the appropriate responses to the actions or words of others and frequently omits necessary social actions. We can see this, not only in her unfriendly reception of visitors and failure to return calls, but in her failure to attend church on her first Sunday at Wildfell Hall and in her unconventional responses in conversation. Because her concept of useful talk differs from that of her neighbors and

she dismisses their small talk as trivial and tiresome, they often see her as secretive and uncommunicative. Because she fails to show proper deference to the opinion makers of the community, she appears to be disrespectful. We see this in her rudeness toward Mrs. Markham in Chapter 3 but also in her anticipative dismissal of any counsel that Rev. Millward might offer. Helen seems unaware of the expectations of other participants in the communicative events they jointly construct but they attribute her failure to meet their expectations to motivated conduct. Finally, Helen misinterprets the tone of conversations, sometimes, for example, replying to humor with rigid opinions. Her remonstrance to Huntingdon in Chapter 23 that provoked him to label her an 'enthusiast' derived, in part, from her misunderstanding of Huntingdon's tone and mood when he questioned her devotion in church.

Because Helen does not always share the systems of practices, conventions and rules that govern interaction in the communities she moves through, she had found it difficult to make the transition from Staningley to Grassdale, where she developed few satisfactory friendships. Mrs. Markham's summary of her first visit to Helen in Chapter 1 clarifies the situation. Mrs. Markham asserts that "if she had not gained much good, she flattered herself she had imparted some" (Brontë, 1848/1866, p. 20). She feels that she did not gain much from the visit because Helen did not focus on the topics that were of interest to the neighbors and provided little information about herself. She believes that she helped Helen because she was able to advise her about domestic details that Helen seemed to be ignorant about. Yet Mrs. Markham worries that her advice may "be thrown away" because Helen "betrayed a lamentable ignorance on certain points, and had not even the sense to be ashamed of it." Helen, in Mrs. Markham's view, "said little to any purpose, and appeared somewhat self-opinionated." Helen's later comment, as she takes a break from the party in Chapter 9, illustrates the differences in expectations.

I was wearied to death with small talk - nothing wears me out like that. I cannot imagine how they *can* go on as they do. Is it that they think it a *duty* to be continually talking . . . and so never pause to think, but fill up with aimless trifles and vain repetitions, when subjects of real interest fail to present themselves? - or do they really take a pleasure in such discourse? (Brontë, 1848/1866, p. 74)

These two remarks indicate that Helen's concept of worthwhile discourse differs from that of her neighbors. What Helen calls 'subjects of real interest,' Mrs. Markham characterizes as 'little to any purpose.' What Mrs. Markham sees as 'useful advice,' Helen considers 'aimless trifles and vain repetitions'. As the narrative develops we see that Helen focuses on abstract moral and philosophical issues while her neighbors are more concerned with practical details of daily life.

Of the central figures in *Wildfell Hall*, Huntingdon remains most distant from the reader. The closest we get is to see his actions from Helen's perspective, edited by Gilbert. In the early chapters of the diary, his villainy is clear to the reader although Helen refuses to see it. As Helen becomes more aware of his unpleasant qualities, the reader may begin to understand some of his reactions. From Helen's point of view, though not necessarily from his, Huntingdon is unquestionably guilty of chronic bad conduct. As Helen describes the interactions between the two, however, we begin to see that he may not be motivated by bad intentions. At times he seems as genuinely confused by his wife's words and actions as she is by his. During their first major fight, in Chapter 24, for example, each seems to be upset with the other's conduct and each seeks in part to teach the other a lesson that will improve that conduct. It may not be possible to imagine circumstances in which Huntingdon would have become an admirable man. It is, however, likely that he behaved more badly than he would have on some occasions partly because he and Helen never learned to communicate with each other.

Failure to communicate can have serious consequences. Esplugas (1999), for example, notes that, in England, "in May 1596, 103 Gypsies were condemned to death for idle wandering and speaking a language that could not be understood" (p. 147, citing Bercovici, 1929). In *Wildfell Hall*, the characters believe that they are speaking the same language and those people who harm others do not believe that they are punishing them for poor communication. The experiences of Helen and Huntingdon in their marriage, however, as well as Helen's experiences in *Lindenhope*, make clear that there are consequences that derive from not understanding and from not being understood. She worried that her exposure to the life that Huntingdon led was contaminating her as well. But she is not always able to recognize moments when she pushed him toward greater dissipation.

In a slightly different analysis of the problems between Helen and Huntingdon, Hyman (2008) identifies Helen with the work-centered ethics of the rising middle class and notes how she pushes Huntingdon to assume identities that would undercut his view of himself as an aristocrat. Thormahlen (1999), too, argues that Helen sees Huntingdon's inability to occupy himself as deficiency. Gordon (1989) notes, "An unspoken assumption in the novel is that Gilbert Markham is a better man than Helen's first husband because, as a farmer, he has work to occupy him" (p. 178). Hyman argues that as earnest, hardworking members of the middle class gained wealth and assumed the trapping of aristocracy during the Victorian age, the obsolete rural aristocracy had only leisure and dissipation to separate themselves from the 'strivers' who were replacing them. She notes that Huntingdon is always careful to limit his conversation to frivolity because a gentleman should not be productive. Helen, of course, frequently observes

that trivial conversation tires her. During a walk home from church which Huntingdon, described in Chapter 23, we can see how Helen compounds her problems. Huntingdon would have been satisfied with a trivial coquettish response from Helen, even if she had not responded directly to his complaint about her overzealous piety. Instead, she confirmed his opinion of her with her unsmiling insistence on educating him. His consequent laughter merely augmented her frustration and her religious passion. Both Helen and Huntingdon may have concluded the conversation disappointed in their partners, but they may not have realized that they were judging each other's conversation by very different standards. Helen seems to have learned some things from her time in Grassdale and it is unlikely that she would be attracted so easily again to Huntingdon's variety of frivolity. Each time Gilbert's words or gestures seem to resemble those of Huntingdon, as when he stares at her in church or smiles at Wildfell Hall, she immediately closes off communication. But it is clear that she is unable to interpret many signs made by others when she interacts with them.

Wildfell Hall is a record of Helen's attempts to adjust to new communities; she is successful in neither. In the two periods of her life that we are permitted to see, one from Gilbert's viewpoint and one from her own, she eventually abandons communities where she has not been able to successfully integrate. After Huntingdon's death she abandons Grassdale a second time to return to her aunt's home. But not all her communication problems can be attributed to failures of perception. Her attempts to interact with others are also complicated by inadequate interaction strategies. We are able to develop a clear sense of Helen's interaction style because we are able to view her from the outside through Gilbert's eyes and then from her own perspective. Her failure to achieve intercultural competence seems to derive from several poorly chosen adaptation strategies. First, she consistently closes herself off from what is unfamiliar or unpleasant to her. Second, she frequently chooses solitude over interaction. Third, she seldom listens to suggestions or opinions of other people and she assumes that she is correct in all her ideas. Fourth, she judges actions and people that differ from what she expects. And finally, whenever possible, she turns from face-to-face interaction to writing.

Helen's customary reaction to unexpected or unpleasant moves in interactions is to end the interchange. She dismisses Gilbert several times early in the novel by simply assuming a cold expression and turning away. Gilbert, in fact, notes, when she does this at the end of their first encounter at Wildfell Hall, that the gesture is especially irritating because it seems so natural. The ease of the expression reinforces the sense that Helen uses it frequently. With Huntingdon, she employs long periods of silence and also locks herself in her room. Early in their marriage, she becomes upset at a story he is telling her about a previous romance. She responds, as is her custom, by ending the

conversation. "Without another word, I left the room, and locked myself up in my own chamber" (Brontë, 1848/1966, p. 170). Later, when Huntingdon retires, he finds the door locked, knocks and asks, "Won't you let me in, Helen?" (Brontë, 1848/1966, p. 170). Her answer demonstrates a characteristic mode of responding to unpleasantness: "No; you have displeased me . . . and I don't want to see your face or hear your voice again till the morning." With her Wildfell neighbors, too, Helen develops a reputation for avoiding contact. By shutting off communication, Helen may avoid unpleasant or confusing interactions but probably limits her opportunities to gain more insight into the speech conventions and underlying ideologies of the community. Carroli, Hillman and Maurer (1999) observe, "Acquiring intercultural competence requires conversationalists to be able to recognize how communication takes place so that they can tacitly negotiate a mutually acceptable mode of communication" (p. 157). Both the ability to recognize how communication takes place and the ability to negotiate modes of communication are enhanced by observant participation in communication events.

Helen's tendency to close herself off from communication with others is so developed that she places barriers even when she does not intend to. When Gilbert and Rose Markham visit her in Chapter 5, she invites them into her studio and clears off a couple of chairs. But her whole attitude seems designed to separate her from the visitors. She "resumed her place beside the easel - not facing it exactly, but now and then glancing at the picture upon it while she conversed, and giving it an occasional touch with her brush, as if she found it impossible to wean her attention entirely from her occupation to fix it upon her guests" (Brontë, 1848/1966, p. 44). Gilbert finally tells her to go on with her work or they will "regard ourselves as unwelcome intruders." But Helen is, in fact, happy to have these visitors and she reacts to Gilbert's words "as if startled into politeness." This incident leads us to suspect that much of Helen's distancing of herself in interactions is simply awkwardness in social discourse. This awkwardness sometimes encourages her to pursue occupations that require less social intercourse.

Apart from her tendency to cut off communication when she encounters difficulties, Helen frequently seeks out solitude. In Chapter 7, she admits to Gilbert that the loneliness and isolation of Wildfell Hall were among its chief attractions, "I take no pleasure in watching people pass the window; and I like to be quiet" (Brontë, 1848/1966, p. 56). Her unfriendliness and apparent unwillingness to receive visitors are among the first perceptions of her formed by the neighbors when she entered the community. Even when she joins the excursion to the sea at the close of Chapter 7, she separates herself from the sight of the rest and sets up an easel to paint. It is noteworthy that Helen, an artist and therefore accustomed to observing visual details closely, is so little able to detect social detail. Helen's awkwardness in conversation and

her limited contact with others outside her family in her youth probably make social gatherings uncomfortable for her, but by keeping to herself to the extent that she does she reduces her access to the interactions that might enlarge her communicative competence. Helen needs to learn to understand the communities that she participates in and she can do that best by participating somewhat more than she does.

Her solitude is also a handicap because, within the conventions of Lindenhope, she thus draws unfavorable attention to herself. Her failure to return visits to her neighbors is among the earliest elements of her conduct to be dissected by her neighbors. When she makes a visit to the Markhams in Chapter 3 they are notably unconvinced by the pretexts she offers for not having visited other families. When Mrs. Markham tries to make her social obligations easier by inviting her to a party where she can offer apologies personally to the others she declines with almost no concern for politeness: "Thank you, I never go to parties" (Brontë, 1848/1966, p. 31). In the first chapter, Mrs. Markham had remarked upon her odd behavior when they visited and Rose reported on her scandalous behavior in failing to attend church on her first Sunday in Wildfell and on her failure to return any of the visits so far made to her. For a woman who is trying to avoid notice, her actions seem rather to set her apart as a figure of concern. Crozet et al. (1999) are speaking of the importance of learning second languages when they write, "Without a linguistic experience of difference, a cultural experience of difference cannot reach the same depths. Difference is the central aspect of intercultural communication and such difference must be lived in communication" (pp. 4-5). Their principle, however, applies equally to Helen, who is learning to adapt to an unfamiliar English-speaking community. Greater interaction linked with careful observation would most likely speed her adaptation to the community.

Helen's struggle to communicate with people of other cultures is a central problem of Wildfell Hall. There are many themes and issues but this underlying lack leads to or complicates many of the other problems. Carroli et al. (1999) suggest that the qualities of adaptability and flexibility are important elements in becoming competent at intercultural communication.

Intercultural competence requires one to be flexible and adapt to the interlocutor's cultural style to work out the most fitting conversational, social and politeness strategies, which are essential for effective communication. Adaptability is an essential human quality which can be encouraged in developing intercultural competence. (p. 156)

Flexibility and adaptability are key inadequacies in Helen's communicative style.

She struggles throughout the novel with a tendency toward judgment that reduces her communicative effectiveness. She often fails to understand when her problems with others have cultural roots and when she needs to adapt to their cultural conventions. When Helen leaves Staningley, she is arrogant and seems sure of her power to control the worlds she moves through. Although some of her concepts may be narrow and though her orientation to the world may be different than that of many of her contemporaries, she seems to expect everyone to adapt to her vision of the world. At Grassdale she learns that the precepts she picked up at Staningley are not universal and she begins to understand the warnings that her aunt gave before she married. Because she cannot adapt she is gradually ostracized in the new community that she has joined. Though she suffers greatly at Grassdale, her experience is helpful because she has learned a little about the arrogance of her previous beliefs and understands better the limits of her powers. Nonetheless, in Wildfell Hall her negotiation of communicative events shows little improvement. Her conversation on education with the Markhams in Chapter 3 demonstrates her difficulty in handling small talk and expressing unobjectionable platitudes. Rather she asserts her unorthodox opinions almost dictatorially and calls into question accepted wisdom. From such a start it is only natural that the community would worry about her morality and conventionality. As time passes her position inevitably deteriorates as she fails to resolve doubts about her orthodoxy. The gossip about her is a natural defense of a community threatened by unsavory elements.

In the second section of the novel we see how her time in Grassdale followed a similar pattern of comments and behavior that do not quite fit in becoming compounded and gradually alienating her from the community and from her husband. Despite her intentions she is often seen to be the cold distant member of the pair and Huntingdon justifies his conduct as a response to Helen's coldness. Much of her failure in these situations can be traced to her reluctance or perhaps an inability to understand the perspectives of others. Helen often seems more willing to share her opinions than she is to listen to the opinions of others. We see this in her polemic in the Markham home and in her efforts to teach Huntingdon. The problem is clearly summarized in her reply to Gilbert as she prepares to leave after having stridently dominated the discussion of education. He objects that she insists on having the last word and she responds, "You may have as many words as you please, - only I can't stay to hear them" (Brontë, 1848/1966, p. 35). This response shows that Helen has come a long way since Grassdale. She has learned to joke, at least on this one occasion, and she displays a lighter touch than she did in her conflicts with Huntingdon or her arguments with her Aunt Maxwell that began the diary. But she also discloses her unwillingness to listen to the ideas of others. Her lack of listening skills coupled with her tendency to judge others when they do not share her values make it more difficult for her to communicate

with members of other communities. To the qualities of flexibility and adaptation, mentioned also by Mendenhall (2001) and Matveev and Milter (2004), the two latter articles add inquisitiveness. This is a third attribute that Helen seems to need as her lack of interest in Gilbert's response demonstrates.

One tool for developing awareness of other cultures is fairly successful in Wildfell Hall. Helen's diary opens Gilbert's eyes to the struggles that have led her to Wildfell Hall and help him to understand her better. Nonetheless, Gilbert seems to learn little about how to interact with Helen. At the end of the book he is as evasive as he had been at the beginning. What little he did learn, however, was sufficient to lead Helen to propose to him. Helen's diary, necessary for a variety of reasons, is especially useful because it allows us a rounded view of the process of adaptation to an alien community. The diary allows us to watch Helen failure to adapt in two different communities but from opposite perspectives, her own and that of Gilbert. Gilbert's increased awareness of Helen's struggles demonstrates a benefit of written documents. They can provide background information that makes interaction smoother. Gilbert's use of written documents to complement interaction is a practical strategy for gaining competence. Helen's use of the diary as a confidant in substitution for face-to-face interaction is probably less effective. The diary seems to be only one example of Helen's preference for the written word. When she is living at Grassdale after her marriage to Huntingdon she chooses to spend long hours in her room writing letters to her aunt, despite her refusal to listen to the aunt before her marriage. She also shuts out others by reading books. For her both reading and writing seem to be devices for avoiding the confusion of direct interaction with others.

Helen's education continues throughout the novel. She overcomes arrogance and misplaced confidence in her power to influence others. She recognizes her responsibility for her reckless first marriage. Her responses to Gilbert when he travels to Staningley indicate that she has become somewhat more tolerant. But she seems never to become socialized into appropriate interaction within an unfamiliar community. She repeats the process of alienation and ostracism twice. When she returns to Grassdale she seems to do so on her own terms, forcing Huntingdon to adapt to her rather than seeking to understand his perspectives. She concludes the book where she began, at Staningley. We can not really know either how successfully Gilbert learned to understand or adapted to Helen's norms since we only have his perspective. Circumstances favor her in the end; she returns to her childhood home, marries, and Gilbert lets us believe that her life has turned out well, though we have very little information about her after her engagement to him.

Discussions of intercultural competence are almost always related to bilingual or multilingual situations. The case of Helen Graham, however, demonstrates that it is possible for people speaking the same language to fail to communicate because they lack cultural competence. Multiculturalism can exist in a monolingual society. The communities through which Helen moves are not so different as to be called multicultural but they are not so homogenous that they must be seen as a unified speech community. Multiculturalism often tends to be seen as attached to two or more languages. One benefit of Wildfell Hall is that it demonstrates how multicultural even the most apparently culturally monolithic society might be. Hymes (1981) observes, "The nature of things, it would seem, is not monolingual. Not to be or to pretend to be bilingual is to lose out; to presume that others are not is to lose out" (p. 76). In Wildfell Hall, Helen loses out much of the time because of her refusal or inability to listen to or to understand the language that others are using. Both at Grassdale and at Lindenhope she uses language and responds to language in ways that are not quite acceptable to those around her because she is unable to consider as valid perspectives other than her own.

Helen tells her diary that she fears she is becoming contaminated by Grassdale. This fear may explain, in part, her difficult interactions. She might have been more willing to comprehend the perspectives of others if she had not felt that they threatened her own. She may have been more likely to fear contamination by others because she viewed many aspects of life as questions of right and wrong, rather than as manifestations of differing conventions. She seems unable to find an intermediate position because to do so would indicate a softening of moral values. This perspective interferes with intercultural communication between Helen and those she encounters at Grassdale. In other words, Helen has yet to find the 'third place' which Crozet et al. describe below as essential for intercultural competence:

...[A]n intercultural interaction is neither a question of maintaining one's own cultural frame nor of assimilating to one's interactants' cultural frame. It is rather a question of finding an intermediary place these two positions—of finding a third place. In so doing the participant in the interaction is an experiencer, not an observer, of difference. The ability to find this third place is at the core of intercultural competence. (Crozet et al., 1999, p. 5)

Another way of visualizing this third place is described by Mendenhall, who compares intercultural competence to viewing the world from two simultaneous perspectives.

Developing global competencies does not involve acquiring knowledge and adding it to one's existing world view. Expatriate adjustment is not a linear accumulation of knowledge. To adjust to a new culture requires learning and internalizing new world views—new cognitive software systems—that must run simultaneously with one's own traditional cultural software system. (Mendenhall, 2001, pp. 7-8)

To have interiorized the conventions of Grassdale and Lindenhope to such an extent would have permitted Helen to interact more smoothly with her neighbors but would not have forced her to sacrifice the values on which she based her identity. She and her neighbors were motivated by divergent cultural conventions but awareness of other conventions, even internalization of those conventions, would not have required her to give up her own beliefs. She may never have perceived the cultural implications of her conflicts at Grassdale and Lindenhope. She tended to judge differences in values as character flaws or educational deficiencies. If she had recognized the variations in values, conventions and conceptual categories that contributed to her awkward communicative events, she might have been able to adapt to the expectations of others without risking her confidence in her own identity and values. The sum of Helen's communicative failures lead her to gradual alienation from the communities in which she lives and in each case she eventually determines that she needs to leave the community. Her position becomes untenable because of misunderstandings deriving in part from her misperceptions of others, in part from others misperceptions of her and in part from her inadequate communication strategies.

One benefit of *Wildfell Hall* as a classroom text is that it demonstrates how multicultural even the most apparently culturally monolithic society might be. In *Wildfell Hall*, Helen loses out much of the time because of her refusal or inability to listen to or to understand the language that others are using. Both at Grassdale and at Lindenhope she uses language and responds to language in ways that are not quite acceptable to those around her. She seems unwilling or unable adapt her communicative strategies to the norms of the communities she dwells in. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is a novel that is especially appropriate for use with proficient L2 learners. It demonstrates how much of intercultural communication takes place tacitly beneath the level of consciousness and how cultural differences that we don't notice can lead to assumptions about character traits. It focuses on questions of cross-cultural interaction that may be familiar to L2 speakers as language learners. It promotes awareness of the complexity of all interaction. It allows them to bring their own experience to the analysis of difficulties in intercultural understanding. It encourages students to become aware of the range of elements involved in successful intercultural communication and to consider the implications of intercultural competence.

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