

Task I

The extract given is taken from the short story "Do You Speak English?" by Simon Collings, which is set in Brazil. It describes the encounter between two American tourists, a young Brazilian boy and Manuel, who happens to walk along the quay right in the moment of the encounter.

The Brazilian boy has just caught a fish in a river and now intends to sell it. The fish laying in the gutter is fighting for his life. When the American woman and her companion appear, the boy pretends not to see them.

The woman feels pity for the fish and thinks that it "ought to be thrown back" (l. 19) into the water. She decides to ask the boy what he is going to do with the fish, but he does not understand English.

Therefore, she asks Manuel to translate her question to the boy. Manuel explains to her that the boy's intention is to sell the fish and so the woman decides to buy it. The boy names a price which is far too high but the woman accepts it and when the boy pretends not to have any change, she ends up paying twice the price asked by the boy.

After having paid she throws the fish back into the water and leaves together with her companion without looking back at either Manuel or the young Brazilian.

Task II

In the given extract from Simon Colling's short story "Do You Speak English?" the author uses different means to characterize the American woman.

The first impression the reader gets is that of a rather young and slim American tourist with "reddish hair" and "pale freckled skin" (l.9). Her outward appearance reminds of a person who is used to spending a large part of the day inside. The fact that she is "athletic looking" (l.9) and that she and her companion are walking "slowly" (l.7, l.11) suggests that she has a lot of time and money for her hobbies and leisure. The woman and her companion are coming "along the dusty street of warehouses" (ll.11-12) where they probably bought something. This again emphasizes their Western way of living, which is characterized by wealth, fun, leisure and a certain superficiality. The woman can therefore be described as a rather stereotyped representative of the American middle class.

Apart from this first the impression also the encounter with Manuel and the Brazilian boy reveals a lot about her character. She feels pity for the fish rather than for the Brazilian boy because she sees it suffer, and does not even realize that the boy has caught the fish in order to sell or eat it. Neither does she recognize that the boy is suffering, as well, since he is very poor and needs to sell the fish to earn some money. The disrespectful tone she uses when she is talking to him reveals her feeling of being superior to him. She reproaches him for having caught the fish and therefore is unable to change her point of view.

In addition, the encounter shows the woman's complete lack of intercultural competence. First, she expects a nine or ten year-old boy to speak English, and then she throws the fish back into the water although it would have actually have been eaten.

In the end, the woman leaves and does "not once look back" (l.61). This shows an important character trait of hers: She makes the boy sell the fish but once her will is fulfilled, she does not care what happens to the boy or to Manuel.



Task III

3.1

In my opinion, Manuel finds himself in a difficult situation. On the one hand, he is able to speak English and therefore could act as a mediator between the American woman and the Brazilian boy.

On the other hand, he is a local man and so he probably would rather take sides with the boy than with an American tourist.

The woman's behaviour and her outward appearance suggest that she is not aware of the difference between her own culture and the one of the boy, and thus maybe would not be able to understand the boy's situation, at all. She does not see that the boy is poor and that he caught the fish not just for fun but in order to sell or eat it. I think that Manuel did the right thing not to explain the boy's situation, because the woman would not have been able to understand it since she is used to living in a Western country. Being wealthy and not having to think about money is nothing special for her. She cannot understand that people, especially in third world countries, have to struggle to simply exist. The fact that she feels pity for the dying fish instead for the suffering human being shows that she is unable to understand the way of living in poor countries.

If Manuel had explained the boy's situation to the woman, she might have felt pity for the boy. But I think that, due to her lack of intercultural competence, she probably would have had no idea of what it means to be poor and of the difficult living conditions the boy has to deal with. She might have given a rather strange answer, thus creating the situation Manuel actually wanted to avoid.

3.2

In Simon Colling's short story "Do You Speak English?" an American couple sees a dying fish, which is laying on the street and which has just been caught by a Brazilian boy. The American woman feels sorry for the fish and tries to convince the boy to throw it back into the water, while her companion stays out of the discussion. Since the Brazilian boy does not speak English, he does not understand her request. Manuel, a man walking along the quay right in the moment of the encounter, translates for the woman and in the end, she buys the fish for an excessive price.

A similar encounter is described in R.K. Narayan's short story "A Horse and Two Goats." An American tourist wants to buy the statue of a horse from an old Indian, Muni. But neither of them speaks the language of the other one. This is why Muni does not understand that the tourist wants to buy the statue – he thinks the American intends to buy his two goats.

Both the American woman in the short story "Do You Speak English?" and the American tourist in "A Horse and Two Goats" have to deal with different social or cultural backgrounds in unfamiliar situations.

The woman's companion in Simon Colling's short story is not involved in the encounter (" 'It ought to be thrown back', the woman was saying. 'Do you think he wants it?' She turned to her companion who shrugged", ll.19-20). Furthermore, the situation frightens him ("He looked nervous", l.20).

The woman, on the other hand, is actively involved and not frightened. But she has no understanding for the boy's situation. She feels pity for a dying fish instead for the boy, who has a hard life. The difficult living conditions and the poverty the boy has to deal with are strange to her. Living in an industrialized country, she is unable to put herself in the position of the Brazilian boy. This is shown very well by the fact that she expects a nine- or ten-year-old boy to speak English.

In addition, she is arrogant towards the boy since she feels superior to him.

The American tourist in R.K. Narayan's short story, on the other hand, does not feel superior to Muni. He talks to him in a polite way ("He said politely in English, "How do you do?", Echoes of the Empire - The Mixed Voices of a Colonial Past", p.76, ll.1-2).

The American tourist, however, does not understand the man's situation either.

Like the American woman in the short story "Do You Speak English?", he is rich (which is shown by the fact that he travels a lot) and cannot put himself in the position of a man living in a third world country.

3.3

Fleischhacker Foundation
P.O. Box 29918
San Francisco CA 94129-0918

Felicitas Müller
Schillerstraße 32
76135, Karlsruhe
Germany

June 1, 2013

Subject: Potential Sponsorship for our film dealing with the problems of globalization

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to inquire as to whether you were interested in sponsoring a film project of the film club Karlsruhe, which is going to deal with the problems of globalization.

In our globalized world, misunderstandings and ignorant behaviour due to a lack of intercultural competence come to pass more and more often. We, the film club Karlsruhe, think that it is time to raise people's awareness of this problem and therefore we decided to make a film about it.

Looking for as much information as possible on the subject, we found a very interesting short story which deals with the lack of intercultural competence: "Do You Speak English?" by Simon Collings. We decided to base our film on a scene taken from this short story.

Since you might not know it, we would like to give you a short summary on the respective paragraph: A young Brazilian boy has caught a fish and now wants to sell it. An American tourist sees the dying fish, feels pity for it and wonders why nobody throws it back into the water. She asks the boy whether he knows that the fish is dying and is surprised that the nine- or ten-year-old Brazilian does not speak English. Then she discovers a man, Manuel, who is watching the scene and she asks him to translate her question. With the help of Manuel, she buys the fish at a very high price and throws it back into the water.

Then the American couple leaves without looking back.

We would like to choose this scene because it could raise people's awareness of ignorant behaviour due to a lack of intercultural competence. The author created the stereotype of a wealthy, naïve American woman. She feels pity for the fish instead of the Brazilian boy. The fish, which would have actually been eaten, is thrown back into the water by the American middle-class woman because she is incapable of understanding the other culture. She does not realize the real problem, namely the bad living conditions in developing countries.

We, the members of the film club Karlsruhe, thank you for taking the time and thinking about our film. We would be very happy if you decided to support our film project.

Sincerely yours,

Felicitas Müller