Aspects of Cultural Elements in Prominent English Textbooks for EFL Setting

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Abstract—**Materials development and evaluation is a relatively young phenomenon in the field of language teaching. In the practical sense, it includes the production, evaluation and adaptation of materials. Undoubtedly, culture is much more valuable than teaching and practicing the literary masterpiece. The need to integrate culture into teaching the second language particularly teaching English in a foreign context is not a new debate and has long been highlighted in countless studies. Societal values, attitudes and cultural elements are integrated with the communicative approach to enhance the effectiveness of L2 acquisition. Conversely, textbooks are an integral part of language learning in the classrooms. Yet, it seems to be common practice that foreign language textbooks and classrooms frequently overlook the conclusions drawn in such studies and neglect the essential information about the target language culture that would help students reach a cultural understanding to accompany their linguistic knowledge. Hence, it is the intent of this paper to examine the cultural elements in four English language textbooks: Interchange, Headway, Top Notch, On Your Mark currently used in Iran in order to determine the most prominent cultural dimension portrayed.**

Index Terms—**culture, text book, EFL**

I. INTRODUCTION

The term "culture" refers to the systems of knowledge shared by a group of people, including a group's values, beliefs, and attitudes, notions of appropriate behavior, statuses, role expectations, and worldview (notions of time, space, and cosmology). Culture also includes material objects and knowledge about their purpose and use. Culture is understood to be a symbol-rich template that shapes human consciousness and behavior. There are many axioms reflecting the relationship between language and culture in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) pedagogy. There are also various stands by a number of ELT educators regarding the place of culture in ESL. The positive implications of including cultural associations of the target language into instructional materials are largely known and accepted. This inclusion will nurture positive attitudes towards the target language, hence facilitating its acquisition. Generally, there is a tacit agreement that the assimilation of the target culture which results in acculturation will encourage communicative competence which in turn will enhance language learning. Therefore, cultural understanding should not be disregarded but should be in the heart of second language learning. Having established the cultural niche we have then moved on to the issue of what kind of cultural elements are introduced and integrated into ELT instructional materials specifically, textbooks, and how deliberate the infusion is. Studies in English textbooks for EFL students reported that cultural information is present in EFL textbooks. They revealed different portrayals of culture in all its dimensions. This paper discusses the cultural impact on Iranian English Language teaching and learning as well as identifies the cultural dimensions found in Iranian English Language textbooks.

Sheldon (1988) obviously noted that the ability to evaluate teaching materials effectively is a very important professional activity for all EFL teachers. No course book or set of materials is likely to be perfect and even though it is clear that course book assessment is fundamentally a subjective, rule-of-thumb activity, and that no neat formula, grid or system will ever provide a definite yardstick nonetheless, a model for hard pressed teachers or course planners is needed and it should be brief, practical to use and yet comprehensive in its coverage of criteria, given that everyone in the field will need to evaluate materials at some time or other.

Cunningsworth (1995) and Ellis (1997) suggest that textbook evaluation helps teachers move beyond impressionistic assessments and it helps them to acquire useful, accurate, systematic, and contextual insights into the overall nature of textbook material. Textbook evaluation, therefore, can potentially be a particularly worthwhile means of conducting action research as well as a form of professional empowerment and improvement. Similarly, textbook evaluation can also be a valuable component of teacher training programs for it serves the dual purpose of making student teachers aware of important features to look for in textbooks while familiarizing them with a wide range of published language instruction materials.

A. The Theoretical Development of Culture in EFL Education

According to Allen (1985) "in the earlier part of this century second language learning took place in order for learners to gain access to the great literary masterpieces of civilization". Learners were exposed to cultural experiences associated with the target language. In the sixties, another educational purpose for second language learning emerged - "cross cultural communication and understanding" (Nostrand in Lessard-Clouston, 1997). Culture then became essential not only for the study of literature but more importantly for language learning where the term "small c culture" came into the picture. .This thought is further supported by the emergence of the communicative approach in language teaching which promotes the integration of language and culture. This is translated into the goal of communication within the cultural context of the target language which in turn should encourage communicative competence. The relationship between language, society and culture is further explained through the domain of sociolinguistics which examines language use within different social contexts. In relation to this language use includes the social functions of language and the forms these functions take in the evocation of social meaning as people's lives, opinions and beliefs are strongly influenced by the society they live in. Although sociolinguists have a common concern in examining the relationship between language, society and culture, there exist various interpretations of the meanings of these terms. However, they do agree on the principle that there exists an inextricable bond between language and culture

Stern (1983) posits the cultural aspect of second language and foreign language teaching in his three-level framework. The foundational level incorporates linguistics, educational, anthropology, sociology and sociolinguistics theories. Ethnographic or cultural description of the target language is the essence of the inter-level or level two while the sociocultural component of the target language is the foundation for level three. In Stern's conceptual framework language, culture and communication is synonym with society. Therefore like many other conceptual frameworks it also emphasizes the inclusion of culture in ESL education.

Backing to the related literature, Controversies exist around what kinds of content should be incorporated into a foreign or second language curriculum. Since the early 1970s, momentous changes have occurred in the field of foreign language teaching. The early 1970s witnessed the reform of structural methodologies such as the Grammar Translation Method and Audiolingualism, because it became important that "language was not to be studied but to be learned and spoken" (Byram, 1991, p. 13).

After all the transitions from one approach to another, the widely-held belief was that it was essential to teach the target language through meaningful and culture-based content. In order to be successful in real life situations, this, in turn, would help the learners to employ the social rules of that target culture in learning its language.

The social rules of language use require an understanding of the social context in which the language is used, and hence, the language learner ends up with the inevitable culture-specific context of the foreign or second language class. As Alptekin (2002) puts it, "learning a foreign language becomes a kind of enculturation, where one acquires new cultural frames of reference and a new world view, reflecting those of the target language culture and its speakers" (p. 58). Similarly, applied linguists such as Halliday (1975) have suggested that learners should acquire knowledge about how to use the language in order to function successfully in socio-cultural contexts. Thus, language teachers are inevitably supposed to be equipped with target language communicative competence, so that the students can gain access to educational or economic opportunities within the target language setting. What is more important, since acquisition of target language communicative competence entails the integration of both language and its culture, learners should become familiar with the "experience of another language, and a different way of coping with reality" (Alptekin, 2002, p. 59). Similarly, as Risager (1991) notes, speaking with a native speaker includes the ability to act in real life situations, and is not merely a question of knowing the grammar and lexis. Thus, it is important for the learners to be involved in communicative acts, as well as in the reality of the target culture, so that they can understand the cultural references and views that the native speakers of the particular target culture possess.

Norrizan (1993) set out to find out the impact of various cultural elements in ESL texts introduced during ESL lessons to two sets of students in two different schools. She compared a school in Community A with middle or upper middle class students and Community B which was an urban village with low income families. She used a cultural unit matrix which includes culturally suggestive topical items such as types of houses, overseas studies, satay, business loans, travels, air travels and local festivals among others. These items were selected from a survey of six form four ESL textbooks referred to or used by the teachers in the study. Classroom observations and interviews were carried out to determine whether the topical items are culturally familiar or unfamiliar to the students. She found out that many of the topical items were culturally relevant to students who came from middle or upper middle class families in Community A. She concluded that the textbooks were biased towards middle-class values and lifestyles. Thus, meaningful interactions were achieved in these classrooms. Conversely, students in Community B were very distracted and restless during these lessons. She proposed that teachers should be more selective in choosing appropriate items according to the learners' culture. It is concluded that culturally familiar items do facilitate second language learning.

Despite misgivings about the inclusion of Western culture in English Language teaching, Shimako(2000) found that many of the textbooks adopted in Japan do include Western characters and values although Japanese culture was predominant. Foreign cultures were almost always in the context of Western visitors being introduced to Japanese culture by the locals. Generally, American culture is the main culture representing Western values and characters.

In the Korean English as a foreign language (EFL) context, the teaching and learning of culture encompasses all aspects of human life: lifestyle, behavior, thoughts and the value system of the target culture. Learners are made aware of the various dimensions of culture as well as the rules of the language. It is found that the most frequently appeared topics related to culture in the Korean English textbook for secondary schools are food, holidays, gestures, weather, customs and travel to English speaking countries. The predominant concept of culture is 'culture as the way of life' which is the sociological sense of culture.

The aesthetic dimension of culture, culture as a way of thinking and behavior do not seem to be taken into consideration.

In their study of teaching materials in Moroccan secondary schools Adaskou, Britten, and Fahsi (1990) found nothing beneficial or motivating in including Western culture. By introducing Western culture there's a tendency for cultural comparison which in turn will breed discontent among learners with their own culture. Besides, certain patterns of behavior in English-speaking social contexts are not desirable, being incompatible with local values. Finally, the teachers in the study believe that motivation in learning English will improve if the language is presented in contexts relevant to learners' lives as young adults rather than in the context of an English-speaking country. Adaskou, Britten, and Fahsi (1990) also maintains that the inclusion of a cultural component in language teaching can improve international understanding, enhance appreciation of one's own culture, facilitate learners' visits to foreign countries and contacts with their people, and motivate learners.

Generally in the textbooks of these nations, the Western characters are used to introduce stereotypes presenting differences between Western culture and local cultures. They also portray issues of gender roles and all of them appear in textbooks approved by the local Ministry of Education. Along the same line, it is the intention of the present study to explore the cultural dimensions and describe the cultural contexts in Iranian settings.

B. What is the Role of Culture in L2 Textbooks?

As Hinkel (1999) noted it is widely acknowledged that textbooks are the main materials used in language classes. They may be the teacher, the trainer, the authority, the resource, and the ideology in the foreign language classroom. Such textbooks are produced massively for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) purposes all over the world, and aim to meet the needs of language learners, so that they can function linguistically and culturally well in English communicative acts. Thus, it is extremely important that these textbooks include the vital components to teach the language, its culture, and are appropriate for learners' needs, cultural background, and level. Yet, regrettably, certain aspects of the target culture, such as oral and written history, literature, music, drama, dance, visual arts, celebrations, and the lifestyle of native speakers are not always represented in these resources, nor are the intercultural phenomena. To illustrate, textbooks produced at a national level for particular countries mirror the students' local cultures, rather than the English-speaking cultures.

C. The Role of Culture in Intercultural Competence

This section discusses some of the arguments posited in support of developing second language learners' intercultural competence. This is in line with globalization where second language learners are increasingly exposed to the global community in which English plays a role as an international bridge.

Learners who are fully competent in the language are expected to be global performers well versed in the cultural awareness embedded in the international language in their quest for knowledge as well as fostering global relations.

The closeness of the relationship between language and culture gives rise to the perception of language as a kind of acculturation where language learners assimilate new culture, "new codes of expression, new values, and new norms of conduct" as well as a different world view. Puente (1997) asserts that "language reflects and affects culture" forming a "dynamic relation" or intrinsic link. This link is manifested in what Fantini terms "lingua-culture" where language is inextricably linked with culture and in turn is taught in tandem with its culture. In relation to this, Iranian English Language learners need to learn about the target language culture together with Persian culture in order to communicate effectively, achieving communicative competence. Communicative competence is not possibly achieved without cultural understanding as it is the core of language acquisition. This is demonstrated in the fact that when a learner decides to learn a language, such as German, the learner is not only learning the linguistics of German but everything else German and Germany. Therefore, learning the linguistics of a language involves assimilating cultural associations and its entire cultural load. A learner then avoids all the pitfalls of cultural misunderstanding or ignorance which leads to the breakdown of communication. In addition to communication, learners who are said to have acquired a language are those who are able to align themselves with the culture of the target language. They can also think in the target language thus enabling them to identify with the language by capturing the essence of the language. (Tang, 1999)

It is mentioned earlier that Iranian EFL learners need to learn about the culture of the target language together with Persian culture assimilated into the target language. Accordingly, intercultural understanding should then be emphasized in EFL education in Iran.. Intercultural understanding means dual culture understanding where learners are exposed to the target language culture, specifically English and to a certain extent, American culture as well as being introduced to Persian culture in English. Learners are given plenty of exposure to cultural information of the target language. This exposure to the target language culture is to minimize what Schulman and Ellis (1985) termed as social and psychological distance in his Nativization model where he posited that language learning may be hindered by social

and psychological distance. Social distance refers to the equality of the social status of each culture, the integrative and instrumental motivation in learning the additional lingua culture which in turn affects the attitude of the learner towards second language learning.

Psychological distance is realized in language and culture shock, motivation and ego boundaries of individual learners'. Therefore, social and psychological distance extensively influence learners' attitude, whether positive of negative, towards the target language and its culture. A positive attitude will facilitate language learning as it promotes affinity with the lingua-culture. In contrast if learners feel alienated from the target language and culture, language learning is certainly hampered by this cultural gap . It is also essential to bridge this gap as it could pose difficulties in communication; especially when the second language learners come into direct contact with target language culture.

In the pragmatic dimension, confusion could occur due to the ignorance of cultural information. Learners need to be aware of ambiguity in some functions of the target language such as in the classic example of the statement 'It's cold'. The statement can function both as a general comment on the weather and a request for the window to be opened. If an EFL learner does not recognize the hidden meaning, communication is surely lost. In addition to this, learners need to be informed about culturally accepted attitude and behavior in the target language. The Asian way of reacting to praise or compliments with reticence and humility might cause cultural misunderstanding in the target culture. Consequently, cultural contexts in its entire dimension should be introduced in ELT education in order to achieve communicative competence.

Lack of cross-cultural awareness will lead to misunderstandings in second language classrooms. Some 'improper' classroom behavior may stem from culturally specific behavior. Many rules and procedures for effective classroom interaction are dictated by culture. Powel and Andersen (1994) asserted it is not surprising that a female Muslim learner will not often volunteer to lead a group when there are other Muslim male learners in the group. This is the consequence of her up-bringing which recognizes the leading role of a male Muslim. She will often avoid direct eye-contact with a male teacher when responding to a question as direct eye-contact with a person of the opposite sex, is undesirable in the Islamic context, especially when not related. Syahrom (1995).

The learner may be upbraided for breaching the ideals of effective communication which emphasizes eye-contact in interaction by a teacher who is not well-versed with cross-cultural understanding. This lack of understanding has serious implications because it affects classroom management and consequently the teaching and learning process. Teachers need to reflect on their cultural judgment and adjust their world-view in the light of these cultural constraints. They have to localize certain aspects of culture by adopting the target language culture without neglecting local cultural values. This is in line with McLeod (1985) who asserts, "It is important for the teacher to understand the values he is transmitting and also the values of the students' cultures".

Confusion and conflict can arise among people engaging in cross-cultural interaction .One reason is that the culture one is born in to is generally taken for granted as reality. The anthropological term "ethnocentrism" refers to the way that people's central stance toward reality is shaped by their social group. While it is not the only source of cross-cultural challenge understanding the implications of ethnocentrism may help facilitate cultural adjustment and ease the experience of "culture shock".

D. Textbook and Culture

A discussion on textbooks is inevitable in light of the arguments advocating the infusion of culture in ESL education. The significance of textbooks is seen in the many roles textbooks play in facilitating the second language teaching and learning process in the classroom. According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), the textbook "can be a teacher, a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority, and an ideology." Hence, the textbook can be a major source of cultural elements besides providing linguistic and topical contents which necessarily reflect the ideology inherent in the EFL context of a particular circle. Textbooks across the world are of different cultural orientations; whether they are based on source cultures, target culture or international target cultures. Source cultures refer to learners 'own culture, target culture is the culture in which the target language is used as a first language while international target cultures refer to various cultures in English, or non-English-speaking countries which use English as an international language. (Cortazzi and Jin, 1999). Consequently, this categorization will assist in describing the cultural orientation of the textbook in this study.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This is a very small scale descriptive study on an Iranian four English Language textbooks currently in use. It sets out to identify or determine the most prominent cultural dimension found in these textbooks. It also intends to describe the cultural contexts portrayed.

III. RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the most prominent cultural dimension portrayed in English Language textbooks in Iran: the aesthetic, sociological, semantic or the pragmatic (sociolinguistic)?

A. The Conceptual Framework

A specific and operational definition of culture which outlines four dimensions or 'senses' of culture; the aesthetic, sociological, semantic and the pragmatic posited by Adaskou, Britten & Fahsi (1990) is adapted to be used to facilitate the investigation. These aspects are representative of the myriad dimensions of culture as well as providing concrete substance to the abstractness of culture. It should be mentioned here that the analysis of cultural component in this study does not include the prescribed literary texts integrated into the ESL syllabus by the Ministry of Education.

It should be mentioned that although this framework was developed for an EFL context, it is found to be compatible to Iranian EFL context which resembles EFL in the psychological distance of L2 in the majority of learners. It is also appropriate as a framework for studies on non-native speakers.

Figure 1. Four meanings of 'culture': Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi (1990)

The Aesthetic Sense: Culture with a capital C: the media, the cinema, music (whether serious or popular, literature-the study of which used often to be one of the main reasons for language teaching. Many of these forms of culture are at the same time sources of information on culture in our second sense.

The Sociological Sense: Culture with a small c: the organization and nature of family, of home life, of interpersonal relations, material conditions, work and leisure, customs and institution.

The Semantic Sense: The conceptual system embodied in the language, conditioning all our perceptions and our thought processes, time and space relations, emotional states, colors.

The Pragmatic (or sociolinguistic) Sense: The background knowledge, social skills, and paralinguistic skills that, in addition to mastery of the language code, make possible successful communication:

► The ability to use appropriate exponents of the various communicative functions.

► The ability to conform to norms of politeness, where different from the learners' culture, including taboo avoidance.

► Awareness of conventions governing interpersonal relations- questions of status, obligation, license, where different from the learners' culture.

► Familiarity with the main rhetorical conventions in different written genres e.g., different types of letters and messages, form-filling, advertisements.

B. The Textbooks Sample

Interchange, Headway, Top Notch, On Your Mark

IV. PROCEDURE

Examination of the four cultural dimensions adapted from Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi (1990) is carried out on the textbook sample. The written text in the textbook is scrutinized looking out for language discourse which suggests and conforms to the cultural dimensions in the conceptual framework. Text analysis is carried out drawing attention to:
• Informative or descriptive text material
• Texts presenting foreign attitudes and opinions
• Human-interest texts (including dialogues), authentic of fictitious, with details of everyday life
• Contextualized practice activities, writing tasks
• Lexis- particularly idioms – and unfamiliar collocations, which involve alien concepts
• The exponents of the communicative function
(Adapted from Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi (1990)
Cultural information can be effectively communicated through this particular analysis thus it is adopted and adapted to facilitate the study.

During the analysis any textual discourse with cultural loads are recorded in a tally sheet in order to gauge the distribution and frequency of occurrence of the four cultural dimensions. The frequency of occurrence of each dimension of culture is then converted to percentages for comparison purposes. These percentages are then analyzed to determine the dimension which occurs the most frequently. The findings are then presented in tables and visuals. The findings are later justified and discussed qualitatively to address the research question.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FIGURE.2.
DISTRIBUTION OF CULTURE DISTINCTIVE OCCURRENCES ACROSS CHAPTERS

The Aesthetic Sense	The Sociological Sense	The Semantic Sense	The Pragmatic or sociolinguistic Sense
8chapters	7chapters	8 chapters	14 chapters

FIGURE.3.
THE RANKING AND PERCENTAGES OF CULTURE DISTINCTIVE OCCURRENCES ACROSS CHAPTERS

Ranking	Cultural Dimension	No. of Chapters	Percentage %
1	The Pragmatic (or sociolinguistic) Sense	12	80.0
2	The Sociological Sense	8	53.3
3	The Aesthetic Sense	8	53.3
4	The Semantic Sense	8	53.3

Culture distinctive occurrences are found to be spread across fifteen chapters of the textbooks. (Figure 2). The pragmatic or sociolinguistic sense is found in twelve out of fifteen (80%) of the chapters. The sociological sense is found in eight chapters or 53.3%, the aesthetic sense is found in seven chapters (46.6%) and the semantic sense in five chapters which is 33.3%. Therefore, the pragmatic or sociolinguistic sense of culture spans over almost all fifteen chapters of the textbook followed by the sociological sense, the aesthetic sense and finally the semantic sense.

The pragmatic (sociolinguistic) occurrences are quite predominant probably because the forms and functions of language such as 'to offer', 'to clarify' and 'to request' are included in almost all the chapters. According to Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi (1990) the pragmatic (sociolinguistic) sense includes 'the ability to use various exponents of communicative functions." Another probable reason is the rhetorical conventions in different written genres for example, types of letters, are introduced in the sub-section of the textbooks on the writing skill which is found in every chapter of the textbooks. This could imply that the textbooks conform to the communicative language teaching approach which is the generally accepted ESL ideology in Iran.

FIGURE. 4.
FREQUENCY OF CULTURE DISTINCTIVE OCCURRENCES

The Aesthetic Sense	The Sociological Sense	The Semantic Sense	The Pragmatic (or sociolinguistic) Sense
21	35	28	21

This finding is equivalent to the findings in the Korean study where almost all the culture distinctive occurrences are sociological in nature. However, in this study it is found that though sociological dimension is prominent the other three dimensions of culture; the semantic, the aesthetic and the pragmatic (sociolinguistic) senses are not totally neglected.

It is also found that the characters portrayed in these textbooks are mostly local characters from the different ethnic groups. Even the travel destinations are strictly local but there is a mention of a holiday in other non-western countries.

VI. IMPLICATION

It is observed that the cultural focus or content of these textbooks is local culture or 'localized culture' made up of the cultures of the various ethnic groups. In line with this, the cultural orientation of these textbooks is based on the source cultures in which there is a direct and explicit inclusion of local culture such as found in the passages explaining about local festivals and dances. There is also an attempt to introduce intercultural behavior and communication .No instances of comparison with western or target language culture are found. In this respect the EFL context in Iran is extended to English as an international language (EIL) context as it is used to describe local culture and values to other global speakers of English. In conclusion, hence the inclusion of culture is beneficial to language proficiency. Therefore the Iranian ELT ideology on culture is successfully translated into the cultural occurrences in the textbooks investigated in this study.

VII. LIMITATION

As mentioned earlier, this is a very small scale study with just four textbooks as samples. Therefore it is not the intent of this study to generalize its findings. The scope of the study is only confined to the analysis of written text. It does not consider illustrations and other visuals, tape scripts of listening texts, sound recordings, realia and pseudo-realia of all sorts.

VIII. CONCLUSION

It is a fact that English has become an international language therefore it doesn't belong only to native speakers in English-speaking countries. It has truly belonged to the world as the global lingua franca of this century. Second language speakers of English use English to communicate not only with native speakers of English but with other second language or foreign language users of English. The rapid and extensive localization and nativization of English suggests that English need not always be linked to the culture of those who speak it as a first language. Indeed the purpose of an international language is to describe one's own culture and concerns to others. (McKay, 2004). The

findings in the studies reviewed in this paper reveal that, in many countries, the teaching of English is becoming much more localized, integrating local flavors with those of the target culture. The use of local characters, places, and issues as the content for textbooks is subtly interspersed with the cultural contexts of English-speaking countries. This is a necessity as language could not be totally divorced from culture. The adoption of English as a second language means to a certain extent the acceptance of Western culture and values. As Smith (1976) proposed thirty four years ago, only when English is used to express and advocate local culture and values will it truly represent an international language.

Clearly, ESL and EFL educators support the inclusion of a cultural component in the teaching of English. Therefore the issue now is not whether to include but what aspects of culture to include, what role culture should play and more importantly how culture should be taught in the teaching of English as a second language.

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