

THE MANIFESTATION OF CULTURE IN IRANIAN AND TURKISH HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEXT BOOKS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine the cultural references in Iranian and Turkish high school English text books. Because textbooks play a pivotal role in the realm of language teaching and learning and they are looked upon as an indispensable vehicle for foreign language learning, this study aims at investigating the extent to which the Iranian and Turkish high school English textbooks represent the cultural principles. This study is interested in screening the cultural references in the content of the instructional materials of Iran and Turkey at high school level. This research was done on the reading section as the kernel part of these books. To achieve the objective, Ramirez and Hall's (1990) categorization is used. The analysis was carried out within a coding scheme with eight categories. Results of the study indicate that the ELT textbooks in Turkey and more in Iran appear too weak to provide new information or broaden students' worldview or cultural understanding. In other words, the study seems to postulate that changes should be made if we want to prepare the students to communicate in the multicultural world of English and if we want to use the nationally developed textbooks for the optimum benefit. The findings of the study present the point that cultural principles are not utilized in the Iranian and Turkish high school textbooks.

Keywords: culture, manifestation culture, Turkish, Iranian, high schools,

INTRODUCTION

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.

English language teaching materials (textbooks) play an important role in many language classrooms. The relationship between textbooks and language teaching is not something which has only recently been commented on. When it comes to teaching English the textbook issue would be considered as one of the most important topics in countries like Iran in which this language is considered as a foreign one.

The textbook is an almost universal element of language teaching (Hutchinson and Torres, 1994). Millions of copies are sold every year and numerous aid projects have been set up to produce those in various countries. According to Riazi (2003), "textbooks play a very crucial role in the realm of language teaching and learning and are considered the next important factor in the second/foreign language classroom after the teacher." Although textbooks can be affected by other aspects of an instructional situation (for instance by the teacher's use of different approaches, by students' preferences for one part over another, or other environmental factors), the effect of these instructional materials on the other components are more significant as texts have the potential to change the objectives of the situation or alter students' motivation.

The wealth of published materials for English language teaching (ELT) available in the market makes selecting the right coursebook a challenging task. Moreover, the selection of a particular core textbook signals an executive educational decision in which there is considerable professional, financial and even political investment (Sheldon, 1988).

As there are many different and diverse ELT textbooks on the market, there is a necessity for the evaluation of textbooks in order to be able to recognize the advantages of one over the others, which in

turn will lead to the adoption of the textbook. So, many researchers evaluate various principles of textbooks to increase the effectiveness of them. According to Sheldon (1988), there are several reasons for the evaluation of textbooks. Among these reasons, he suggests that the selection of an English language teaching textbook often demonstrates an important administrative and educational decision in which one can see considerable amount of professional, financial, or even political investment. According to Sheldon (1988), there are several principles for the evaluation of textbooks. One of the key principles could be referred to as culture; in other words, according to Savignon (in Celce-Murcia, 2001, p.18), "what must be learned is general empathy and openness towards other countries".

Carrasquillo (1994, p.54) presented the statement below as what culture might be referred to:

"Culture includes institutions, language, values, religion, ideas, and habits of thinking, artistic expressions, and patterns of social and interpersonal relationships."

Culture has been defined in a number of ways. Linton (1945, p.32) defines culture as "a configuration of learned behaviors whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society". Thompson (1990, p.132) defines culture as the pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms, including actions, utterances and meaningful objects of various kinds, by which individuals communicate with one another and share their experiences, conceptions and beliefs. Culture is related to language. The relationship between language and culture is so great that they are referred to as the sides of the same coin. The relationship between these two has been examined by different researchers.

It has been suggested that knowing a language is inseparable from understanding the culture in which the language is spoken (Brown, 1990). In fact, according to Dornyei (2001, p.15), "The learning of foreign/second language involves far more than simply learning skills, or a system of rules, or a grammar; it involves an attraction in self-image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner."

Although classroom practice may not have fully caught up with theory, few would dispute that culture learning should be an essential element of the foreign language curriculum. School textbooks are one vehicle through which attempts can be made to disseminate and reinforce dominant cultural forms. In countries in which there is much attitude, mostly negative, towards countries whose language is taught or there is a chaos in political relations between them, there have always been concerns regarding cultural issues. But it needs to be kept in mind that making students familiar with other countries' culture is not necessarily accompanied by jeopardizing their own native culture and it does not mean that one has an obligation to behave in accordance with conventions of the target culture. On the contrary, this would give the pupils a better understanding of new cultures as well as realizing their own identity in a better way. This would also help them see their culture in relation to others so as to promote cross-cultural understanding (Aliakbari, 2004).

METHOD

Through a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, the researcher established a criterion by which cultural aspects of the current English textbooks could be analyzed and evaluated. Since the procedure of textbooks analysis had been discussed in this study, the purpose of this study was to consider how the researcher analyzed the data. The purpose of this study was to find out how culture is presented in Iranian and Turkish high school English text books. So, the main focus of this study was to reveal, through a certain discursive analysis, some cultural practices of English language in the ELT textbooks. To this end, a model of culture analysis was developed and then applied to the intended books. In this study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to explore and investigate English culture as presented in Iranian and Turkish high school English text books.

The Pilot Study

The significance of a pilot study is that it enables researchers to make changes, as necessary, on the proposed instrument, whether it is used in its original or modified form. Furthermore, piloting is to increase the reliability, validity and practicability of the research methods. According to Wilson and Sapsford (2006,p.103), "A pilot investigation is a small-scale trial before the main investigation,

intended to assess the adequacy of the research design and of the instruments to be used for data collection; piloting the data-collection instruments is essential, whether interview schedules or questionnaires are used." As some researchers observed, every questionnaire must be tested and refined under real-world conditions before it is finalized, preferably by someone who is not involved in its preparation, which would reflect an independent point of view (Gay and Airasian, 2003). A pilot study was conducted before the final administration of the proposed research instruments.

Content Analysis and Coding Scheme

Several ways of manipulating texts are common in content analysis. For Weber (1990), they include word frequency counts, key-word-in-context (KWIC) listing, concordances, classification of words into content categories, content category counts, and retrievals based on content categories and co-occurrences. The process of creating and applying a coding scheme consists of several basic steps. One of the most fundamental and important decisions concerns the definition of the basic unit of text to be classified. Word, word sense, sentence, theme, paragraph and whole text are six commonly used options. As part of the content analysis procedure we had to decide about a coding scheme. Throughout this study, coding scheme was tried for the reading section under investigation. The quality and the justification of the choices are given in the following sections.

Coding Scheme for Reading Passages

Observing Ramirez and Halls' (1990) study of content analysis and the above classifications, reading section of high schools textbooks of Iran and Turkey were put under investigation. The total number of units in either section of the textbooks was examined and their respective references to different countries or groups were tabulated. Indirect references were also taken into account. To get close to the central idea of the passage, which is considered the major objective of reading comprehension, the whole text or excerpt was taken as the unit of study for the 'Reading' passages. There are eight categories. Categories included reference to English speaking countries (H), reference to non-English speaking western countries (I), reference to eastern countries (L), Cross-national comparison (M), reference to Iran or Turkey (N) and reference to Islam or Islamic traditions (O). Two other categories were established for a different reason. Category (J) was to embody general texts such as those related to science, biographies, historical events and life stories which did not concentrate on the life style but on the introduction of a scientist, a world figure or a man of will. Some texts seemed to be adopted from known sources but were presented to students anonymously. Accordingly, category (K) embrace 'Reading' passages whose identity had been left out.

Materials (Textbooks)

The researcher collected Iranian text books from a high school in Tehran and Turkish text books from Turkish embassy in Iran.

Under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, three English textbooks have been developed for the three levels of high school in Iran. They are entitled English Book One, English Book Two, and English Book Three (Birjandi, Soheili, Nowroozi&Mahmoodi, 2000; Birjandi, Nowroozi&Mahmoodi, 2002a; Birjandi, Nowroozi&Mahmoodi, 2002b). The books are designed based on a similar pattern and structure. Each lesson starts with the 'New Words' section. In Books Three and Four, this section is known as 'Word Study'. The second section of each book is the 'Reading' section, which is a set of reading passages followed by a number of comprehension questions. Grammar and writing exercises comprise the next sections. There is also a section for conversation practice called 'Language Function'. 'Pronunciation Practice' and 'Vocabulary Drills' form the final sections of each lesson in the textbooks. There are twenty two reading passages in these books.

There are four levels in high school grade of Turkey .There are two textbooks in high school level. They are entitled New Bridge to Success as a course book and New Bridge to Success as a work book (Altınay Bayral, Ayse Pinar Albayrak, Ayten Pinar, Didem Akbulut, Fehmi Alpaslan, Filiz Yildiran, Funda Aksu, Funda Baydar, Hatice Anci, Mehmet Ates, Mustafa Aslan, Nilgun Kindirdglu, Selma Goksu, Sibel Ak, Sinan Eroglu, Suna Ince, Sebnem Akkin and Zehra Esin Akin, 2007). They are designed based on a similar pattern and structure. (Let 'start) ,(Reading and speaking), (Listening and Writing),(Reading and Speaking),(listening and Speaking),(Reading and Writing),(Let's

speaking),(Let's Remember),(project),and (Fun Corner) are the sections of these books. There are twenty tow reading passages in these books.

Selection

Among the books commonly used in schools, only those thought in high school have been considered, the year when the new syllabus was presented. A close examination of the textbooks made it clear that the reading section of the textbooks is the kernel section of the books. They are to provide new vocabularies, grammar of the lesson and new information. In the reading section of the textbooks, each new word is used in it. This is done to contextualize one of the meanings of the word.

Other sections are to help students internalize the information obtained in this section. Accordingly, the present study aimed at the analysis of this section of the textbooks.

Procedure

To date, no specific methodology has been agreed upon for analyzing the cultural content of foreign language textbooks. This section of the study aimed at a quantitative account of the state of references to different cultural categories in the English textbooks. The model of textbooks analysis was done based on a modified version of Ramirez and Halls' (1990) model, designed and adopted for a similar purpose.

This study was conducted based on the following procedure: First, studying and analyzing the reading passages and offering categories presented in English textbooks. Second, these categories were classified according to the strategies presented in Hall and Ramirez. Third, the researcher analyzed the results of the classifications of Iranian and Turkish texts and compared them with each other.

During the analysis, any text with cultural categories was recorded in a sheet in order to gauge frequency of occurrence of the nine cultural categories. 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 occur most frequently. The findings were then presented visually. The findings were later justified and discussed qualitatively to address the research question.

RESULTS

The results of analysis of reading passages of two series of textbooks are shown in Table 1.1.

Cultural categories:

H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
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Direction:

- H, Reference to English speaking countries
- I, Reference to non-English speaking western countries
- L, Reference to eastern countries
- M, Cross-national comparison
- N, Reference to Iran or Turkey
- O, Reference to Islam or Islamic traditions
- J, General texts related sciences, biographies, of scientists and world figures
- K, Reading passages whose identity had been left out.

Table 1.Results of 'reading' analysis

<i>Iranian Text books</i>		
<i>Book One</i>		
Lessons	Title	Reference
Lesson1	The kindergarten man	(I)
Lesson2	The funny farmhand	(J)
Lesson3	A story about Newton	(H)
Lesson4	The school bus	(H)
Lesson5	Learn a foreign language	(I)
Lesson6	The boy who made steam work	(I)
Lesson7	Highways in the sky	(J)
Lesson8	Eat, clothes, eat	(N)
Lesson9	The holly prophet	(O)
<i>Book Two</i>		
Lessons	Title	Reference
Lesson1	Washoe and the puzzle	(J)
Lesson2	The other side of the moon	(J)
Lesson3	Holland's toy town	(I)
Lesson6	Charles Dickens and the little children	(H)
Lesson5	The little old man who could not read	(K)
Lesson6	Hic, hic, hic	(J)
Lesson7	How are you	(J)
<i>Book Three</i>		
Lessons	Title	Reference
Lesson1	TV or not TV	(J)
Lesson2	The value of education	(J)
Lesson3	Memory	(J)
Lesson4	The Olympic games	(J)
Lesson5	Every word is a puzzle	(J)
Lesson6	What is a computer	(J)

Table 1. Results of 'reading' analysis

Turkish text book

<i>Lessons</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Lesson1	Personal identification	(H)
Lesson2	My family	(H)
Lesson3	People and places	(J)
Lesson4	Traffic	(J)
Lesson5	Daily routines	(J)
Lesson6	Leisure activities	(H)
Lesson7	Planes and intentions	(N)
Lesson8	Dos and don'ts	(J)
Lesson9	Feasts	(K)
Lesson10	Refreshments	(J)
Lesson11	How and then	(J)
Lesson12	A detective story	(H)
Lesson13	Famous people	(N)
Lesson14	Hopes for the future	(J)
Lesson15	Health and sports	(J)
Lesson16	Past activities	(K)
Lesson17	People profiles	(N)
Lesson18	Climate	(N)
Lesson19	Experiences	(N)
Lesson20	Superstitions	(K)
Lesson21	Fashion	(H)
Lesson22	Party	(H)

In above tables, the title of passages and related categories are shown. For example, the title of lesson one reading in book one of Iran is (The kindergarten man) and this passage was about non-English speaking western countries (category (I) in Ramirez and Hall's categorization). Based on the coding scheme explained each lesson has been classified into one of the eight categories.

Results of 'Reading' Analysis of Iran

There were 22 reading passages in the three textbooks. Based on the coding scheme explained each lesson has been classified into one of the eight categories. About fifty four percent (12) of the passages referred to general texts such as science, biographies, historical events, and life stories with focus on the introduction of a scientist, a world figure or a man of will. About eighteen percent (4) of the text were passages referenced to non-English speaking western countries. Thirteen percent (3) referred to English speaking countries. Four percent (1) referred to passages whose identity had been left out. Four percent (1) referred to passages with reference to Islam and Islamic countries and again four

percent (1) referred to passages with reference to Iran. There was no passage with reference to cross-national comparison and to eastern countries.

Results of 'Reading' Analysis of Turkey

There were 22 reading passages in the textbook. About thirty six percent (8) of the passages referred to general texts such as science, biographies, historical events, and life stories with focus on the introduction of a scientist, a world figure or a man of will. About twenty six percent (6) referred to English speaking countries. Thirteen percent (3) referred to passages whose identity had been left out and twenty tow percent (5) referred to passages with reference to Turkey. There was no passage with reference to cross-national comparison, eastern countries, Islamic tradition and non-English western countries. The data collected for the categorization of the Reading passages were represented in figure 1.1 and 2.2. The height of the bars signified the frequency of the text in each category.

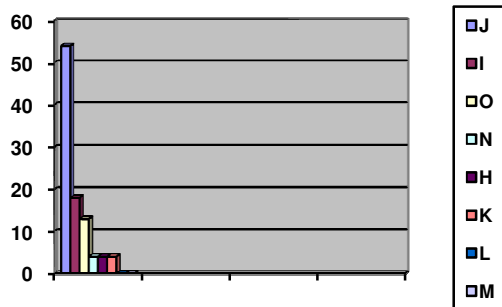


Figure 1. Results of 'Reading' Analysis Of Iran

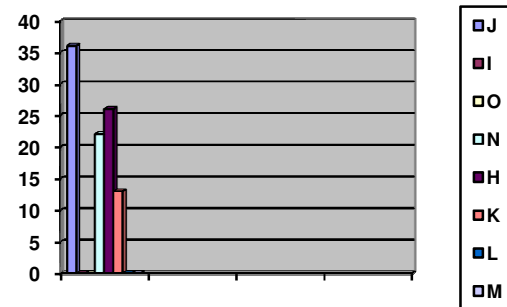


Figure 2. Results Of 'Reading' Analysis Of Turkey

In sum, the result of these analyses is as follows:

1. Major finding with Iranian and Turkish textbooks was a large number of topics (about 54% and 36% percent) on science and the related fields. The instructional goals of the text were not found deliberately focused and narrow. There were almost a few texts with reference to other fields such as literature or art.
2. The textbooks differed slightly in their extent of treatment to the eight established categories. The differences did not appear significant. Throughout the textbooks, the category "J" (general culture-neutral texts) respectively covered the greater parts. In these textbooks passages with reference to cross-national comparison, Islam or Islamic traditions and eastern countries could be found in lesser extent. This could be one of the disadvantages of these textbooks.
3. Turkish text books did not show a good variety (five out of eight) and the results of Ramirez and Hall's study on high school books were not so significant, but Iranian textbooks showed a good variety to some extent (six out of eight categories).
4. The study found that the texts were not good enough not only in the depth of cultural information but also in the range of the cultures depicted. It means that they were not perfect. Less than thirty percent of passages were about English-speaking countries.
5. The results of the study (Reference to English speaking countries) signify that high school textbooks in use in Turkey proved helpful in developing intercultural understanding to some extent. There was no evidence that the books deliberately distract attention from culture or cultural points. The data showed that the cultural content in 'Reading' comprehension sections is available.
6. This part concerns the textbook evaluation. As the table shows, the cultural principles are represented to a lesser extent in Iranian high school textbooks. In other words, the cultural principles are assigned a low rank in these textbooks. It can be concluded that the cultural principles are missing in the textbooks of Iranian high schools. This might be one of the reasons why the school teachers do not use the cultural principles in their classes. Table 2.2 presents the amount of representation of the

same eight principles in Turkish high school textbooks. In contrast to Iranian high school textbooks, Turkish textbooks highly represent the cultural principles; that is, the target culture is present in the textbooks of this domain to some extent.

DISCUSSION

According to the results the answers to research questions are available:

1. Which cultures are represented in English text books and to what extent? In particular what range of cultural references is represented in the textbooks?

In Iranian text books, about half of the texts are general texts related to science, biographies. The rest of the texts are related to passages whose identity had been left out; the culture of English speaking countries and Islamic culture. No reference to eastern countries was found, nor was a text exclusively dealing with cross-cultural comparison. The sum of all referenced texts formed only frothy six percent of the content of the textbooks.

In Turkish text books, about thirty six percent (8) of the passages referred to general texts such as science, biographies, historical events, and life stories. About twenty six percent (6) referred to English speaking countries. Thirteen percent (3) referred to passages whose identity had been left out and twenty tow percent (5) referred to passages with reference to Turkey. There was no passage with reference to cross-national comparison, eastern countries, Islamic tradition and non-English western countries.

2. Is there any significant difference between Iranian and Turkish English Textbooks in terms of representing cultural features?

According to Ramirez and Hall (1990), there were eight categories to consider passages and there were five out of eight in Iranian books; so, there was a good variety in these texts in contrast to Turkish text books. The study found that texts were good enough not only in depth of information but also in the range of cultures depicted. Texts could be much better if there were more culturally loaded texts for example: texts with reference to eastern countries or non-English speaking western countries, especially Turkey. Iranian textbook analysis indicates they are not conducive to cultural implementation. The study made it clear that, with a slight difference, the two countries books followed a similar orientation. But, in contrast to Iranian high school textbooks, Turkish textbooks represent the cultural principles higher than Iranian text books; that is, the principles of target culture are present in the textbooks of this domain to a great extent.

One very important aspect of any textbook is its content in terms of the motivation it creates in the readers. This is specifically true in EFL textbooks of Turkey where the learners need more than just content since content-wise; such books are not very much different from the learners' world knowledge level, that is why material developers working in this area are usually consciously choosing content which interests the users of the texts more than just the ordinary content they design for the level of proficiency they presuppose in developing the texts. But, High school texts developed in Iran seem to fail to meet the standards normally used in the preparation of materials of this type. The reason for this drawback might be cultural in that the socio-cultural patterns observed tend to be those dictated by the authorities not very much aware of standards universally observed in the development of ELT materials. Incorporating the cultural and social aspects of language based on a sound basis in such texts is an important issue which seems to have been neglected.

The following comments provide detailed explanations of this shortcoming.

1. The results of the study signify that the ELT textbooks in use in Iranian high schools did not prove helpful in developing cultural elements and cultural understanding. The evidence does not suggest a positive contribution, since the books, deliberately or not, distract attention from culture or cultural points. The data show that the cultural content in 'Reading' comprehension sections is extremely limited and basic. Nevertheless, the treatment of cultural understanding and the development of cultural features still remain insufficient.

2. Another major finding with the Iranian ELT textbooks was a disproportionate number of topics on science and the related fields. The instructional goals of the text were found deliberately focused and narrow, with a major focus on science. There was almost no reference to other fields such as literature or other arts.
3. Reading passages with omitted identity were recognized as another disadvantage of the textbooks. It was found that 13 percent of 'Reading' passages of Turkish text books lacked identifiable sources of reference. Such a process, which has apparently been done with the intent of providing neutral passages, has resulted in senseless, artificial and untraceable texts. Thus, instead of genuine texts, learners often meet imaginary artificial passages.
4. The study found that the texts (especially Turkish text books) were limited not only in the depth of cultural information but also in the range of the cultures depicted. In the text books examined information about other countries, English or otherwise, averaged less than 30 percent of the total content. It is right to worry that such biased and simplistic cultural presentations reinforce pre-existing assumptions and stereotypes because the literature indicates that shallow presentation of culture can reinforce inaccurate stereotypes.
5. Generally speaking, the wealth of research indicated that the ELT textbooks in Turkey and more in Iran appeared too weak to provide new information or broaden students' worldview or cultural understanding. In other words, the study seems to postulate that changes should be made if we want to prepare the students to communicate in the multicultural world of English and if we want to use the nationally developed textbooks for the optimum benefit.
6. The results and findings of the study present the point that cultural principles are not utilized in the Iranian and Turkish high school textbooks. Therefore, regarding the results of the study and due to the fact that textbooks designed by experts outside the foreign language instruction context do not fulfill language learners' needs, the following model is proposed for Iranian and Turkish.

CONCLUSION

The research outlined in the present study will, we hope, encourage an extension of research into textbook designers and teachers' knowledge and understanding of culture. Regarding the general ideas posed, there is a possibility that for the sake of highlighting crucial pedagogic implications of the study more, it can be claimed that teachers, materials developers, and test constructors can benefit from the results of the present studying particular. However, such a crucial and fundamental change takes time. Therefore, rather than simply jumping into and adopting the cultural principles, those involved in the field should carefully investigate the context and decide how cultural-oriented textbooks can best serve the needs and the interests of the stakeholders; that is, the countries belonging to the EFL context should borrow cautiously rather than buy wholesale culture for their English teaching (Li, 2001).

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