

An Investigation into Cultural Representation in *Interchange* Textbooks

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Abstract

Language and culture are now deemed to be co-constitutive; hence English language teaching (ELT) textbooks should incorporate cultural aspects and promote intercultural competence. However, careful decisions should be made as regards to the cultural content of materials and the ways in which culture is represented. This study was an attempt to deconstruct the patterns of cultural representation and intercultural interactions in *Interchange* textbooks, an ELT textbook series taught to English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in Iran. Using content analysis of texts and images and with the focus on nationality, gender and race, it examined how different cultures were reflected in *Interchange 1*, *Interchange 2*, *Interchange 3*, and whether cultural bias or inequality was present. The quantitative and qualitative data analysis revealed that the white male group was dominant in all three textbooks. And, to use Kachru's (1985) terms, inner, outer and expanding circle nationalities were represented in the textbooks, with the expanding circle constituting the major nationality, but American culture of inner circle was predominant. Additionally, the interactions were mainly limited to superficial aspects of the target culture although these textbooks sought to show various intercultural interactions. Dominance of male and white characters and the US culture indicated inequality in race and gender, and the superficial treatment of culture in the textbooks. Less attention to the hybrid culture and deeper level of intercultural aspects, i.e. critical reflections, in the textbooks suggests that the materials be supplemented by EFL teachers' constructive discussion of the cultures that interact.

Keywords: culture, intercultural competence, textbooks, *Interchange*, bias

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INTRODUCTION

English as an international language has been widely used all over the world for transactional and interactional purposes by not only native speakers, but also nonnative speakers of English. Moreover, due to improvement in many aspects of science and technology, living in today's world demands all necessities of living in a global village; hence, as the very term 'international' suggests, it can be argued that English no longer belongs to a particular people (Brutt-Griffler, 2002; House, 2003; Nault, 2006). English, in this era of globalization, has become the language of technology and diplomacy, as well as a tool for accessing knowledge (Lee, 2009). The dynamics of the world then demands paying more attention to English as well as the factors, other than language itself, which can enrich English language teaching (ELT) courses and help English as foreign language (EFL) learners in approaching their objectives. One of the factors that worth considering is culture, which represents the way speakers of a language think and live.

Culture is defined as "the pattern of meanings embedded 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" (Thompson, 1990, p. 132). In point of fact, language and culture are integrally dependent on each other (Byram, 1997; Jiang, 1999); hence, the ability to use a language suggests being capable of understanding its native speakers' attitudes, behaviors, and styles of life; language is not only part of how we define culture, it also reflects culture as a much broader concept that is inherently tied to many linguistic concepts taught in EFL classes (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003). It is not then far from expectation to bolster Lee's (2009) claim that successful communication with individuals from a target language society depends EFL learners' understanding of intercultural knowledge and communication. This issue makes the intercultural competence the focus of attention in second/foreign language (L2) learning/teaching, in general, and English learning/teaching, in particular. That is why the representation of culture in L2 textbooks, particularly in ELT textbooks, has been one of the biggest concerns in recent years (McConachy & Hata, 2013).

In fact, as Oakes and Saunders (2004) state, textbooks as one of the most important materials in L2 learning are potential sources for transferring intercultural messages; they can be the core of instruction as

an authentic source to improve L2 students' knowledge at the end of the course and to open a new vision compared with the first days of learning in the term of intercultural messages, along with other aspects of language. To move further, ELT textbooks take on more importance in EFL contexts like Iran where EFL students cannot observe high amounts of cultural aspects by living among native speakers and interacting with them in social life; thereby, ELT textbooks should incorporate EFL learners' diverse racial and cultural backgrounds and empower them to identify different voices and perspectives (Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011). Yet, the problem is that social, gender, and racial dominance, which are aspects of culture, are sometimes maintained in the textbooks and inequalities are reproduced in them (Apple, 2001); the representations of local cultures are not sometimes depicted in a way that unequal power relations can be challenged, and social identities and gender bias are manipulated. Intercultural or cross-cultural competence, which provides us with information about social attributes, thought patterns, and the cultures of different groups of people and involves understanding the different cultures, languages and customs of people from other countries (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002), is not demonstrated; As Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) point out, some of current ELT textbooks have limitations in fostering intercultural understanding. As Kobia (2009) points out, if such textbooks are biased and are not efficient in developing cultural understanding among EFL learners, they can in turn lead to a biased worldview where learners may discriminate and prefer certain nationalities, races, gender or groups over others rather than appreciating diversity and understanding cross-cultural differences. Additionally, if ELT textbooks happen to reinforce Anglo-American social/cultural expectations, they may pose challenges to the ideology of our EFL learners and may backfire. Thus, the analysis of cultural representation in ELT textbooks should not go unnoticed. Evaluating ELT textbooks from cultural perspective suggests added significance for us in that it helps in adapting our ELT materials and improving the quality of EFL courses along with increasing intercultural awareness and appreciating cultural diversity, given that there are just a few studies (e.g., Baleghizadeh & Jamali Motahed, 2010; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014) focusing on the deconstructing the patterns of cultural representations in international ELT textbooks used in Iran. Besides, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, none of them have investigated the patterns of cultural representations and intercultural

interactions in the internationally well-known *Interchange* series widely used in Iran. In light of this view, this study tries to evaluate the *Interchange* textbooks by deconstructing the patterns of cultural representations and intercultural interactions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

With the introduction of the concept of communicative competence in the 1970s, culture has come to be considered as a vital part of language education (Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014). To Lederach (1995), culture is “the shared knowledge and schemes created by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to the social realities around them” (p. 9). Kramsch (1995) defines culture as “the attitude and beliefs, ways of thinking, behaving, and remembering shared by members of that community.” (p. 84). To Goode, Sockalingam, Brown, and Jones (2000), competence in culture (i.e., cultural competence) means knowledge about “an integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, and manners of interacting and roles, relationships and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group” (p. 1). A close inspection of various definitions and views of culture reveals the importance of intercultural competence and cultural interactions in L2 learning/teaching; that is, the ability to interpret the language and behavior of the target community and to explain it to home community members (Corbett, 2003). Lee (2009) states that effective communication with people from a target language community depends on two factors: firstly, the level of learners’ understanding of intercultural dynamics i.e., intercultural knowledge, behavior and attitude of human interaction and communication, and secondly, their socio-cultural competency in respect to the target speech community. The aforementioned issue makes the role of intercultural competence and cultural interactions, when two or more different, native or non-native cultures interact, the focus of attention in L2 context and instructional textbooks. Intercultural competence, sometimes regarded as a component of communicative competence along with discourse, linguistic, pragmatic competence (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006), helps language learners to understand how intercultural interactions occur (Byram et al., 2002). According to Song (2013), intercultural/cultural interactions in instructional textbooks can be

superficial interactions, hybridization, and critical reflections. Superficial interactions concern explanation physical cultural products; hybridization occurs as a result of a mixture of more than two different cultural values, traditions, and customs. And critical reflections involve further discussion or reflection of beliefs, history, values, or conflicts of the cultures or, to use Byram's terms, "critical engagement with the foreign culture under consideration and one's own" (Dervin, 2010, p. 162).

Thus, familiarity with cross-cultural indicators through textbooks is important in L2 learning. Learners can learn the target language as they master the cultural contexts in which the target language is presented. But the amount and the way of transferring the cultural messages are different in L2 textbooks. In this light, several researchers have considered the role and power of L2 textbooks in cross-cultural transferring and culture making. For instance, Méndez Garcia (2005) investigated international and intercultural aspects in 14 first- and second-course ELT textbooks in Spain. The researcher aimed to find out to what extent an international and/or intercultural approach was a constituent element in their design. He concluded that the textbooks did not have a cross-cultural approach and provided little opportunity for students to develop intercultural competence.

In the context of Korea, Lee (2009) did a research on EFL textbooks to find out whether there was cultural dominancy in Korean EFL textbooks. The research was done on 11 high-school EFL conversation textbooks to see how these textbooks would teach culture. The results of content analysis showed that all the textbooks neglected the teaching of the culture, that is, both general aspect of culture learning and the small c target-culture learning. Also, there was a strong sense of a hierarchical representation of the Anglophone world in which the US culture served as the supreme source. Similarly, in the Korean context, Song (2013) did a comprehensive research on intercultural aspects in four EFL textbooks, written for grade 10 in Korean national curriculum. The analysis of the four textbooks revealed that Korean and/or American characters prevailed from a physical standpoint, and white male characters—mostly American—were dominant. The results reinforced the findings of previous studies on Korean EFL textbooks in that the textbooks tended to advocate Korean culture and favored American white cultural representations over all others.

Furthermore, Shin, Eslami, and Chen (2012) investigated the presentation of local and international culture in seven series of

internationally ELT textbooks; that is, they examined whether internationally distributed ELT textbooks reflected the cultural perspective of the English as an international language (EIL) paradigm, and how comprehensively these textbooks represented the cultural perspective of the EIL paradigm. The content analysis of 25 EFL books revealed that the cultural content of the variety of English used by native speakers in countries such as the US, UK and Canada still dominated most of the textbooks. In addition, they concluded that cultural presentation still largely remained at the traditional knowledge-oriented level i.e. transferring information about the culture, and did not engage learners in deep levels of reflection.

In educational system of Iran, Majdizadeh (2002) investigated intercultural competence in eighth- and ninth-grade Iranian public and private school ELT textbooks. Contrary to the above results, the researcher found that the locally produced Iranian ELT textbooks exclusively advocated Islamic traditions and culture. Therefore, he asked for more provision to accommodate Western culture in these textbooks for facilitating intercultural competence. Also, Aliakbari (2004) analyzed the way culture addressed in Iranian EFL/ELT textbooks at high school level. After analyzing four high school ELT textbooks, he found out that vocabulary and reading parts were knowledge-oriented. Besides, the textbooks mostly conveyed Iranian culture. Like Majdizadeh (2002), he concluded that Iranian EFL textbooks were not adequate to expand learners' intercultural competence, almost ignored by Iranian writers and publishers. Furthermore, Baleghizadeh and Jamali Motahed (2010) analyzed and compared the ideological content of six American and British textbooks. Their findings showed that British textbooks tended to entertain the students while American textbooks included more occupational and business-related issues of culture. But both American and British textbooks tended to be oriented towards target-culture information. More recently, Tajeddin & Teimournezhad (2014) examined the hidden agenda in two international and localized textbook series, i.e., *Top Notch: English for Today's World* (Saslow & Ascher, 2006) and *The ILI English Series: Intermediate* (2004) to see which 'cultures'—those associated with the first language, those associated with the target language, or other cultures—and which aspects of each culture (sociological or aesthetic) were addressed in these textbooks. The results revealed that most of the cultural elements embodied in the localized *ILI* textbooks were culturally neutral, with the focus on sociological values.

And target language cultural elements were comparatively more evident in the international *Top Notch* textbooks, with the focus on aesthetic values. Thus, their study suggests that local materials developers pay more attention to the representations of cultures in L2 materials.

Instructional textbooks play a significant role in forming the learners' worldview of female and male gender in the society (Kobia, 2009). Thus, the manner in which male and female genders are depicted has been the focus of some research. For instance, in an attempt to investigate gender positioning in EFL textbooks in Jordan, Hamdan (2008) scrutinize several major aspects of gender such as visibility in illustrations and texts, firstness, grammatical function (e.g., subject), leisure-activity types, and masculine generic conception in *Action Pack Series* taught in Jordanian schools. He discovered that males outnumbered females in the explored facets. Likewise, Levine and O'Sullivan (2010), who investigated gender bias and female visibility in images and illustrations of EFL textbooks written for Japanese university students, reported that males occupied the greater number of social roles whereas females were positioned in low status occupations in the textbooks. Their results did not support the finding of the previous research by Mineshima (2008), who reported that both genders were represented equally in the number of male and female characters, their utterances, occupations, and family roles in an EFL textbook used in upper secondary English classes in Japan.

Investigating gender bias in EFL textbooks has attracted the attention of some Iranian researchers (e.g., Ansary & Babaii, 2003; Amal Saleh, Sajjadi, & Yarmohammadi, 2006; Bahman & Rahimi, 2010; Roohani & Heidari, 2012; Roohani & Zarei, 2013; Sahragard & Davatgarzadeh, 2010; Tajeddin & Janebi Enayat, 2010). For instance, Ansary and Babaii (2003) examined the status of sexism i.e., sex-linked job possibilities, (b) sex-based activity types, (c) stereotyped sex roles, (d) firstness, and (e) masculine generic conception in *Right Path to English I and Right Path to English II* (Birjandi & Soheili, 1999) taught to Iranian students at secondary schools. They concluded that these two textbooks could be regarded as sexist ones that would expose Iranian EFL students to a partial representation of females. Likewise, Amal Saleh et al. (2006) scrutinized how language was presented in the EFL high school textbooks in Iran. Using discourse analysis, they showed that females were mostly associated with the traditional roles of doing household chores and care giving. Moreover, Tajeddin and Janebi Enayat (2010)

investigated the positioning of gender in the images of three international and local ELT textbooks: *New Headway*, *Top Notch*, and *Iran Language Institute (ILI) English Textbook*. Using quantitative and qualitative analyses, they focused on finding the active participant, gaze direction, visual techniques, body display, and space in which the participants were represented. The results revealed that men, in general, were depicted to be more active, competent, socially important, breadwinners, and powerful. But locally developed ELT materials manifested less gender bias.

In sum, as Dominguez (2003) state, L2 textbooks can be one of the great influences in contributing to cultural prejudice and personal bias that learners can absorb in their learning. The above textbook studies highlight some countries' pedagogical and academic perspectives toward L2 learning through the content analysis done in L2 textbooks. They have reported some preferences, though sometimes inconsistently, for specific home or target culture. But there is still more need to evaluate cultural aspects in L2 textbooks used in academic courses, particularly in the context of Iran where English is used a foreign language and EFL learners have little access to the real-life situation in the target language. The present study examines patterns of cultural representations embedded in one EFL textbook series, *Interchange* textbooks, to see how different cultures are reflected in these textbooks and whether cultural biases are present in these popular ELT materials, recently revised to better satisfy market and EFL learners' needs. In fact, the objective of this paper is to analyze and evaluate how and to what extent they transfer views on race, gender, and nationality. In so doing, this study reveals whether intercultural communication is limited to certain groups so as the users of these textbooks can make better decisions about the usefulness of these textbooks and replacing this ELT series with another one in EFL courses.

1. How do the *Interchange* textbooks represent different cultures in terms of cultural aspects of nationality, gender and race?
2. How do the *Interchange* textbooks show various cultural/intercultural interactions?

METHOD

Corpus

The materials selected in this study are three ELT textbooks, written by Jack C. Richard, Jonathan Hull, and Susan Proctor and published by Cambridge University Press in 2013. They include *Interchange 1* in pre-intermediate level, *Intermediate 2* in intermediate level, and *Interchange 3* in upper-intermediate level. Each textbook includes sixteen units and eight progress check sections. Each unit of the textbooks addresses four main skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing as well as grammar and vocabulary components. Reading sections of all three textbooks constitute the major part of the textbooks. Conversations along with audio parts are also included. Other parts of these series include Snapshot, Word Power, Perspective, Pronunciation, Role Play, and Discussion.

Data Analysis Framework

This study was carried out both quantitatively and qualitatively. Content analysis was done throughout both texts and images of all sections of the three textbooks as regards to nationality, gender, and race. Nationality analysis was done based on Kachrus' (1985) model. He has classified nationalities to three main branches of *inner circle* for countries that English is spoken natively, *outer circle* for countries where English is the second language, and *expanding circle* where English is used as a foreign language. Kachru's model was taken into account to identify the dominance of a culture or group. Also, written names and pictures (e.g. pictures of cities, countries, and flags) were all counted. As to gender representation, all proper names, pronouns, other gendered words, as well as pictures of women and men were considered in both texts and illustrations. In order to identify racial representation of the textbooks, three main categories of *white*, *black*, and *yellow* were examined. After the tabulation of the raw data, they were converted to the percentages whenever necessary. In addition, as to the cultural interactions, three indicators of *physical (superficial) interactions*, *hybridized*, and *critical reflections* were taken into consideration in the three ELT textbooks. Following Song (2013), superficial interactions concern the explanation of physical cultural products such as food, travel, and festivals;

hybridization refers to “a mixture of more than two different cultural values, traditions, and customs” (p. 386); critical reflections concern the discussion or reflection of our beliefs, cultural values, differences or conflicts related to the cultures which interact.

RESULTS

How Different Cultures Are Represented in the *Interchange* Textbooks

Each of the ELT textbooks was first analyzed in terms of three cultural aspects of nationality, gender, and race through information provided in both images and written texts. The descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages of these cultural aspects) are summarized and reported in Table 1.

According to Table 1, the dominant nationality in the three *Interchange* textbooks was expanding circle, including countries where English was learned and spoken as a foreign language. Inner circle, including countries where English was their first language, took the second place; the outer circle was ranked third. Meanwhile, when the test of significance i.e. chi-square was run on the frequencies obtained for the three circles, the results also revealed a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2 = 2.00$, $*p \leq .05$) in favor of expanding circles.

Further analysis indicated that the US, England, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand constituted the countries in the inner circle in the three textbooks. The US with the frequency of 130 had the highest frequency among all inner circle countries in the textbooks, and represented the dominant culture among other nationalities; England, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand were the inner circle countries which were less frequently referred to as compared with the US. They were less represented than the US in the inner circle countries. In outer circle, India, Singapore, Philippine, and Malaysia were represented, but India was the dominant group. In the expanding circle category, the three textbooks represented many nationalities from all over the world, such as South Korea, China, Japan, Indonesia, Egypt, and Argentina. For instance, Iran, which is a part of the expanding circle, was represented four times in the textbooks.

Table 1: Frequencies and percentages of nationality, gender, and race in the Interchange textbooks

| Textbook | | Nationality | | Gender | | Race |
|----------------------|-----------|---------------------|--------|---------------------|--------|---------------------|
| <i>Interchange 1</i> | Inner | n = 72 (29.75%) | Male | n = 637 (50.19%) | White | n = 343 (83.25%) |
| | Outer | n = 12 (4.95%) | Female | n = 632 (49.81%) | Black | n = 54 (13.10%) |
| | Expanding | n = 158 (65.28%) | | | Yellow | n = 15 (3.64%) |
| <i>Interchange 2</i> | Inner | n = 53 (38.40%) | Male | n = 507 (57.48%) | White | n = 171 (67.05%) |
| | Outer | n = 12 (8.69%) | Female | n = 375 (42.52%) | Black | n = 59 (23.13%) |
| | Expanding | n = 73 (52.89%) | | | Yellow | n = 25 (9.80%) |
| <i>Interchange 3</i> | Inner | n = 63 (39.37%) | Male | n = 529 (54.20%) | White | n = 274 (84.56%) |
| | Outer | n = 12 (7.50%) | Female | n = 447 (5.80%) | Black | n = 32 (9.87%) |
| | Expanding | n = 85 (53.12%) | | | Yellow | n = 18 (9.55%) |

Note: The percentage data for each cultural aspect is presented in parentheses.

In all three textbooks, as shown in Table 1, males were referred to more frequently than females; the difference between the two genders was more significant in the *Interchange 2* and *Interchange 3* textbooks. In *Interchange 2*, the difference in the frequencies was 132 in favor of males, which was revealed to be statistically significant in the test of significance i.e., chi-square ($\chi^2 = 8.59$, $*p \leq .05$). Similarly, in *Interchange 3*, the difference was large (82), which was statistically significant, too ($\chi^2 = 9.76$, $p \leq .05$).

As regards race, the white race was dominant in all three textbooks; it received the highest frequency (788) and percentage (about %79) in the total corpus. Also, the test of significance showed a statistically significant difference among the three racial groups in the three *Interchange* textbooks ($\chi^2 = 96.76$, $*p \leq .05$).

How Various Cultural/Intercultural Interactions are shown in the *Interchange* Textbooks

Three aspects of intercultural interactions i.e., superficial, hybridization, and critical reflections were taken into account to find out about the intercultural representation in the *Interchange* textbooks. The descriptive statistics of three aspects of intercultural interactions and the circle dominancy are summarized in Table 2. Among the three categories of culture, physical culture received the highest frequencies in *Interchange 1* (86.48%), *Interchange 2* (86.36%), and *Interchange 3* (83.80%). In addition, the physical culture mainly belonged to the countries in the inner circle; that is to say, the physical culture of inner circle constituted the largest proportion in all the three *Interchange* textbooks. The hybridization received the lowest proportion in *Interchange 1* (1.35%), *Interchange 2* (3.03%), and *Interchange 3* (2.85%). Further analysis also indicated that the hybridization represented different cultural values, traditions, and customs of inner and expanding circles. Moreover, as demonstrated in Table 2, the critical reflections of the inner circle were observed in the *Interchange* series. And about 33% of the aforementioned cultural aspects belonged to critical culture.

Table 2: Frequency and percentage data on three aspects of intercultural interaction in the interchange textbooks

| Textbooks | Physical | Hybrid | Critical |
|----------------------|---|--|-------------------------------|
| <i>Interchange 1</i> | n = 64 (86.48%) (Inner 39) (Expanding 25) | n = 1 (1.35%) (Inner & expanding) | n = 9 (9.45%) (Inner) |
| <i>Interchange 2</i> | n = 57 (86.36%) (Inner 35) (Outer 2) (Expanding 20) | n = 2 (3.03%) (Inner & expanding) | n = 7 (10.60%) (Inner) |
| <i>Interchange 3</i> | n = 88 (83.80%) (Inner 53) (Outer 4) (Expanding 31) | n = 3 (2.85%) (Inner & expanding) | n = 14 (13.33%) (Inner) |

Note: The percentage data for each cultural aspect is presented in parentheses.

Further analysis showed that in inner circle, the USA was predominantly represented through physical aspects of cultures, particularly by means of food, festivals, places, inventions, people, and currency. ‘Place’, ‘festivals’, and ‘rules’ were the most frequently represented aspects of superficial culture in *Interchange 1*, *Interchange 2*, and *Interchange 3*, respectively. Table 3 shows the aspects of physical culture in the three textbooks with regard to the country represented in the textbooks.

Furthermore, hybrid cultural messages, in general, were scarce in all the three textbooks. One noticeable hybridized culture was nonwestern bride and groom represented in *Interchange 3*; hybridization took place by a young bride and her groom in western clothes in a traditional Asian wedding ceremony. Another case of hybrid culture was demonstrated in *Interchange 3* through juxtaposing Asian hair style (Japanese female hair style) and western clothes. Having steak and rice together in a dish is another example of hybridization in *Interchange 1* where the topic is how to order food. Similarly, a hybridized cultural message is implied in *Interchange 2* which introduces a dish consisting of the mixture of Mexican food (spicy salsa) and potato chips, with the latter the representative of fast-foods in the western culture.

Table 3: Physical aspects of cultures of the countries represented in the Interchange textbooks

| Textbooks | Cultural Aspects | Countries |
|----------------------|----------------------|--|
| <i>Interchange 1</i> | Food (n = 8) | The US, Italy, Japan, China, Thailand |
| | Gesture (n = 4) | The US, Japan, Brazil, Mexico |
| | Place (n = 33) | The US, Japan, China, Canada, Ecuador, France, the UAE, Turkey, Mexico, Egypt, Iran, England, South Korea, New Zealand |
| | Media (n = 4) | The US |
| | Festival (n = 4) | The US, Brazil, Indonesia |
| | People (n = 13) | The US, Brazil, Japan |
| | Currency (n = 1) | The US |
| | <i>Interchange 2</i> | Food (n = 8) |
| Place (n = 17) | | The US, the UAE, France, India, Egypt, Peru, China, Colombia, Japan |
| Rule (n = 14) | | The US |
| Media (n = 10) | | The US, England, DR Congo |
| Festival (n = 23) | | The US, Mexico, Australia, Japan, China, Finland, Jamaica, Thailand, South Korea, Turkey, Brazil |

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|---|
| | People (n = 3) | The US |
| | Invention (n = 4) | The US |
| | Currency (n = 2) | The US, Germany |
| | Food (n = 6) | Italy, US, South Korea |
| | Gesture (n = 5) | The US, India, Bulgaria, The Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Saudi Arabia |
| | Place (n = 4) | Egypt, Chile, South Korea, Germany |
| <i>Interchange 3</i> | Rules (n = 28) | Egypt, Canada, Indonesia, Thailand, Brazil, South Korea, the US, France, Nigeria, Sweden, Australia, Singapore, Finland, Taiwan |
| | Media (n = 4) | The US, England, India, Japan |
| | Festival (n = 6) | The US, Canada, Sweden, Egypt, Mexico, the Republic of Vanuatu |
| | Brands (n = 14) | The US, England, Israel, Japan, Finland, France, Germany |
| | People (n = 4) | The US |
| | Currency (n = 1) | The US |

Critical reflections on intercultural relationships could be touched upon through topics such as Facebook, Twitter, dating services, bi-educational schools, mixed-sex gyms, dance clubs, mixed-sex parties, and racism. As listed in Table 4, for instance, one of the hot topics represented in both texts and images in *Interchange* series was dating as a form of courtship or social activity done by two people of opposite sex to try out their relationship. This issue can create conflicts between the cultures that interact, which engages EFL learners in critical reflections about the opposite sex relationship. Practices of dating vary from culture to culture; while dating is acceptable in some cultures, in some Muslim countries, it is viewed negatively in the public; even for some, it is considered as a taboo. Likewise, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are mentioned in the textbooks. They are represented as social network sites to help people keep in touch, have fun, and see what matters most to them even though there are conflicting views about these sites.

Table 4: Topics representing intercultural aspects of hybridization and critical reflection

| Textbooks | Hybridization Topics | Critical Reflections Topics |
|----------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <i>Interchange 1</i> | Food | Dating, Night clubs, Bi-educational schools, mixed sex gyms, Facebook, Twitter |
| <i>Interchange 2</i> | Food | Online dating, YouTube, and Dressing, Mixed-sex party, Fashions and models, Pet keeping |
| <i>Interchange 3</i> | Clothes, Food, Lifestyle | Facebook, Twitter, You Tube, Dating & Friendship, Pet keeping, Lifestyles & Dressing, Online dating, Dance, Events (e.g. September 11 th) |

DISCUSSION

One objective of textbooks is then to serve as a means to facilitate the integration of content about ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse people (Sileo & Prater, 1998). To achieve this purpose, textbook writers ought to avoid cultural inequalities and prejudices that learners can absorb in their learning and have a reasonable representation of social/cultural components such as nationality, gender, and race. In the case of nationality, the *Interchange* textbooks successfully represent a variety of nationalities, including those of expanding circle. The inclusion of diverse nationalities has allowed the writers increasingly participate in the general cultural transmission within the ELT realm. To familiarize students with a large number of nationalities, various locations and landmarks such as ancient Pyramids, the ruins of Macho Pico, Great Wall of China, and Abul Hol statue have been cited in these textbooks. For instance, in the reading section of unit16 in *Interchange 3*, the first paragraph of the text is an explanation of achievement of an Iranian man in L2 learning and his ability to speak several languages in spite of difficulty. This fair indication of the Iranian nationality can be taken as positive cultural representation by the textbook writers, providing motivation for Iranian EFL learners. If the target language is presented in contexts relevant to the EFL learners' lives, they are more motivated to learn it (Adaskou, Britten & Fahsi, 1990; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014). In the conversation in unit 8 of *Interchange 2*, Japanese nationality was represented through an explanation of wedding ceremonies in Japan. Also, there is an accompanying photo that presents a Japanese shrine and bride and groom wearing traditional Japanese

costumes. In *Interchange 3*, in the reading section of unit 14, India, an outer circle country, was represented through Bollywood (as a film industry) along with Hollywood. A considerable attention to countries other than countries where English is spoken as an official language, particularly expanding circle countries may reflect the writers' awareness of the growing recognition of the spread of English through expanding circle countries (Graddol, 1997) and sends us the positive message that English users from the outer and expanding circles are taking a role in the use of English and shaping its culture worldwide; the presentation of English use among different nationalities in the *Interchange* textbooks may also represent the use of English as a medium of international communication, not mere access to the inner circle culture. The textbook authors' attention to diverse nationalities and multicultural character of English can further make EFL learners recognize the multi-cultural character of English and put more trust on the content of the textbooks.

However, data analysis, much against expectation, has demonstrated that the white male character, including the white male from the expanding circle, is predominant in the *Interchange* textbooks. These ELT textbooks like other materials (see Cawyer et al., 1994; Hanson, 1999; Roohani & Heidari, 2012, Roohani & Zare, 2013) have been shown to send the message that white men are the dominant gender and race. Dominancy of male in the *Interchange* series may indicate that there is a trace of masculine perspective in the textbooks. Perhaps, the writes of these textbooks have echoed this masculine dominancy as it exists in many cultures. Equality between races and males and females has been a dream for many people, and EFL students may not expect their textbooks to reinforce gender and racial inequality and misrepresentation; hence, this finding may not be positive. Like female characters, black characters were represented less in all three ELT textbooks. Although there is nothing as world of slavery today, there is still a more positive attitude toward the white race, as reflected in the textbooks. As Banks (1994) asserts, a growing number of classes have a complex mix of races and cultures. But the *Interchange* textbooks maintain interest in the white male representations, particularly white male American characters despite the current emphasis on multicultural approach in international ELT textbooks. The above issues can perpetuate exclusion, silence, and distortion of language users' educational experiences. In some cases where black characters are represented in the textbooks, a negative picture is depicted. For instance,

in the reading section of unit 15 in *Interchange 3*, Dr. Martin Luther King, a black human right activist, is represented, but he was illustrated as a person who used to plagiarize: “It has been learned that even some highly respected figures, including Martin Luther King Jr., have plagiarized” (p. 105).

Needless to say, he was a black activist, humanitarian, and leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement. Due to the fact that he is a highly respected man, and now best known for his role in the advancement of civil rights and equality of races, this kind of representation may show racial biasness and cause misunderstanding in the EFL learners’ mind about the black community or distort the real picture about the leader of civil rights in the US.

Another finding of the present study is that most of intercultural representation is through superficial culture with dominancy of inner circle. The writers of the *Interchange* textbooks have largely introduced the foods, landmarks, celebrities, festivals, laws and rules i.e., the physical aspects of culture from inner circle countries. However, this low-level exposure to superficial culture in the process of target language (English) learning may make EFL learners less reflective critical thinkers. One reason for the above finding, as Alptekin (1993) points out, might be that it is often difficult for native-speaker writers of ELT textbooks to gather relevant materials about other cultures. Another plausible explanation lies for the above finding in the native authors’ views and greater tendency towards target language cultural elements, rather than local ‘cultures’, perhaps to reinforce L2 English culture. In spite of some attempts to present some other cultures through customs and festivals (e.g., Independent Day in Turkey, Chasuk in Korea, National Heroes’ Day in Indonesia, Al Sabu in Egypt, and La Quinceanera in Mexico), American culture is still the most prevalent inner circle culture represented in the textbooks. This inner circle dominancy, particularly Anglo-American dominancy, may not be viewed positively by the EFL learners in the expanding circle such as Islamic republic of Iran where widespread suspicion is voiced against US cultural threats. In this EFL context, some local EFL teachers might feel uncomfortable about presenting Anglo-American cultural elements. As Gullicks, Pearson, Child, and Schwab (2005) argue, the tradition of education to reinforce Anglo-American social and cultural values and expectations can pose challenges to the ideology of student-based learning. Cultural hybridization, of course, can be considered as an

example of active intercultural interactions (Lee, 2009), which can be employed more to have better intercultural representation of diverse cultures. But cultural hybridization, unlike superficial aspect, has constituted the least proportion of the intercultural aspects in the three aforementioned ELT textbooks. It stands to reason that the internationally developed *Interchange* series targeting users from diverse language communities may not incorporate the cultural elements of a particular community, the lack of hybrid (inter)cultural aspects i.e., mixture of more than two different cultural elements, in these textbooks, however, may defy expectation.

As the findings in this study show, there are some parts in the *Interchange* series which engage in critical reflections on intercultural relationships. However, some of the issues going beyond the superficial level, such as night clubs, dance party, Facebook, online dating cannot be received favorably by some EFL users of the textbooks due to their religious, social and cultural values and beliefs, which may create conflicts between their own and target culture. For instance, Facebook and Twitter, though considered as social networking services in the eyes of many people from inner circle countries to link people from all over the world, can be viewed in the eyes of some EFL learners from the Islamic world as a tool in the hands of some powerful countries to promote western cultural values; that is why using these social networking services sometimes gets a political issue. Yet, this leaves a need for the textbook authors to develop a critical cultural consciousness to deal with such issues at a higher level of criticality and reflexivity, which appears to be a cultural gap in the textbooks. As McAllister, Whiteforda, Hilla, Thomasa, and Fitzgerald (2006) point out, “reflective thinking leading to reflective judgment appears to be an important aspect of cultural competence; in fact, it may be more critical than some other aspects, like possessing specific knowledge” (p. 370). Embracing different perspectives can help EFL learners move from ethnocentrism to broad ranging cultural competence. Similarly, racism is another critical subject. In most parts of the world, it is not acceptable to respect one color over others. But the idea that noble black figures, like Dr. Martin Luther King are presented as those who committed a wrongdoing i.e. plagiarism, on the one hand, might reveal biasness of the writers of the textbooks, who have over-presented the white characters. On the other hand, it may shine a positive light in the classroom for EFL teachers from

local cultures to critically discuss inequality in race and plagiarism in the classroom.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As Matsuda (2002) states, since English is increasingly used among speakers from the outer and expanding circles i.e. nonnative speakers of English, the assumption that nonnative English speakers learn English only to communicate with native English speakers and learn about their culture does not always remain true anymore; English can be attributed to many cultures (Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014). However, the deconstruction of cultural elements through the *Interchange* textbook characters' nationality, gender, and race revealed that 'white male' from inner circle countries was dominant in all three textbooks. Dominance of male and white characters may suggest inequality in race and gender in these internationally-developed ELT textbooks, given the fact that most of the target users of English are from expanding circle (Graddol, 1997).

Furthermore, intercultural competence, which is "the expected outcome of the insertion of interculturality in language learning and teaching" and an important competence in our contemporary world (Dervin, 2010, p. 158), was given weight in the aforementioned textbooks. An attempt was made to represent nationalities from inner, outer, and expanding circle countries and show intercultural interactions in the textbooks. But the content analysis of the textbooks in the present study showed that physical aspects of culture of inner circle was in charge of most intercultural messages and interactions, indicating a fairly superficial treatment of culture in the textbooks. Such an initiative, of course, seems to be logical since avoiding any reference to the physical aspects of inner circle target culture may deprive EFL learners of the authentic cultural context and work against their intercultural awareness. However, much against expectation, the deeper level of cultural/intercultural interactions i.e., critical reflections, was not represented adequately in the *Interchange* textbooks, especially in the more advanced-level textbook of these series. Besides, hybridization was less observed in the above textbooks despite the fact that this aspect of intercultural interactions deserves more attention in the era of globalization. The shortage of critical intercultural interactions in the textbooks calls for more EFL teachers' supplementary and constructive feedback and discussion in the classroom; while using the above

textbooks, both EFL teachers and learners should engage in evaluating the contents of the textbooks and have a critical lens to be able to see overrepresented and underrepresented groups, to discuss unequal cultural representations, and to reflect on sensitive sociocultural issues. Bridging the gap through linking the local culture (first language culture) to the target culture (English language culture), miles away in our global world, and sometimes mixing both cultures, can be the responsibility of our EFL teachers. It is then the role of curriculum developers and teacher educators to prepare interculturally incompetent teachers for such a responsibility. Such a move helps EFL teachers and students in redressing inequalities and biasness.

Bio-data

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