

The Place Of Culture In The Iranian ELT Textbooks

In High School Level

Mohammad Aliakbari, Ph.D.

Ilam University- Iran

maliakbari@hotmail.com

Abstract

The present study is an attempt to investigate the way culture is addressed in ELT in Iran in general and the place of culture in ELT at the high school level of education in particular. Throughout the study, this issue was examined with reference to the relevant theoretical background, and the content analysis of prescribed English textbooks. The research findings make it clear that the current materials or textbooks are shallow and superficial with respect to their treatment of culture. They are therefore inadequate to the task of teaching culture specifics in the deeper sense (values, norms, beliefs, etc.) or culture-general skills such as intercultural communication and understanding.

Key word: Language-culture relationship, Textbooks and culture, ELT in Iran

1. Introduction

The integral relationship between language and culture has led to numerous debates on the role and impact of English language teaching in general and of the English language programs in Iran in particular. Ranging from English linguistic imperialism and cultural invasion to cultural neutrality, the interpretations of the state of ELT in Iran is still controversial. In particular two extreme evaluations of ELT appear in the agenda. On the one hand English, as a school subject, is seen as representing and introducing western culture to the Iranian students. On the other hand, there are voices postulating that English as it is presently taught in Iran is nothing but a representation of the Persian or Islamic ideology. This unresolved controversy prompted the present investigation into the cultural content of ELT in Iran.

2. Statement of the problem

The cultural content of the ELT textbooks in Iran has never been explicitly discussed. There is a serious absence of studies that examine the quality and the types of materials used in teaching culture. Therefore, the major purpose motivating this study is to find out, on the one hand, whether the available English materials provide sufficient content for students' cultural understanding and make them ready for intercultural communication; Or, on the other, whether the 'culture' taught merely familiarizes students with their native culture. More specifically, this study was interested in screening the cultural references in the content of the national instructional materials. Among the questions this study was interested to seek answers for were:

1. What range of cultural references is represented in the textbooks? In particular, whose cultures are represented in the cultural content of the Iranian English textbooks and to what extent?
2. Can the textbooks foster learners' intercultural communication in English?

3. ELT in Iran

English language teaching in Iran has passed through a host of ups and downs and has experienced extreme courses. Prior to the Islamic Revolution in 1979, because of the exceptional relations

between the Iranian government and the West, especially the U.S. and England, English language teaching received particular attention. Vigorously strengthened by the presence of abundant native speaking teachers, and the contribution of several American and British institutions, the condition led to such an extreme position that certain national universities were conventionally called American Universities. As an example, in Shiraz University English proficiency was considered a basic requirement for entering or starting the major courses.

Post-revolutionary reactions to ELT, in certain ways, went to extremes as well. Following the revolutionary oppositions against the U.S. as the main supporter of the fallen kingdom, and because of the faulty perception of parallelism between English and the U.S., ELT received waves of hostility. A movement, generally referred to as 'book purging', aimed at 'de-culturalization' of school and university English-teaching textbooks. As an urgent reaction, certain words and concepts were replaced by 'proper' a-cultural or neutral ones. Replacing the national course-books and designing new materials were the next steps. The materials developed, then, generally represented the concepts, topics and ideas that Iranian students might learn in other courses including history and divinity.

At present the dominant trend in Iran is toward more English language teaching. As a required course from the second grade of junior high school, English is taught in three to four hours in a week. There is an extensive and still growing private sector of education in the country, a distinctive feature of which is introducing English at primary school and even pre-school levels. In almost all private schools functioning within the three levels of general education in Iran, namely primary, junior and high schools, English receives striking attention and probably extra hours of practice. English is so crucial a factor that the quality of the English program and the skill of the teacher or teachers working in each school may determine the families' choice to send their children to one school or another. Private language schools or institutes have attracted an increasing number of interested learners from young children to adults. The multiple variations observed in the programs delivered signify a great tendency to learn English in Iran, on the one hand, and a notable endeavor to fulfill the learners' communicative needs, on the other.

So far, English seems to have found its way smoothly right to the heart of Iranian society, proving itself to be a necessity, rather than a mere school subject. Just as with the outer world, English is the dominant language of foreign trade, international conferences, for air traffic in international airports, and in sea navigation. Iran's relation with the world is mainly through English. Though native-like pronunciation, which is not contradictory to EIL assumptions, is aimed at in classrooms, native English speakers do not make up the sole possible interactors for Iranian English learners. In fact, English is often used for non-native interactions. English dailies, weeklies, journals and other English periodicals directed by Iranian nationals are issued and available throughout the country. The government's policy for promoting the export of non-oil products made companies and exporters take advantage of this medium to introduce their goods and products to the world market. The Iranian national TV has started broadcasting authentic foreign programs, especially English ones. The Internet, the use of which requires a substantial English proficiency level and through which people enjoy world relationships, has gained national recognition. Iran's cooperation with the UN, Islamic Conference Organization, ECO, OPEC and other regional and world organizations makes English a practical necessity for the involved nationals. International book fairs and trade exhibitions held annually in the capital demonstrate the country's readiness and its dependable capacity to maintain its world relationships in English.

4. Review of literature

Textbooks and other materials used in language learning generally present a certain way of looking at the world, presumably, through the cultural lens of the author. They fulfil a crucial role in the process of education and English language teaching is no exception. Relevant to the subject of this

study is the examination of the possible functions the textbooks fulfil. The quality of the cultural content of the textbooks and the debate over the culture to be reflected in them are other fertile grounds for study. These topics are hoped to contribute to providing an answer to the question of the culture in ELT texts.

4.1. Functions of a textbook

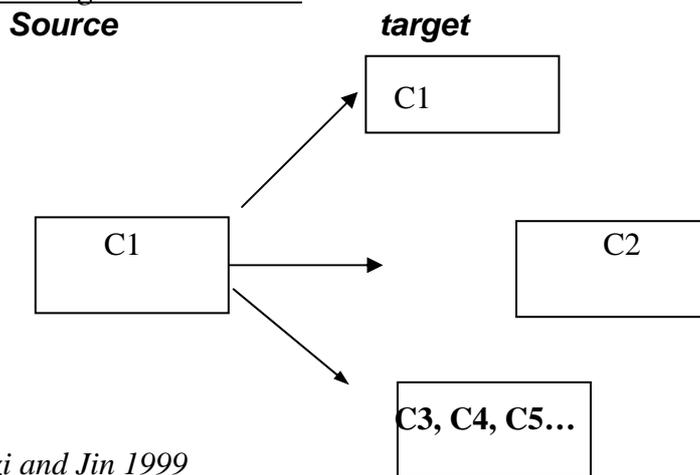
In an attempt to elaborate on evaluating textbooks for cultural elements, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) note that ELT textbooks perform different functions. To them a textbook is potentially a teacher, a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority, a de-skinner and an ideology.

A textbook can be a teacher, in the sense that it contains materials which are intended to instruct students directly about English speaking cultures. It can also be a map in the sense that it gives an overview of a structured program of linguistic and cultural elements, showing teachers and learners the grounds to be covered and summarising the route taken in previous lessons. Although sometimes textbooks are expected to be covered thoroughly, as in the Iranian context, most EFL training courses emphasise that the textbook is a resource; a set of materials and activities from which the most appropriate or useful items can be chosen. Richards (1993: 49) clearly articulates the resource-based view of the use of textbooks when he notes, "I see textbooks as resource books rather than course books". A textbook is also a trainer. For an inexperienced or untrained teacher the explanations and guidance, the step by step instructions of a teacher's guidebook, can be very useful. Teachers can learn from them, not least about culture. A textbook is also seen as an authority in that it is reliable, valid, and written by experts. Often a textbook carries the authorisation of important publishers or ministries of education. This is true for ELT textbooks used in Iranian high schools. English textbooks are all developed, published and distributed under the authority of the Ministry of Education. Though a textbook is generally designed to evoke tasks and provoke activities on part of both the learners and the teachers, it may also become a restrictor or a de-skinner. Sometimes, to cope with the requirements of the book, teachers cannot use a more creative, interpretative or critical approach. This can be considered as a restricting function of the textbooks. Finally a textbook can be seen as an ideology in the sense that it reflects a worldview of a cultural system, and a social construction to teachers and students, which indirectly constructs their view of culture.

4.2. Textbooks, culture and content

Textbooks vary in their content and approach to cultural treatment. In spite of the fact that EFL/ESL textbooks are generally expected to contain elements of the target culture, the bulk of research shows that this is not always the case and target culture is not always represented. Some books include a range of English-speaking cultures; others include non-English-speaking cultures as well, stressing more international uses of language. Still there are plenty of textbook which focus on the learners cultures. Therefore, the representation of culture in textbooks seems to be more complex than that the portrayal by many educators implies. It even varies in the course of time for one particular community. For example Bobda (1997) notes that the recent history of EFL in Cameroon has witnessed three major periods in the development of materials in relation to the environment. "First there was a period when all materials were based primarily on British cultural context... Then the stage of the incorporation of African cultural content into curriculum followed, and finally, from late 1980s to date, the stage of indigenization of materials to a basically Cameroonian context" (p. 221). In this regard Cortazzi and Jin (1999) propose three patterns of reflecting culture in English textbooks, which are shown in the figure B-6 below.

Figure-1: Culture in English textbooks



Adopted from Cortazzi and Jin 1999

C1 refers to the learner's culture, the source culture. C2 refers to the target culture where the target language is used as a first language. C3, C4, C5, refer to the cultures that are neither the source nor the target culture. They can be different varieties of culture from both English and non-English-speaking countries around the world. In using English as an international language, they are called international target cultures. In accordance to Cortazzi and Jin's classification in the sections that follow, there will notes to the textbooks that mirror the source culture, the textbooks based on the target culture, and the textbooks which aim at the international target cultures.

4.2.1. Textbooks that mirror the source culture

There are EFL textbooks, produced at the national level for particular countries that mirror the source culture rather than target cultures. Hajjaj (1981) comments that EFL texts in Kuwait are being prepared with Kuwaiti situation in mind. Scott (1980) also notes Chinese EFL texts, which thoroughly transform cultural content that aims at reinforcing Chinese norms and values. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) talk about a Venezuelan textbook which gives details of the major national heroes. The settings referred to are primarily Venezuelan cities and places, with minor attention to places outside Venezuela. They also inform us about a Turkish English textbook, the cultural content of which is primarily Turkish not a target culture. "It is about Turkish food, Turkish history, and Turkish weather discussed in English". Krishraswamy and Aziz (1978:99) tell us that a number of countries such as India and Yemen have successfully produced teaching materials with their national aspirations and values. Another example is English for Saudi Arabia (Al-Quraishi, Watson, Hafseth, and Hickman, 1988) in which virtually every setting is located in source culture. When the textbook characters greet one another, talk about local professions, make Arabian coffee, or talk about going on pilgrimage to Mecca. All maps in the book are maps of the home country. In general, in such textbooks, learners see members of their own cultures speaking English. The contexts and the participants and sometimes the topics are usually familiar to the students.

4.2.2. Textbooks based on the target culture

A large number of EFL textbooks focus on target culture. An effective example of this approach to social culture realism in elementary level textbooks is "*Success- Communicating in English*" (Walker 1994) which is set in the United States but marketed worldwide. The multicultural nature of American society is portrayed by including members of minority groups. Krishraswamy and Aziz (1978) note that English teaching materials written for global use usually use English names and try to teach English culture and values. They then name "*English Occasions*" (Longman, 1952)

"Success with English" (Course-book I, Penguin, 1968) and *"The language of Business"* (British Broadcasting Corporation, 1970) as good examples. They also comment on the textbooks written by native speakers for particular countries and note that except for occurrence of some place names and the use of some local personal names, there is no shift in the culture presented to the students. "In fact there has been no attempt to understand other cultures" (ibid. 97).

Cook (1999) notes that target-based goals were emphasised in the heydays of audio-lingual and communicative methods of teaching. He refers to *"Reward"* (Greenall, 1994) and *"Flying Colours"* (Garton- Springer and Greenal, 1990) as examples of such course books.

4.2.3. Textbooks aimed at the international target cultures

A third category of EFL textbooks are those which include a wide variety of cultures from both English-speaking countries and countries where English is not the first or second language, but is used as an international language.

Cortazzi (2000) notes that a category of C3 cultural content is now evident in some books from America and south Asia where textbook characters from all around the world use English as a global language and the aim is quite explicitly to include the development of intercultural skills. Textbooks of this kind seem more appropriate for the global classroom, although other types could be used if the teacher brings a wider awareness to the classroom and compensates for what is not actually in the book. Perhaps the ideal is some combination where C1, C2 and C3 all feature in the materials but with a global perspective, (p. 82).

To the above classification, I should add another category, text with little interest in culture. In Brumfit's terminology they are considered as neutral. Brumfit (1996) notes the claim that a neutral educated variety offered the widest access to English throughout the world, while a model based on particular locality (rather than a general British or American one) would be unpopular for learners because it was too restrictive. However, she further acknowledges that over the past 20 years has there been increasing exposure of learners to a range of different models of pronunciation and different styles of speaking.

More examples of this type of textbooks have been reported. Giesecke (1980) and Nakayama (1982) state that in Japan, English is generally taught not as a functional tool for cross-cultural communication but as codified system, representing the linguistic characteristics of idealized American or Briton. Similarly, Scoval and Scovel (1980) and Evans (1980) note that in Chinese and Korean textbooks, the pedagogic focus seem to be on grammatical features of English without regard for its communicative and/or cultural functions. Stated differently, these textbooks seem to merely focus on developing students' linguistic competence.

In order to evaluate the implementation of the theoretical positions and the categories for the treatment of culture in ELT materials in the Iranian context, the next section will focus on the content analysis of the Iranian ELT textbooks in high school level with the intention of exploring the culture/s they represent and the category of the textbooks they belong to.

5. Methodology

As previously noted, this study was undertaken to investigate the state of culture in the Iranian high school ELT textbooks. For this purpose, this section of the study aimed at a quantitative account of the state of references to different cultural categories in the ELT textbooks. More specifically, the present study sought to find answers to the following questions:

1. Whose cultures are represented in the nationally developed instructional materials and to what extent?
2. Is the treatment of culture in the instructional materials good enough to develop students' intercultural competence?

5.1. Materials/ Textbooks

Under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, four English textbooks have been developed for the four levels of high school in Iran. They are entitled English Book One, English Book Two, English Book Three and English Book Four. To avoid repetition and ambiguity, they are simply called Book One, Book Two, Book Three and Book Four.

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. A close examination of the textbooks made it clear that the 'New Words' and 'Reading' sections of the textbooks were the kernel sections of the books. They are to provide new vocabularies and new information. Other sections are to help students internalize the information obtained in these two sections. Accordingly, the present study aimed at the analysis of these two sections of the textbooks.

5.2. The model of text analysis

The textbooks analysis was done based on a modified version of Ramirez and Halls' (1990) model, designed and adopted for a similar purpose. The model concentrated on an account of the amount (i.e., how often) and kind (visual vs. written mode) of presentation given to various target language speaking countries or groups in the textbooks. The present study, however, modified the adopted model. To embody features detected through a pilot study, an extension of references was decided upon. The intention was to provide a relatively comprehensive picture of the state of the culture in the textbooks.

Due to the adoption of a somehow monotonous approach for visual representations throughout the textbooks, which is generally limited to drawn pictures, and due to the absence of any real map, picture or photograph, this issue was dropped from the study.

5.3. Procedure: Content Analysis and Coding Scheme

As part of the content analysis procedure we had to decide about a coding scheme. 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 (.....ibid.).

Throughout this study, two different coding schemes were tried for the sections under investigation. Decision was made with reference to the nature and the quality of each section. The quality and the justification of the choices are given in the following sections.

5.3.1. Coding scheme for 'New Words'

In the 'New Words' section of the textbooks, each new word is followed by two or more sentences, which are to contextualize different meanings of the word. Throughout the study each single exemplification or illustration for the meanings of words was considered a unit of study because each statement conveyed a particular meaning independent from the preceding or the succeeding sentences.

In a closer examination, these sentences were classified into four categories. A large number of sentences had no reference to a target group in any way. It was not clear when, where and by whom

they were produced. They did not include names of people or places either. Such sentences, general enough to be used by people in any country or culture, were classified as No Reference, Culture Free Statements (NRCFS). They usually started with or included unclear, generic pronouns such as he, she, they and I. Some of them would refer to general categories such as, students, the children, doctors, people or so. Here are a few examples.

Children love their fathers and mothers. (Lesson 1 book 1)

We breathe through our nose. We breathe all the time. (Lesson 6 book 2)

You should not hurt little children. You should be ashamed of what you do. (Lesson 3 book 3).

Workers are paid for their labor. (Lesson 6 book 4)

A second category of sentences was labeled No Reference, Culture Specific Statements (NRCSS). These sentences often had no indicator of their referents. However, compared with the previous category, they were considered special or peculiar to an unspecified target group, culture or country.

For instance:

People always talked about war. You know this was a topic for conversation a few years ago. (Lesson 7 book 4)

You can break your fast as soon as the sun sets. (Lesson 6 book 3)

It is easy to understand that the word 'people' and 'you' have particular references. The first sentence refers to the war between Iran and Iraq and the second conveys an Islamic tradition.

Another type of sentences included proper names of people, places or objects that indirectly specified the source group, culture or country. These sentences were then subdivided into two classes. A vast majority of them were classified as Sentences with Culture General Reference (SCGR). Apart from their references to particular people, places or objects, people from different culture backgrounds could potentially use these sentences.

He spoke English so well that I never realized he was a German. (Lesson 2 book 3)

If you accept the job, it will involve living in Bandar Abbas. (Lesson 6 book 4).

Ali's father travels a lot. He visits many foreign countries. He speaks two foreign languages. (Lesson 5 book 2)

A fourth group of sentences included particular references. Such sentences were labeled Sentences with Culture Specific References (SCSR). For example, there were frequent references to the imposed war in Iran or particular occasions such as:

The 15th of Sha'ban is a religious celebration. (Lesson 5 book 3)

During the imposed war many people were killed in air-raids. (Lesson 6 book 4)

Eventually, four coding schemes for the analysis of the 'New Words' were established. No Reference, Culture Free Statements (NRCFS) did not express a particular culture; at least they were considered neutral or thought to be potentially used by speakers of different cultures. No Reference, Culture Specific Statements (NRCSS) bore special cultural references but their references remained hidden to the students. Sentences with Culture General References (SCGR) included certain names and references but their usage were not merely peculiar or limited to those references. Sentences with Culture Specific References (SCSR) dealt with known groups and normally specified something special about their references.

In order to make the classification and the discussions easier, the categories were labeled as A, B, C and D. The labeling was conventional. There was no symbolic relationship between the letters and the categories.

5.3.2. Coding scheme for 'Reading' passages

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. Based on the findings of the pilot study, after examining all the reading passages, a coding scheme with eight categories was established. They were labeled as H, I, J, K, L, M, N, and O for a reason similar to that explained for the 'New Words'. Six categories were meant to embody references to

culture as life style, locations, tradition and customs, special events or occasions among different targets. These 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 (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. Although these texts might occasionally include references to certain personalities or places, due to their general and worldwide recognition they were classified as general texts with no particular cultural reference.

The pilot study showed that references in some texts were probably intentionally dropped. They seemed to be adopted from known sources but presented to students anonymously. Expressions like "one university research".... (Lesson 1 book 3) and "in one country.... an unusual experiment was done recently" (Lesson 3 book 3) are not rare. Accordingly, category (K) was decided to embrace 'Reading' passages whose identity had been left out.

6. Results

Observing Ramirez and Halls' (1990) model of content analysis and based on the above classifications, two sections of the Iranian ELT textbooks 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. If the name of a country or group was not specified, the names of the interlocutors or any other indirect identity, if provided, were taken as clues to determine the referenced countries or groups.

6.1. Results of the 'New Words' analysis

The 'New Words' section of the textbooks included 292 sentences. Figure 3 to 6 represent the categorization of the sentences in all lessons of each textbook.

As the data make it clear, no culture-specific statement had been observed in the 'New Words' section of book one. Seventy-eight percent of the sentences were found to be general, culture free statements. From the 68 sentences in this section, only 6 items (one percent) were evaluated as culturally loaded items. These statements, however, represented no clear identity or source. Only nine sentences (13 percent) referred to particular targets.

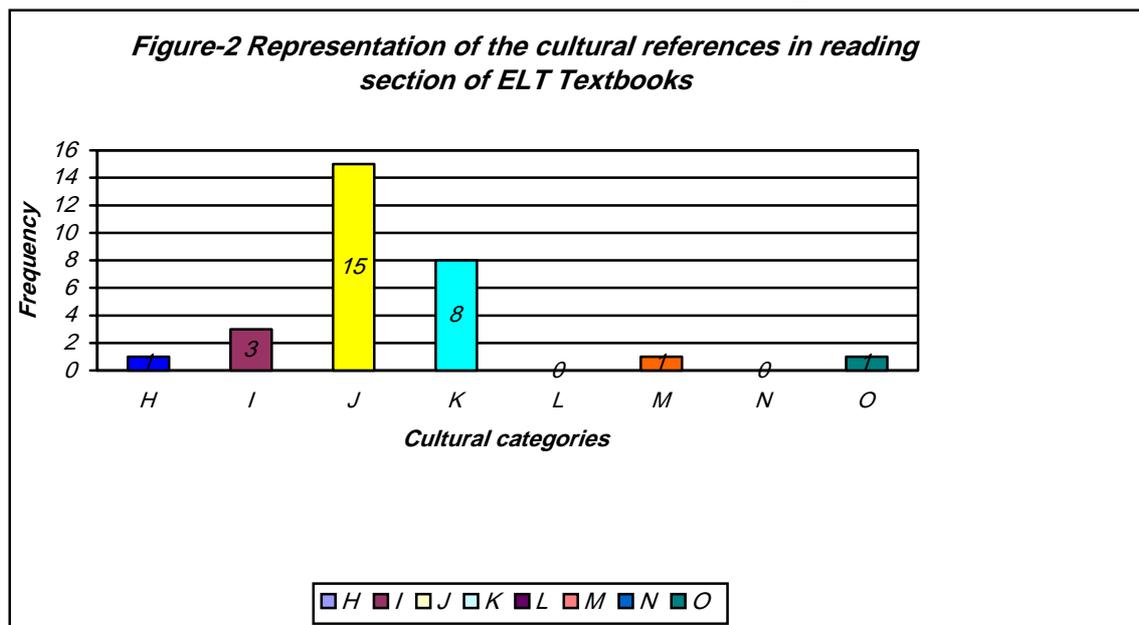
A condition similar to that of Book One was observed in Book Two. Forty-two out of the total 51 items in the 'New Words' sections (82 percent) were categorized as No Reference, Culture Free Statements (NRCFS). Only one case (2 percent) of culture specific reference was observed. Six items (12 percent) dealt with culture general references; however the only special thing about them was the names included. They were found to present a common culture but using particular names.

Data collected and represented through figure-3 showed that similar to Book One and Two, the focus of attention in Book Three also rested upon general statements with no particular references. Fifty-four out of 77 items in the book (70 percent) were considered as NRCFS. Yet, compared to other textbooks, this book had the most culture specific statements. Eleven items (14 percent) were classified as SCSR. Ten items bore general references, which did not specify a clear culture. Only one culture specific sentence with omitted reference was identified.

Book Four had the fewest lessons but the most statements in the 'New Words' section. It also included the highest percentage of No Reference Culture Free Statements among the high school books. Eighty-one out of 96 sentences (85 percent) were classified as NRCFSs. NRCSSs and SCGR both were found to make up four percent of the items each. Seven items (7 percent) were classified as sentences with culture specific references.

6.2. Results of 'Reading' analysis

There were 29 reading passages in the four textbooks. Based on the coding scheme explained each lesson has been classified into one of the eight categories. The data collected for the categorization of the 'Reading' passages are represented through the figure 2. The height of the bars signifies the frequency of the texts in each category. The textbooks differed slightly in their extent of treatment to the eight established categories. Again, the differences did not appear significant. Throughout the textbooks, the category “J” (general culture-neutral texts) and “K” (reference-omitted texts) respectively covered the greater parts and only rare or no case of other categories appeared. Category (I), non-English western countries, received the third rank. This shortcoming is observable in the figure below.



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

O, Reference to Islam or Islamic traditions

J, General texts related to science, biographies, of scientists and world figures

K Reading passages whose identity had been left out.

7. Data analysis/ discussion

The checklists adopted for textbook analysis provided us with the frequency and the percentage of the number of references to four categories in the 'New Words' and eight categories in 'Reading' comprehension sections of the textbooks.

Figure - 3 to 6. Representation of the type of sentences in ‘New Words’ section of ELT Books.

Figure3 New words in Book One

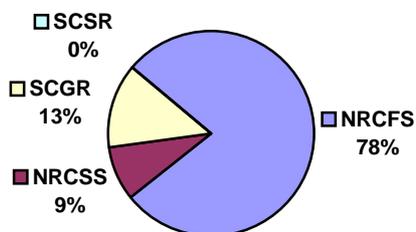


figure4. New words inBook Two

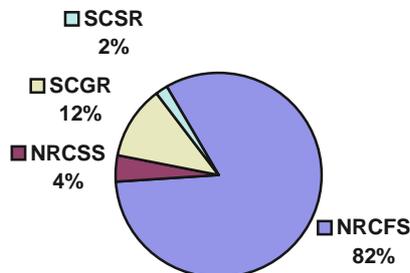


Figure 5. New Words in Book Three

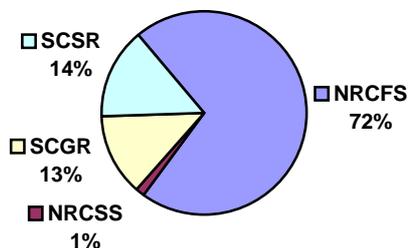
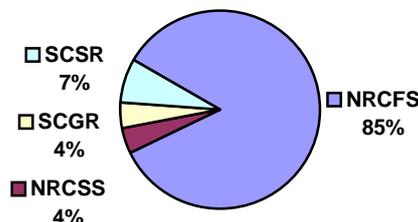


Figure-6. New Words in Book Four



Reference:

- NRCFS =No Reference Culture Free Statements*
- NRCSS = No Reference Culture Specific Statements*
- SCGR = Sentences with Culture General Reference*
- SCSR = Sentences with Culture Specific Reference*

Note. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

The study made it clear that, with a slight difference, the books followed a similar orientation. With a range of 72 to 85 percent, the NRCG sentences made up the largest portion of the books. The value of NRCS statements varied from one to a maximum of nine percent. This degree of representation is not significant at all. Sentences with culture general reference (SCGR) formed roughly 13% of the content of the books One, Two and Three and only 4% of that of Book Four. The frequency of occurrence of sentences with culture specific references (SCSR) kept growing

from Book One to Four. It grew from none in Book One to seven percent in Book Four. However, this growth is too low to be considered seriously. The following figures represent the data collected on the categorization of the 'New Words' section in each English textbook.

8. Conclusion

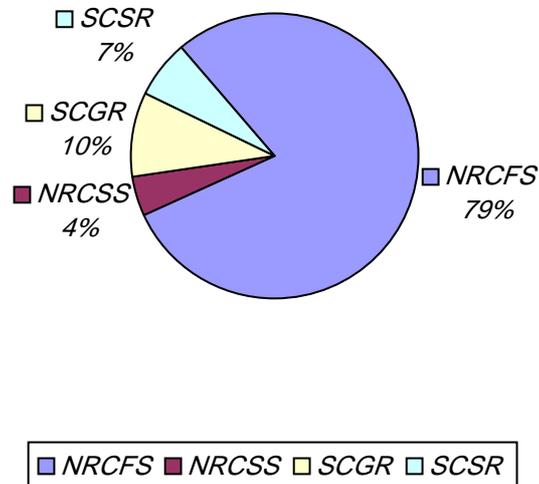
The major intent in the analysis of the textbooks was an investigation of their contribution to the improvement of students' intercultural competence. The results of the textbooks analysis do not confirm such a quality. The following comments provide detailed explanations of this shortcoming.

1 The results of the study signify that the ELT textbooks in use in Iranian high schools did not prove helpful in developing intercultural competence 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 both the 'New Words' and 'Reading' comprehension sections are extremely limited and basic.

As for the 'New Words' section although textbooks differed in the extent of their treatment and their devotion to the four studied categories, the differences did not appear significant at all. Altogether, only 11 percent of this section was considered as culture specific statements. No doubt, such a slight portion cannot prepare the students for intercultural understanding or communication. This can be visualized in figure 6.

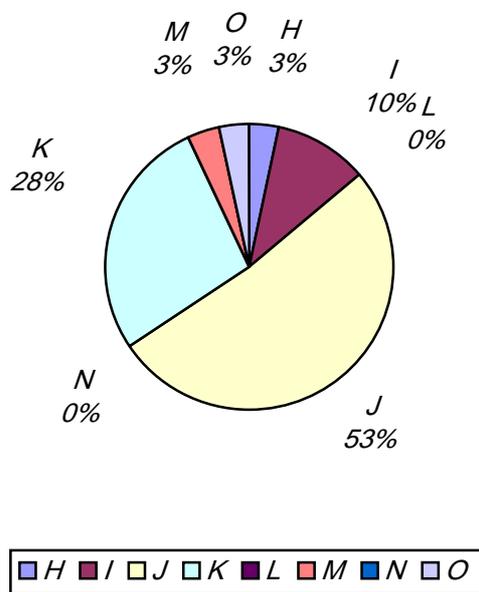
The overall scheme of cultural references that Iranian high school students encounter through 'Reading' passages in their English textbooks are represented in figure 7. As the graph signifies, 53 percent of the books dealt with general, culture free passages. Texts with deleted reference (28 percent) were second in rank. English speaking countries, Islamic tradition and cross-cultural comparison formed only 3 percent of the content of each. No reference to eastern countries was found, nor was a text exclusively dealing with Iran or the national culture. The sum of all referenced texts formed only 19 percent of the content of the textbooks. The study made it clear that, compared with the 'New Words' section, culture-specific texts received an eight-percent increase. Nevertheless, the treatment of cultural understanding and the development of intercultural communicative competence still remain insufficient.

Figure -6 Representation of the cultural references in the 'New Words' section of the ELT textbooks.



- Note. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Figure -7 Representation of cultural references in the 'Reading' section of ELT Textbooks



- Note. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

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 28 percent of 'Reading' passages lacked identifiable sources of reference. Whether the identity had been taken away prior to or through the adaptation and modification processes is not known. 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 were limited not only in the depth of cultural information but also in the range of the cultures depicted. In the four books examined information about other countries, English or otherwise, averaged less than twenty 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 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.

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