A content analysis of the cultural representations of three ESL grammar textbooks

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Abstract: The global use of the English language in various international contexts complicates the role of culture in teaching English as an international language. Drawing on a well-known framework of cultural representation consisting of four categories of products, practices, perspectives, and persons, this study focused on a content analysis of three ESL grammar textbooks. The findings indicated that contrary to the expectation regarding the cultural neutrality of grammar textbooks, the analyzed textbooks were, to a large extent, predominated by the practice aspect of culture which comprises the behavioral patterns of a certain society involving information about daily life and prominent customs. With regard to the scope of foreign cultures manifested in these textbooks, a lack of balance was evident. This can be traced to the fact that compared to international cultures, the cultures of English-speaking countries occupy a larger space in these textbooks and hence has caused little room for the international cultures the targeted textbooks. It is suggested that learners receive more help in developing their intercultural competencies and promoting effective communication with people coming from different backgrounds through using English as an international language. This can be made possible if materials writers pay further attention to the role of international culture.

Subjects: Curriculum Studies; Language & Linguistics; Language Teaching & Learning

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Drawing on Yuen’s (2011) framework of cultural representation consisting of four categories of products, practices, perspectives, and persons, this study focused on a content analysis of three ESL grammar textbooks. The findings indicated that contrary to the expectation regarding the cultural neutrality of grammar textbooks, the analyzed textbooks were largely dominated by the practice aspect of culture which comprises the behavioral patterns of a certain society. Moreover, the cultural elements from English-speaking countries occupy a larger space in these textbooks compared to those of non-English-speaking countries. This shows that materials writers tend to western culture. It is therefore suggested that ELT grammar textbook writers pay more heed to a balanced distribution of the cultural elements of both English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries and hence help learners with further growth of their intercultural competencies.

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Keywords: Cultural representation; Yuen’s (2011) framework; English as an international language; Content analysis; grammar textbooks

1. Introduction

The ubiquitous culture of globalization in all domains of life was prevalent in the outset of the 21st century. There has been a shift in the role of the English language from a national to international language shared among many social groups of non-native speakers through globalization. English has developed into a modern lingua franca, a contact language, and an international language employed for communication purposes by speakers of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Harumi, 2002). English no longer plays the role as the inviolable property of English-speaking communities; it is now a worldwide property of people throughout the world (Harumi, 2002). This widespread use of English language leads to its dissociation from its national culture(s) and its integration with different cultures over the world (Nizegorodcew, 2011).

Accordingly, a revision in the method of teaching culture in EFL/ESL contexts is eventuated by the globalization of the English language. This revision conceptually paves the way for incorporating the multicultural aspects or international cultural elements, which support the development of intercultural communicative competence. International cultural elements refer to cultural elements belonging to cultures other than English-speaking communities in the inner circle, such as Asian, African, and European (with the exception of British) cultural elements. The significance of investigating frequencies and percentages of international cultural elements along with cultural representations of English cultures in textbooks is to show how biased the textbook developers have been towards western culture. Nault (2006) consistently demonstrates that, now that English is widely spoken in all quarters of the globe, it is not sensible to speak of a target culture of the English language or to recommend that American or British cultures solely are worth studying. If adaptation to the dynamic international landscape of English does not take place successfully for English learners, they might consider themselves to be defective in communication or thwarted in cross-cultural situations (Rajagopalan, 2004).

Successful foreign language instruction in all skills relies on emphasizing the inextricable interconnection between language and culture (Hinkel, 2001). The recognition that culture is a fundamental component of language learning has been a crucial debate over the past few decades and has revolutionized the nature of foreign language teaching and learning. Bennet et al. (2003) accentuate that separating language and culture is out of the question. Moreover, they assert that learning a language without its underlying culture leads to the learners’ becoming a fluent fool. Brown (2000) noted that language and culture are intermixed such that it is not possible to separate one from the other without causing it to lose its importance. Kramsch (1993) asserted that language acts as the conveyor of culture which affects the way its speakers interpret and perceive the world. Kramsch (1993) declares, in a foreign language curriculum, culture is not an expendable fifth skill. Kramsch (1993) goes on to say that right from day one, culture is always in the background, ready to disconcert the good language learners when they expect it the least, making clear the restrictions of their hard-won communication competence.

The interest in investigating how culture is demonstrated in language textbooks is awakened by the awareness of the significance of culture in foreign language instruction (Bennet et al., 2003; Chlopek, 2008; Premier & Miller, 2010). According to Cunningsworth (1995), sets of social and cultural values which are immanent in their make-up, are conveyed directly or indirectly by coursebooks. He suggested that attitudes and values that are not consciously held but which nevertheless affect the content and image of the teaching materials, and indeed the whole curriculum might well be expressed by this hidden curriculum. Textbooks, which have a biased orientation may in turn cause a biased worldview, contributing to students’ discriminating and preferring specific cultures over others rather than valuing cultural diversity and difference.
Diepenbroek and Derwing (2013) refer to textbooks as tangible learning resources that provide a sort of continuity and coherence for the program. According to Shardakova and Pavlenko (2004), English language textbooks have an incomparable authority to construct and mediate alternative cultural and linguistic aspects by envisaging them for learners.

Taking the crucial role of textbooks in language and culture learning into account, the present study aimed at an empirical examination of the representation of culture in three ESL grammar textbooks, namely Understanding and Using English Grammar (Azar & Hagen, 2017), Communicate What You Mean: A Concise Advanced Grammar (Revised by Eckstut, 1997), and Oxford Practice Grammar (Yule, 2010) which are widely taught in Iranian universities. Review of the related literature revealed that the majority of studies were conducted on textbooks which cover the four skills and reading sections (Dinh & Sharifian, 2017; Rajabi & Ketabi, 2012; Sadeghi & Sepahi, 2017; Zarei & Khalessi, 2011). Due to the paucity of research on the representation of culture in ESL grammar textbooks and to shed a new light on this area of research, this study continued this line of research by conducting content analysis on the three mentioned ESL grammar textbooks in manifesting the cultural aspect of the target language to prepare EFL learners to better deal with culture-related issues. The findings of this study contribute to established literature by providing empirical results for textbook writers to design and develop culturally embedded language materials and instructional practices to promote learners' intercultural communicative competence.

2. Literature review

2.1. The manifestation of culture in ELT

Cortazzi and Jin (1999) define culture as a framework encompassing ideas, assumptions, and beliefs by which other people's words, actions, and patterns of thinking are construed. According to Kramsch (1998, p. 127), culture refers to “membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting”.

The interrelatedness of language and culture has been consistently underlined in the literature (Bennet et al., 2003; Byram, 2008; House, 2007; Kramsch, 1993). Culture plays a cardinal role in language education and it is not possible to learn language in the absence of its cultural elements (Ho, 2009; Lange & Paige, 2003). Byram (1991) points that language is an integral aspect of culture which forms and is formed by cultural reality rather than being a simple reflector of culture. Hence, to embark on learning language will inevitably lead to a cultural phenomenon. Young et al. (2009) claim that language is both the transmitter and the fundamental instrument for the internalization of culture.

The association of language and culture has been further strengthened through the development of the notion of intercultural awareness (Byram, 1991, 1997; Lange & Paige, 2003). To be interculturally competent means knowing about culture, thought patterns, and social attributes of various groups of people coming from other countries, together with their languages and customs (Byram et al., 2002). Furthermore, intercultural competence is considered to be one of the components of communicative competence along with other competencies such as, discourse, linguistic, and pragmatic competence (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2006). As described by Byram (1997), the process of intercultural communication encompasses a collaboration of a series of skills and knowledge in the process of interaction. The elements of knowledge and attitude are prerequisites for successful intercultural communication. Byram considers two categories of skills: first, are the skills required for interpretation and establishing relationship between cultures; second, are the skills required for discovery and interaction. According to Byram (1997), the experience of otherness is the main concern of foreign language learning, since it necessitates learners to get involved with both familiar and unfamiliar experience through the means of another language.
It is claimed that global cultural consciousness and intercultural citizenship should be the primary and major goal of L2 cultural learning and that being competent in the target language culture is not sufficient (Byram, 2011; Kumaravadivelu, 2008). According to Weninger and Kiss (2013), the goal of language education, involving EFL education must be completely altered and the only thing which can lead to the accomplishment of this goal is a profound familiarity with culture and understanding within a pedagogy that is critically oriented. It is in this sense that the central role of ELT textbooks as a facilitator type of ELT materials comes into play, bearing the responsibility to encourage the development of an open, reflexive, and universally conscious language learner (Weninger & Kiss, 2013).

2.2. The role of textbooks in ELT

Textbooks have an instrumental role to play in foreign language teaching classroom, as Richards (2005) maintains that in EFL learning situations, textbooks are the only source of input provided for learners and instructional practices occurring in the classroom. Richards (2005) points to the pertinent role of textbooks as the crucial resource for both teachers and learners despite the innovation of new technologies. He demonstrates eight fundamental roles of textbook in any curriculum:

1. Textbooks decorate the program with a structure which directs teacher and learners through the course.
2. They ensure the possibility for a standardized instruction in which all the learners receive similar material and will be assessed similarly.
3. An appropriate and well-developed textbook will improve the quality of learning.
4. Textbooks accompanied by other recourses such as CD, cassettes, etc. provide a high variation in presenting material.
5. Textbooks efficiently save teachers’ time and energy to allocate to teaching rather than material production.
6. They supply teacher and learners with the appropriate sample of the target language.
7. They can also educate inexperienced teachers.
8. Textbook usually enjoys high standards of design and quality in production resulting in a visually appealing material in any program.

Hutchinson and Torres (1994) were of the opinion that textbook is a worldwide aspect of language teaching. Cunningsworth (1995) indicates that a textbook may be a source of classroom practices, a syllabus for monitoring and advancing the training/learning process toward systematization, and as a scaffold for novice teachers. According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), textbooks can adopt the role of a teacher, a resource, a map, an authority, an instructor, a restrictor, and an ideology. By including appropriate materials, foreign language classrooms are excellent opportunities for learners to expand their communicative proficiency.

Ndura (2004) posits that the content of instructional materials considerably influences the attitudes and inclinations of students toward themselves, other people and society. To understand diverse cultural values and perspectives, ELT textbooks have to deal with various opinions and cultural viewpoints (Shin et al., 2011). Littlejohn and Windeatt (1989) assert that ELT materials include hidden curriculum, focusing on various messages about various cultures. Chapelle (2009) mentions that in addition to presenting language, textbooks also convey various hidden agenda.

Textbooks are valid sources to develop learners’ knowledge of various aspects of the target language and significant mediators in transmitting intercultural information to L2 learners (Oakes & Saunders, 2004).

Diverse perspectives with respect to the representation of culture in textbooks and materials have been proposed. Saville-Troike (1975) assumes that culture has two representations: clearly
observable materials and non-materials which are challenging to be observed. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) identify three sorts of cultural information that can be utilized in language textbooks: a) target culture materials that draw the culture of a country where English is spoken as the native language; b) source culture materials that utilize learners’ own culture as content; and 3) international target culture materials that take account of cultural diversity in English- and non-English-speaking countries around the world. According to Peterson (2004), culture includes visible and invisible elements. Architecture, geography, gestures, and clothing are the visible elements of culture, while invisible elements of culture are categorized as society’s norms, preferences or tastes, beliefs, and opinions. Furthermore, culture has been envisaged as big “C” and small “c” categories (Brooks, 1968; Chen, 2004). Chen (2004) asserts that big “C” culture comprises themes such as politics, history, education, economy, music, geography, and social system, and small “c” culture refers to cultural values such as life style, daily routine, customs, greeting, weather, holiday, body language, and food.

2.3. Empirical findings
Researchers in the field analyzed textbooks used for language learning in terms of different criteria ranging from their coverage of linguistic aspects to their representation of cultural points and their provision of authentic language. Textbooks act as the primary source of cultural information in language teaching and learning in many educational contexts (Kiliçkaya, 2004). Cultural knowledge may be integrated in descriptive and informative texts, writing tasks, dialogues, audio recordings, realia, and pictures (Adaskou et al., 1990). Liu (2013) launched a study to explore the cultural categories and themes put forward in Chinese EFL textbooks for university level. The results revealed that the textbooks were replete with target culture and very small percentage was devoted to international culture and source culture. Moreover, the results showed that small “c” of “values” were the dominant theme among 19 cultural themes under big “C” and small “c” themes and common small “c” themes were the absent themes. Weninger and Kiss (2013) ran a study and analyzed tasks, images, and texts in ELT textbooks developed by and for Hungarians to have an in-depth investigation into cultural meanings grounded in them. The results suggested that the two textbooks “Bloggers” and “Steps” included passages about famous people of diverse nationalities, festivals from around the world, and characters and voices from around the world particularly in Bloggers. The researchers believed that even though it is significant to present culture overtly and factually, they are not sufficient, especially because such parts are followed by tasks and activities that encourage students to reflect on cultural values.

Cakir (2014) carried out a study to examine culture-specific expressions in English-language coursebooks utilized in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades of elementary education in a Turkish context. The content analysis showed that cultural elements were not sufficiently integrated in the majority of the teaching activities which did not assist learners in utilizing target language in authentic situations. Hamilouglu and Mendi (2010) investigated five ELT coursebooks in Turkey regarding their intercultural content. They found that one book depicted almost exclusively US and England cultural topics as the major target cultures; while, four embedded elements from various cultures. Abdullah and Kumari (2009) evaluation of textbooks used in Malaysia suggested that culture was mainly represented in the form of sociological traits and that the depicted characters in the analyzed textbooks were local and from various ethnic groups.

In another attempt, Farashaijan et al. (2018) carried out a study to evaluate the pragmatic content of Cutting-Edge intermediate text books, which are currently utilized in language colleges. To put it more specific, they analyzed the conversation sections of all Cutting-Edge intermediate books based on the two pragmatic variables: language functions and speech acts. In addition, the study examined the supplying of adequate data with respect to context and meta-pragmatics involved in textbooks. The results of the study demonstrated the insufficiency of pragmatic materials to promote learners’ second language pragmatic features.

In another investigation centered on the representation of cultural elements in EFL textbooks, Rajabi and Ketabi (2012) examined four cultural dimensions adopted from Adaskou et al. (1990) in the texts of Interchange, Headway, Top Notch, and On Your Mark. Adaskou et al.’s (1990) four
dimensions of culture included aesthetic sense (culture with capital “C” such as literature and music), the sociological sense (culture with a small “c” such as work and leisure), the semantic sense (or the semantic system underlying cultural concepts), and the pragmatic/sociolinguistic sense (including paralinguistic and social skill as well as background knowledge). The findings revealed that all four aspects of culture were included in the four textbooks, and that the sociological culture was the most prominent aspect.

In a similar study, Nambiar et al. (2018) investigated the effect of incorporating local culture into a supplementary reading module in order to help Malaysian lower secondary learners develop their communicative ability and cultural awareness.

In order to extract their viewpoints on the value of the module and the advantages in assisting the learners to improve their communicative ability, the study was subject to focus group interviews which were conducted during a period of three years with lower secondary students and English language teachers. The findings indicated that the module had helped to improve cultural knowledge and create cultural awareness for the learners which consequently results in enhanced communicative ability.

Through analyzing cultural content in local English textbooks, Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2015) demonstrated that the majority of the cultural elements in the local textbooks did not depict any specific culture; only a small proportion of them depicted the target language and other cultures. In another study, Dinh and Sharifian (2017) investigated textual and visual reading section in English 11, locally designed for Vietnamese high-school students. The results revealed that the unit displayed the concept of Vietnamese Lunar New Year culture/Tet as an event for happiness, expectation, gathering, and reawakening of animals, plants, and relationships, appropriate with what has been described in Vietnamese cultural studies.

2.4. This study

Drawing on Yuen’s (2011) model of cultural representation, this study delved into content analyzing the representation of culture in three ESL grammar textbooks and explored which cultural dimensions were more frequent in each textbook. To this end, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How frequent are cultural representations in three ESL grammar textbooks?
2. Based on Yuen’s model, which category of cultural dimension is more frequent in each textbook?

3. Methodology

3.1. Materials

Three ESL grammar textbooks, Understanding and Using English Grammar, Communicate What You Mean: A Concise Advanced Grammar, and Oxford Practice Grammar, currently used in many Iranian universities were selected for analysis. Understanding and Using English Grammar includes 20 chapters with each covering a general topic in grammar. The chapters are divided into charts. Each chart covers one or more grammar points and is followed by comprehensive grammar practice. Communicate What You Mean: A Concise Advanced Grammar comprises eight parts and fifteen lessons which present learners with numerous oral and written exercises. Discussion exercises include pollution, politics, and cultural differences and similarities. Oxford Practice Grammar includes 17 chapters, each pertaining to one grammatical point and providing in-depth explanations and challenging practice activities.

The rational for selecting these textbooks is that they are three of the best seller ESL grammar textbooks available on the markets all over the world. In addition, the researcher surveyed professors
teaching English grammar about the book they taught which showed that most of them taught these grammar books. They pointed that they selected these books since they provided diversity of practices, were suggested from the department, were up-to-dated, and easy to instruct.

3.2. Procedure
In order to analyze the cultural dimension presented in the textbooks, the researchers went through all the activities and exercises in the textbooks, and content analyzed only text-based exercises. The textbooks were firstly skimmed for their general presentations of content and themes to collect data. Then, the culture-related aspects of these textbooks were extracted and were used as the baseline data for the content analysis. Cultural representations were analyzed using the Yuen’s (2011) and Peterson’s (2004) models. The researcher codified cultural content, calculated the frequency and percentage of each cultural dimension, and then interpreted the results. The point worth mentioning is that only those activities which were more than three statements were included in the content analysis.

The descriptive content analysis was carried out based on the data analysis framework of Yuen (2011). This framework organizes cultural elements into four categories: products, practices, perspectives, and persons. Yuen (2011, p. 459) maintains that cultural elements can be conceptualized as “a system of code (products) used, to signify thoughts (perspectives), for communication (practices), by different people (persons)”.

The first category, products, refers to cultural elements related to entertainment, food, merchandise, print, clothing, tools, religions, dwellings, laws, education, and travel. Generally, it encompasses both tangible products, such as books or paintings, and intangible products, like traditional dances and oral tales. This category is coded as P1 in the analysis of the study.

The second dimension, practices, consists of the behavioral patterns of a specific society including information about daily life and dominant customs, use of personal space, forms of address, and rituals. This category is coded as P2 in the analysis of the study.

The third category, perspectives, encompasses the underlying norms and values, superstitions, inspirations, myths, and world views of a specific society. This category is coded as P3 in the analysis of the study.

Lastly, the fourth category, persons, refers to popular individuals and fictitious or unknown people from a specific community. This category is coded as P4 in the analysis of the study.

The overriding purpose of the content analysis was the calculation of the frequency of product, practice, perspective, and person in the coursebooks, since, as demonstrated by Yuen (2011), the breadth of cultural dimensions in teaching materials can be established by frequencies.

In addition, culture representations were classified into two types: Big “C” culture and little/small “c” culture (Peterson, 2004). According to Peterson (2004), Big “C” encompasses the culture relating to grand themes including literature, geography, political issues, architecture, classical music, society’s norms, core values, legal foundation, history, and cognitive processes. Peterson (2004) maintains that little/small “c” culture involves the culture related to common or minor themes. It includes themes such as viewpoints, opinions, preferences or tastes, use of space, gestures, body posture, food, clothing styles, hobbies, popular music, and popular issues, and certain knowledge.

Cultural elements were also analyzed to explore whose culture the textbooks represent; whether target language culture or cultural elements from around the world.
In addition to one of the researchers, there was another expert in Applied Linguistics who independently labeled the activities based on one of the four taxonomies and there was a strong agreement between the two raters’ judgment. K = .90, p < .005.

4. Results
Table 1 summarizes the frequency of four cultural dimensions in three ESL grammar textbooks. As indicated in Table 1, Practice dimension was the most dominant cultural element in all three textbooks with 47.27, 47, and 42.97% of the total number of cultural elements in the first, second and third textbook respectively. The second frequently occurring dimension was Product aspect with 44.24, 37, and 31.4%, respectively. Perspective was the third frequently occurred cultural dimension with 6.06, 9, and 11.57%, respectively. Persons was the last frequent cultural dimension with 2.42, 7, and 16.52%.

Table 2 provides samples of the four P cultural elements from three ESL grammar textbooks.

The next table provides the frequency of international cultural elements in the three textbooks. International cultural elements refer to cultural elements belonging to cultures other than English-speaking communities in the inner circle, such as Asian, African, and European (with the exception of British) cultural elements.

As shown in Table 3, international cultural elements occupy a small proportion of cultural elements in these textbooks, devoting a huge amount of them to cultural elements related to English-speaking societies. As it is indicated, the percentages of international cultural elements from the total number of cultural elements are 5.45, 8, and 4.95% in the first, second, and the third textbook, respectively. The point worth mentioning is that the target cultural elements in the three textbooks are not overlapped.

Some examples of international cultural elements are as follows:

“The Grand Bazaar in Istanbul”, “in Japan people take off their shoes before entering a house”, “Recycling in Sweden”, “Africa's Mount Kilimjaro”, “Ramadan is the ninth month of the Muslim year, and “The ancient Chinese art of Feng Shui”.

In the textbook Understanding and Using English Grammar, there is a paragraph talking about “The Grand Bazaar in Istanbul” in Turkey which is a non-English-speaking country, and a picture of this Bazaar is also presented. This cultural element is classified as Products which is the equivalent of Big C culture. Another cultural element is, “In Japan people take off their shoes before entering a house”. This cultural element is categorized as Practices or small C culture, because it refers to behavioral pattern of Japanese people. There is also a reading passage about “Recycling in Sweden’. Sweden is a non-English-speaking country. This cultural element is classified as Practices which is the equivalent of small c culture.

In the textbook, Oxford Practice Grammar, there is a mention of the month Ramadan. This is the ninth month of the Muslim year which is again related to non-English-speaking countries, particularly Asian countries, such as Iran, Iraq, Turkey, etc. This cultural element is classified as Perspectives, the values and beliefs that represent subjective culture.

There is also a reading passage about “The ancient Chinese art of Feng Shui” which belongs to China (non-English-speaking country) and can be classified as Products which is the equivalent of Big C culture. A part of another reading passage talks about how “the famous snow cap on Africa's Mount Kilimjaro has almost disappeared”. This international cultural element is classified as Products which is the equivalent of Big C culture.

In the textbook, Communicate What You Mean, there is a reading passage about Venice in Italy (non-English-speaking country). This international cultural element is classified as Products which
Table 1. Frequency of four cultural dimensions

| Books                                    | Total exercises | Analyzed exercises | Products P1 | Practices P2 | Perspective P3 | Persons P4 | Total |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|------------|-------|
| Understanding & Using English Grammar   | 807             | 252                | F           | P            | F              | P          | F     |
|                                          | F 73            | P 44.24            | F 78        | P 47.27      | F 10           | P 6.06     | F 4   |
|                                          | 78              | 47                 | 10          | 6.06         | 4              | 2.42       | 165   |
| Communicate What you Mean                | 267             | 158                | 37          | 37           | 47             | 9          | 7     |
|                                          | 47              | 47                 | 9           | 9            | 7              | 7          | 100   |
| Oxford Practice Grammar                  | 403             | 145                | 38          | 31.4         | 52             | 14         | 11.57 |
|                                          | 42.97           | 14                 | 11.57       | 20           | 16.52          |            | 121   |

Note: F = Frequency, P = percentage
### Table 2. Sample of four P cultural elements

| Books                                      | P1                                               | P2                                           | P3                                               | P4                                               |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Understanding and Using English Grammar    | The story of King Midas (literature) Microsoft developed by Bill Gates | Having a garage sale “Are these the appetizers you and Joe brought?” | A stay-at-home dad In western countries, many people may have unreasoned fear of bats | Robin Williams Fauja Singh, the first 100-year-old to ever run a marathon Johnny cash, a singer |
| Communicate What You Mean                  | Alex Haley, the author of the book, “Roots” The top children’s movie in 1995, Pocohontas | Hollywood Kentucky Fried chicken | Marriage ceremonies in America becoming less traditional - A mother lending 10 dollars to her son asking him to pay her back a week later | Kevin Costner John Wayne |
| Oxford Grammar Practice                    | Christopher Columbus Jekyll and Hyde             | Dates being arranged by women Thanksgiving Day | A chair with a curse, The idiom not cricket it, sticky wicket, a good innings that come from the game “cricket” | Actress and model, Viviane Tavenard Michael Jordan |

### Table 3. Frequency of international cultural elements

| Grammar textbooks                      | International cultural elements | Total number of cultural elements | Percentage of international cultural elements |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Understanding and Using English Grammar| 9                               | 165                              | 5.45%                                         |
| Communicate What you Mean               | 8                               | 100                              | 8%                                            |
| Oxford Practice Grammar                 | 6                               | 121                              | 4.95%                                         |

is the equivalent of Big C culture. Another reading passage is about Albert Einstein. This cultural element belongs to Germany which is a non-English-speaking country and can be categorized under Products or Big C culture.

### 5. Discussion

This study examined the representation of culture and multicultural values in three ESL grammar textbooks. The results revealed that three ESL grammar textbooks, unlike the general expectations to be culturally neutral, were largely dominated by cultural norms and values. The findings indicated that the most dominant cultural element in all three textbooks belonged to Practice dimension with 47.27, 47, and 42.97% of the total number of cultural elements in the first, second and third textbook respectively. The finding related to the fact that the theme most frequently incorporated in all three textbooks is that of small “c” cultural themes which were in line with those of Liu (2013), Rajabi and Ketabi (2012), and Zu and Kong (2009) who reported that mainly small “c” themes of culture dominated the EFL textbooks. Product aspect was the second frequently occurred dimension with 44.24, 37, and 31.4%, respectively. The third frequently occurring cultural dimension with 6.06%, 9%, and 11.57% respectively was perspective dimension. The least frequent cultural dimension with 2.42, 7, and 16.52% belonged to Persons. The significance of giving these frequencies and percentages is that as asserted by Yuen (2011), the breadth of
cultural dimensions in teaching materials can be established by frequencies. Moreover, we can understand which aspect of culture the materials developers are valuing more and trying to convey to the learner, whether it is the product or Big C culture which according to Peterson (2004) comprises the culture relating to grand themes including literature, geography, political issues, architecture, classical music, society’s norms, core values, legal foundation, history, and cognitive processes, or small “c” culture which involves the culture related to common or minor themes such as, viewpoints, opinions, preferences or tastes, use of space, gestures, body posture, food, clothing styles, hobbies, popular music, and popular issues, and certain knowledge.

In addition, there was a sharp unequal representation of culture from around the world, devoting a greater treatment to the cultures of English-speaking countries and leaving international cultural elements with the least amount of coverage. The significance of investigating frequencies and percentages of international cultural elements along with cultural representations of English cultures in textbooks is to show how biased the textbook developers have been towards western culture. The reasons for this imbalanced coverage, as discussed by Hamiloglu and Mendi (2010), might be related to either the perspectives of textbook writers, political limitations on textbook publishers, or policies of the local context. Taki (2008) indicates that the ELT materials developers in the English-speaking countries intend to demonstrate their cultural norms and values within the ELT materials prepared to be utilized at an international level to globally transfer the agenda of the inner circle. The findings of the content analysis acknowledged the fact that the grammar textbooks designed by English-speaking materials developers possess a hidden curriculum dealing with the illustration of cultural content in these textbooks. This might be justified by considering the fact that the political groups long to familiarize their language learners with their cultures’ voices and values and aim to transmit their cultural values through their materials.

It is necessary to have both target language culture and international cultures weighted on balance in textbooks. Taking into account the place of the international language of English and the importance of intercultural understanding as an imperative instrument for learners of English (Baker, 2012; Ho, 2009; Nault, 2006), and considering the fact that acquiring communicative language proficiency to some extent demands the representation of international culture (Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2015), the current study revealed that grammar textbooks might not make a contribution to the promotion of the intercultural understanding among learners, because the references made to international cultural elements from around the globe were few. Mass designed textbooks depict a single target culture that does not live up to the needs of learners learning an international language any longer. If textbooks are biased and fail to efficiently foster intercultural understanding among learners, a one-sided worldview in which learners prioritize specific nationalities, races, and groups over others would arise and they would not be able to understand cross-cultural diversities (Kobia, 2009).

Recognizing the significance of development of intercultural competence for successful interaction in diverse international settings, teachers need to establish “a sphere of interculturality” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 205) where teachers and learners can partake in continuous pondering on cultural learning. EFL teachers need to act as a cultural mediator by inviting learners to have in-depth examination of the attitudes, beliefs, values, and cultural practices that textbooks manifest and to utilize those reflections to associate with other cultures.

Textbook writers and materials developers also have to consider cultural representation and the creation of intercultural space within the classroom to promote the development of intercultural competence. In order to better integrate international culture in developing textbooks, they should include some cultural elements from non-English-speaking societies such as Asia, Africa, and Europe (with the exception of Britain) in the textbooks. For example, some cultural elements categorized as Products or Big C culture such as, literature (e.g., the painting of Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci), monuments (e.g., Taj Mahal in India), history (e.g., The second Punic War in
Spain), traditional food (e.g., Sushi), cultural elements categorized as Practices or Small C culture, such as, behaviors (e.g., different ways of greeting), dress code (e.g., kimono); artifacts, (e.g., flags, currency; entertainments, e.g., sports, games), cultural elements categorized as Perspectives, such as, the values and beliefs that represent subjective culture (e.g., concept of time, eye-contact,), cultural elements categorized as Persons, such as, well-known icons or individuals (e.g., the popular Italian actress, Sophia Loren or the famous Indian singer, Lata Mangeshkar) belonging to non-English-speaking societies should be included in the textbooks.

In order to engage a wider audience and present more cultural diversity, ELT grammar textbooks need to evenly distribute the cultural elements of English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries.

According to Alptekin (2002), textbooks should include both native with non-native discourse and non-native with non-native discourse, since developing successful bilinguals with intercultural knowledge and insight has become a significant pedagogical goal. That is, all cultural dimensions have to be integrated in the curriculum and textbooks, therefore, learners can develop linguistic as well as intercultural competence, and become communicatively competent.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study testified that although grammar textbooks are expected to be culturally neutral, they held a hidden agenda of prioritizing English native-speaking countries’ cultural norms and values. The findings call for an utterly intercultural approach to teaching culture in ELT contexts. The intercultural approach recognizes that English language does not solely belong to English native-speaking countries within the bounds of the world; it would bring learners into contact with diverse approaches of discerning reality and utilizing English from far-flung regions of the globe. Moreover, the myth considering the native speakers to be the only providers of English culture would be called into question by it, and finally, it would expand learners’ understanding, and their linguistic competence would be fostered to communicate effectively in intricate international contexts with individuals coming from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The absence of the Iranian culture and the scarce devotion to international cultures were the main problems of ESL grammar textbooks. It is necessary to have learners’ L1 culture integrated in ESL materials because, as McKay (2002) suggests, “it is essential that teachers institute a sphere or interculturality in English as an International Language (EIL) classrooms so that individuals gain insight into their own culture. These insights can then be shared in cross-cultural encounters undertaken in international contexts.” (p. 100). McKay (2003) adds that including source culture in ESL textbooks gives the learners the chance to learn more about their own culture and to gain knowledge of the language required to talk about these cultural elements in English.

The facilitation of the development of localized textbooks involving different facets of the L1 culture can present a solution to policymakers and curriculum designers. Moreover, local EFL teachers who might utilize diverse cultural comparison activities centered on the L1, the L2 and other cultures through pictures, texts, and video-clips to develop the intercultural sensitivity of their students can come up with another solution to the problem. Teacher education workshops and programs should be held to enhance teachers’ awareness that learners require some knowledge and realization of their own cultural identity so as to become interculturally competent. There is a need for them to be cognizant of cultural differences and make an endeavor to raise students’ awareness of such differences through discussions and complementary materials, rather than depending merely on textbooks. However, due to the fact that not all teachers in an EFL context have inevitably adequate intercultural competence themselves, they are not able to assume such responsibilities; therefore, teacher educators need to shoulder the responsibility to help teachers get ready for such issues. Ultimately, local language policymakers and materials
developers are required to value L2 and other cultures enough so as to make sure learners are exposed to interculturally rich materials.

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