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ScienceDirect

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 232 (2016) 217 – 225

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

International Conference on Teaching and Learning English as an Additional Language,
GlobELT 2016, 14-17 April 2016, Antalya, Turkey

An Analysis of Two Turkish EFL Books in Terms of Cultural Aspects

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate how culture is employed in English language textbooks, which are used for 3rd and 4th grade students in state schools in Turkey. The study explores the cultural content and the usage frequency of elements related to native culture, target culture and international culture in the series of textbooks. In order to analyse the series of textbooks, descriptive content analysis is used. Quantitative data are gathered through Checklist and Item Frequency Analysis. The results of the study indicate that 3rd grade textbook has more cultural items than 4th grade textbook does in total. The findings also point out that there is an unbalance among culture related items, which means native culture items are less than target and intercultural items in both 3rd and 4th grade textbooks. Consequently, this study also makes suggestions about how cultural load may be presented in those textbooks by indicating a need for rich cultural content.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of GlobELT 2016

Keywords: Textbooks; culture; teaching materials; interculture

1. Introduction

After World War II, nations' demographic characteristics have undergone a tremendous change in that people have begun to move from one country to another, which may make language-learning settings more diverse and changing. This change can alter the focus point in language education. Earlier focus was on form and function but this shift has placed the focus on exploring language in social contexts (Spolsky and Hult, 2008). That is, language use has gained importance.

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In 1970s, sociolinguistics was emphasized greatly and the concept of communicative competence was introduced by Hymes (Hinkel, 1999). It was claimed that attention should be attached not only to grammatical competence but also to language use in social contexts. Moreover, the term communicative competence was further detailed by Canale and Swain (1980) and they introduced some components to communicative competence such as grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. That is, language is not consisted of just forms and functions and teaching a language does not mean injecting the knowledge of a language through drills or imitation. Language has been seen as a social substance, which means it is not independent from the context in which it is produced. Therefore, it may not be sufficient for learners to utter correct forms of language; they are expected to use these forms appropriately according to the language context.

In 1990s, notion of intercultural communicative competence was on focus (Balboni & Caon, 2014) and culture was given place in second language pedagogy (Seel, 2012). Byram and Risager (1999) says: "Learning another language can contribute to people's understanding of and interest in people of other cultural origins whether in their own society, in geographically and politically related societies or in distant and unfamiliar societies". Byram (1997) maintains that a successful communication means not only the 'interchange of information' but also 'taking up other's perspective'. In other words, being communicatively competent may require language users to be equipped culturally. Interculturally competent people can interpret the relationships between cultures and can maintain an effective communication. Therefore, it would not be mistaken to suggest that intercultural competence has a vital role in language learning because language is not isolated from the culture. It is not possible to teach language without teaching cultural content (Alptekin, 1993) because if cultural aspect is missing in language teaching, learners cannot interpret the language that is embedded in that culture. Kramsch (1993) suggests: "Culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on; so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing. It is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them." That is to say, teaching culture may enable students to be familiarized with that language which would help them explore the language in context.

Integrating culture necessarily does not mean teaching merely target culture. Alptekin (as cited in Aguilar, 2010) asserts that if native speakers are taken as a model, language learner may feel that their own culture is in an inferior position or it is ignored. For this reason, in order to prevent learners' feeling inferior and to provide them an understanding of their native culture, their own culture can be given place in foreign language teaching. Also, teaching native culture can be helpful for learners to see the differences between two cultures and make cross-cultural analysis. (Straub, as cited in Thanasoulas, 2001). They can interpret how social variables can affect people's way of behaving and speaking.

Moreover, Firth (1996) defines English as a lingua franca, which is "contact language between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication." English is perceived as a common medium of interaction around the world, thus speakers may be required to use English to communicate with non-native speakers of English. However, having a good command of English grammar or vocabulary may not be sufficient for a well-established communication because learners may need to have intercultural knowledge and skills.

Equipping learners with intercultural knowledge may be through textbooks because it can be easily claimed that textbooks play a vital role in English language teaching. Textbooks may serve as helpful tools to guide teachers. Most probably, the teachers feel much safer with textbooks because they include several activities, exercises or tasks which teachers use while conveying their lessons.

As for teaching culture, it may be important to take the content of textbooks into consideration. The fact that some textbooks focus on elements from U.S or U.K may confine the target language to its native setting and this could be unrealistic and misleading (Alptekin *ibid*). Therefore, it is important to integrate an intercultural aspect so that the learners from other cultures can feel intimate with what is written. Otherwise, learners can find themselves in a totally strange and isolated environment (Iriskulova, 2012).

Turkey became a member of Council of Europe and accepted Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which puts the focus on interculturality. It is clear from what is mentioned in the framework of CEFR (2001).

"The CEFR provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, course books etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to

learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. The description also covers the cultural context in which language is set.” In other words, CEFR emphasizes necessary skills and knowledge in order to use a language considering its cultural context.

In Turkish context, when the textbooks, which are used in state schools throughout the country, are taken into consideration, it can obviously be seen that these books are claimed to be prepared according to CEFR. Namely, it is expected that those textbooks attach importance on cultural aspects. However, Demirbaş (2013) conducted a study in which she analyzed *My English for 5th grade*, *Unique for 6th grade*, *Spring for 7th grade* and *Four Seasons for 8th grade* in order to find out whether they include intercultural elements. The findings show that of all the books, *Four Seasons* had the most intercultural items, which consisted of mostly Turkish culture and a little Japanese, French and German. On the other hand, other textbooks seemed to include most items related with target culture but least items in intercultural area. That is, it seems that the balance could not be established in terms of including intercultural and target cultural items.

Özil (as cited in Er, 2006) conducted a similar research in which he analyzed *A Modern English Course book for Turks* which was used for 7th grade and found out that it included only native cultural items. In parallel with this study, Iriskulova (*ibid*) examined *Spot On*, which was used for 8th grade, and results presented that the book seemed to have small amount of native cultural elements and the cultural elements are generally related with target culture.

On logical grounds, these findings lend support to claim that the textbooks analyzed so far seem not to treat culture teaching in a well-balanced way. In other words, there is an unbalance in the integrity of native culture, target culture and international culture, which means cultural items are not distributed in a heterogeneous way.

In actual fact, there are several studies, which have been conducted for analyzing Turkish EFL textbooks; however, it appears that studies, which deal with the analysis of Turkish EFL textbooks for young learners, are limited. In this respect, this study might make a significant contribution to the research area. To put it another way, the data gathered in this study may be helpful for material developers.

2. Methodology

2.1. Purpose of the study

The aim of the present study is to analyze English language textbooks, which are used for 3rd and 4th grade students in state schools. The research questions, which will be addressed throughout the study, include:

What is the cultural content of the series of textbooks?

What is the frequency of elements regarding native culture, target culture and international culture in the textbooks for 3rd and 4th grade?

2.2. Data collection

In order to investigate how culture is employed in the series of textbooks, descriptive content analysis is used. Content analysis can deal with large volumes of material (U.S. General Accounting Service, 1996). Besides, in order to establish the frequency of culture related items, item frequency analysis technique is employed.

Two textbooks were sampled for the aim of this study:

Textbook for 3rd Grade by Özdağ DAĞLIOĞLU, Bilen Publishing, 2014, Ankara.

Textbook for 4th Grade by Serap TATLICIOĞLU, Açılım Publishing, 2014, Ankara.

These textbooks are Ministry of National Education authorized, which means all the state schools are obliged to use them. This is clearly indicated in Ministry of National Education’s Textbooks and Teaching Materials Regulations as in the following:

“It is not allowed for teachers to have students get any textbook or any other material which is not recognized by Ministry of National Education.” (Article No. 41 in Regulations of Course Books and Instructional Tools, 2009). That is, teachers are obliged to use these textbooks; consequently, they are expected to teach the syllabus which these textbooks prescribe. They are not allowed to use any other textbooks as a reference.

The textbooks analyzed in this study are comprised of 10 units. The textbook for 3rd grade does not contain any separate workbook unlike the textbook for 4th grade. The textbook for 4th grade has 66 listening records; whereas the other textbooks include 129 listening records.

2.3. Data analysis

Cultural content of these textbooks were analyzed through listening scripts. Visuals were not considered. For analyzing listening scripts, two data collection tools were selected: Checklist and Item Frequency Analysis. The checklist was utilized in order to analyze the cultural content, which is embedded in listening scripts on these textbooks. This checklist was originally developed by Iriskulova (*ibid*) and adapted for this study.

Also, Item Frequency Analysis was used in order to investigate the number of native cultural, target cultural and intercultural items

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. General information about the content of textbooks

Table 1: General information about the content of listening scripts on textbooks

Questions	Textbook for 3 rd grade	Textbook for 4 th grade
Is there any emphasis put on a certain culture? (specify on which culture?)	Interculture	Interculture and target culture
What cultures are present in the listening records?	Native, target and interculture	Native, target and interculture

As seen in the table, in two textbooks, it appears that target cultural and intercultural items are emphasized unlike native culture. Therefore, it can be concluded that textbooks lack in native cultural items.

Table 2: Detailed information about cultural content on listening records on textbooks

Questions	Textbook for 3 rd grade	Textbook for 4 th grade
Are the listening scripts realistic?	Not realistic.	Not realistic.
Are the listening scripts artificial?	Artificial.	Artificial.
Are the listening scripts interesting?	Yes. They include several chants and songs, also there are main children characters (Sue, Ann, Nick and Tom) with whom the book unfolds.	Yes. They include different children interlocutors with different voices.
Are the situations of the listening scripts familiar for students?	Yes.(child-to-child interaction)	Yes (child-to-child Interaction)
Are there any kinds of stereotyping towards any cultures? If yes, what kinds of	No.	No.

stereotyping are there?	Ataturk's house	No reference.
Are there any references to touristic places in Turkey?	(Unit 9) and Hagia Sophia (Unit 7).	No reference.
Are there any references to touristic places in target culture countries?	No reference.	No reference.
Are there any references to touristic places in other countries?	Taj Mahal, Great Pyramid of Giza and Akropolis (Unit 7)	No reference.
	Selin (Unit 4)	No reference.
Are there Turkish names used for the interlocutors?	No reference.	No reference.
Are there names of target culture countries used for the interlocutors?	Akira (Unit 2), Haruki and Allison (Unit 3), Liing from China,	
Are there names of other countries used for the interlocutors?	Augustin from Spain, Mark from France (Unit 4).	Tom and Jack (Student Book Unit 9) But their nationalities are not identified.
Are there unidentified interlocutors? (in terms of sex, age, culture)	There are leading characters which appear at each unit: Sue, Tom, Ann, Nick. Their nationalities are not identified. Also, there are many names used (Jasmine, Kelly, Simon, Kate, Fred etc) throughout the book but they are	Regarding art, cartoon characters can be taken into consideration.
Are there any references to any type of	unidentified in terms of	(Student book Unit 4 & Unit

art, music or literature of any culture?	culture.	6)
Are there any references to famous people of any country?	Scottish bagpipe (Unit 3)	Turkish comedian Ata Demirer and Turkish singer Hadise (Unit 9); Famous scientist Archimedes (Unit 6)
Are there any references to traditions of any culture?	Atatürk (in the phrase 'Atatürk's house in Unit 9.)	Traditional clothing of Japanese is described:
	Traditional houses are presented: Igloo from Canada, Yurt from Mongolia and Tree Houses from New Guinea (Unit 6) Traditional Italian food Spaghetti is mentioned. (Unit 4)	Kimono from Japan (Student Book Unit 2) Also, traditional foods are presented: cupcake, pasta, Italian food Pizza, Japanese food Sushi, Turkish food Kebab, British food fish&chips and Chinese food Rice, Turkish delight, American food doughnut and Belgium desert waffle. (Student Book Unit 10)
Are there any references to the behavior of any culture?		No reference.
In what situations are the interlocutors found?		There is an unidentified situation.
	No reference.	
	In Unit 9,	

Does the cultural information presented in the texts reflect the present or past time?	some interlocutors from different countries are indicated in Turkish cities. (Ex: Mary is in Antalya or Alice is in Trabzon)	They are about present time.
		They are about present time.

Firstly, the dialogues may not seem realistic because the interlocutors (whatever their nationalities are) speak target language accent. It could be better if some interlocutors pronounced target language with their L1 accents in order to get an idea about their accents. Nevertheless, in the series of textbooks, which are analyzed in this study, there are interlocutors from different countries but they speak the same accent. This may make the interlocutors' situation unclear because it may get difficult to understand which interlocutor is in which context (target culture, culture-neutral setting or other cultures setting).

Secondly, the situations included in listening scripts are familiar to students and they are interesting because they include child-to-child interaction and there are songs and chants for the students. The books unfold with leading characters, which appear, on dialogues, which make the book interesting for students because the younger learners may like to follow them.

What is more, for the textbook for 3rd grade, there is a special page left at the end of each unit, which is 'My World'. In that page, there is information about target culture and other cultures mostly, which means home culture is underestimated. Also, there is just one interlocutor from Turkey (Selin, Unit 4). There can be some other Turkish interlocutors. Thus, learners may find something common between themselves and the language of textbook. If home culture is underestimated in any way, students may feel isolated or alien toward language learning as Zue and Kong (2009) say: "One of the goals of language teaching is to train culturally double-directional learners who know about both their native culture and target one, rather than to train totally native like behavior imitators who cast their eyes solely on target culture."

Also, in the textbook for 4th grade, there are cartoon characters which may be considered as art of target culture countries: Superman, Luky Luke, Tom (from Tom&Jerry), Little Mermaid, Avarel from Dalton Brothers, Garfied, Yogi Bear, Olive from Popeye, and Tweety in Unit 4. Merely Pink Panther's country of origin is France, which may be counted as a reference to other countries' art and Keloğlan also is used regarding native culture (Unit 6). It could be seen that some information about tradition, art, music, and famous people is given but it seems that they are mostly related with other cultures.

Furthermore, in the textbook for 3rd grade, there are some items which are not found to be in the checklist such as animals which are described as references to other cultures (North Atlantic Whale, Chinese White Dolphin, Carribean Sharpnose Shark in Unit 10; kangaroo and polar bear in Unit 3; and penguin in Unit 9) and transportation vehicles (American School Bus, Philippines' Jeepney and London's Sightseeing Bus). Besides, in the textbook for 4th grade, there are interlocutors from Spain, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, Japan, Greece and Germany. They express how they say 'thank you' in their native languages. For example, Greek boy says: 'Efharisto' (Student book, Unit 1). This kind of information about other cultures might be beneficial for language learners as they help them to be familiar with the culture.

In order to investigate the number of native, target and interculture related items, frequencies of items are calculated as it is presented in Table 3. However, the items related with countries and nationalities in the Unit of Children's Day on the textbook for 4th grade are not counted as it seems that the objective is teaching and practicing the vocabulary of nationalities/countries and that there is no further information related with culture. To add, geographical locations are taken into consideration and in both of the textbooks, the repeated items are counted as different items in order to find out which culture is emphasized throughout the books.

Table 3: The frequency of culture related items in the scripts of textbook for 3rd grade and 4th grade

Textbook	Native Culture	Target Culture	International Culture	Total
Textbook for 3 rd grade	22	24	51	97
Textbook for 4 th grade	11	19	23	53
Total	33	43	74	150

As seen in the table 3, the textbook for 3rd grade has more cultural items than the 4th grade book in total and international items have the highest frequency in it. In the textbook for 4th grade, native culture items are the least and there is a slight imbalance among culture related items. To conclude, cultural items related to target culture constitute the smallest part for both textbooks.

4. Conclusion

For the series of textbooks in this study, it seems that they are successful in conveying intercultural knowledge. Learning about interculture might foster empathy towards other cultures and enable learners venture beyond their personal boundaries; they can have a chance to understand and to be understood by others. However, it can be suggested that native culture is needed to be emphasized more. Straub (as cited in Thanasoulas *ibid*) indicates that native culture should be included because learners can get ready to make reflections about values, beliefs and traditions of others by exploring their own culture. Learning about both own culture and other cultures may be fruitful because learners can have the chance to see the differences between cultures and they may learn how to tolerate these differences.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my special thanks to TÜBİTAK that provides a scholarship for my study.

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