

# The Compatibility of Cultural Value in Iranian EFL Textbooks

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**Abstract**—One of the major issues in critical linguistics and language education is analyzing the ideological content of textbooks. The dialectical connection between language and culture has always been a concern of L2 teachers and educators. Therefore, in this paper, the researcher has looked for the cultural values depicted in EFL books and tried to find their influence on Iranian learners as well as, the differences between cultural and language among learners and assesses the relative importance of language. In this study, one set of textbooks - interchange series- that are taught in English language institute in Iran are analyzed. The cultural values portrayed in these books were extracted, defined and exemplified in this paper. This study depicts that new interchange series do contain cultural values. However, shows that cultural impact does not occur through one book only. On the other word, the results found by the researcher indicated that these cultural values did not influence learners studying these books differently from those who study English through another set of books.

**Index Terms**—cultural impact, students, teacher, first language, L2

## I. INTRODUCTION

Currently, English is the most widely spoken language in the world. Due to its spread, starting with the colonization period and continuing with the economic and political power of the U.S.A., it has been used for different purposes around the world such as education, commerce, tourism, and science. People all around the world continue to learn English to reach their different aims (Kramsch, 2001).

The dialectical connection between language and culture has always been a concern of L2 teachers and educators. Whether culture of the target language is to be incorporated into L2 teaching has been a subject of rapid change throughout language teaching history. In the course of time, the pendulum of ELT practitioners' opinion has swung against or for teaching culture in context of language teaching. For example, during the first decades of the 20th century researchers discussed the importance and possibilities of including cultural components into L2 curriculum (Rajagopalan, 2004); the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the late 70s marks a critical shift for teaching culture, for the paradigm shift from an approach based largely on form and structure to a plurality of approaches causing an unintended side effect: the negligence of culture (Pulverness, 2003).

Recent studies focus on the seamless relationship between L2 teaching and target culture teaching, especially over the last decade with the writings of scholars such as Byram (1997) and Kramsch (2001). People involved in language teaching have again begun to understand the intertwined relation between culture and language (Pulverness, 2004). It has been emphasized that without the study of culture, teaching L2 is inaccurate and incomplete. For L2 students, language study seems senseless if they know nothing about the people who speak the target language or the country in which the target language is spoken. Acquiring a new language means a lot more than the manipulation of syntax and lexicon. According to Bada (2000), "the need for cultural literacy in ELT arises mainly from the fact that most language learners, not exposed to cultural elements of the society in question, seem to encounter significant hardship in communicating meaning to native speakers". In addition, nowadays the L2 culture is presented as an interdisciplinary core in many L2 curricula designs and textbooks (Rajagopalan, 2004).

A critical question arises in terms of English language teaching at this point, that is, whether to teach 'culture' along with English or not. The question of teaching 'culture' along with English has been discussed by some scholars from the fields of applied linguistics and sociolinguistics for nearly two decades. There are four views regarding the issue. The first one states that 'target language culture' should be taught along with English to acculturate language learners into the cultures of English speaking countries (Byram, 1990; Byram & Flemming, 1998). The second view states that there should not be any teaching of the 'target language culture' together with English in the countries where English is an institutionalized variety (Kachru, 1985, 1986; Kachru & Nelson, 1996; Canagarajah, 1999). Other two views also reject the idea of teaching 'target language culture' along with English. However, while one of the views supports the teaching of 'local culture' in English language teaching (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996; McKay, 2003b), the other view holds the position that English has become a lingua franca and it should be taught in a culture-free context (Alptekin, 2005; Jenkins, 2005; Seidlhofer, 2001). In order to explore the role of 'culture' in English language teaching, several empirical studies were conducted. However, most of the studies focus on English language teachers.

The present study aims to investigate the cultural impact of EFL books and opinions of the Persian English language learners in English as foreign language classes.

## II. LANGUAGE

The first, home, or dominant language(s) of English language learners (ELLs) may vary according to multiple factors such as phonology or sound system; morphology or the way in which words are formed and used; syntax, or the way in which words and sentences are combined to produce coherent speaking or writing; and style, or the manner in which language is delivered (WIDA Consortium, 2007). The qualities and characteristics of language may vary greatly from one to another as contrasted with English; as a result, it is important to recognize that one or a combination of certain characteristics may help and/or hinder academic English development (Jenkins, 2000).

Language as defined by Cook (1999) is a system of human communication. This system of communication is used to convey needs, requirements, requests, wishes, desires and ideas. It is through this system that people come into contact with each other emotionally and culturally and exchange their needs and points of view.

However, it should not be forgotten that people are not the same under their skin. Even if they do look alike, people tend to have different points of view, they tend to look at the same things but have entirely different perceptions (Freeman, David and Yvonne, 2004). This is because different people have different worldviews. They see the world differently and parse in accordingly.

Due to this difference in outlooks, people see the world and truth differently. It is language, which gives voice to ideas and outlooks, and hence through language, the differences become known and apparent. It is through language that through is verbalized, and again it is through language that ideas or points of view can be conveyed and proven for others to accept (Jenkins, 2005).

Such a phenomenon is widely and frequently seen in courts. Someone has committed a crime and his/her lawyer is paid to prove otherwise. The outlook on the issue is changed, the whole incident is looked at from another angle, and, therefore, the truth is distorted. The instrument used to carry out the above scenario is language. Therefore, it can be said language is manipulated to sentence the accused or set him/her free. Therefore, language is a very powerful tool, if in the hands of a master, to influence those who are at the receiving end (Freeman et. al., 2004).

This powerful tool, language, is learned by infants all over the world and by a lot of adolescents and adults. A second language is usually learned by adults and adolescents in a classroom with a book and the help of a teacher.

Mankind is and has always been a gregarious creature. Life has always been lived in societies since antiquity. This is the life that mankind is made for. However, in order to live such a life in peace there should be some laws and regulations that will ensure harmony and uniformity in the society. These laws and regulations are recognized in the form of cultural. Culture is a set of beliefs, attitudes, customs, behaviour and social habits of a community (Richards et al., 1992). Thus, culture is the glue that binds the community together. In this paper that is used for learning a language were also implemented specific ideas, values and points of view; this phenomenon will be delved into in this study.

## III. CULTURE

"Culture" in the contemporary teaching of languages included these aspects, but much more attention is paid to the everyday lifestyle of ordinary and the values, beliefs and prejudices they share with their fellows within their linguistics and social group, with due attention to intergroup differences. Culture establishes for each person a context of cognitive and affective behaviour, a blueprint for personal and social existence. But, tend to perceive reality strictly within the context of our own culture; this is reality that we have created, not necessarily objective reality, if needed there is any such thing as objectivity in its ultimate sense (Kramsch, 2001).

Culture as defined by Llorca (2004) is synonymous with the "ways of the people". More often than not the ways of a people are praised by that same people while looked upon with suspicion or disapproval by the others, and often in both cases with surprisingly little understanding of what those ways really are and mean. Llorca assumed that cultures are structured systems of patterned behaviours.

Llorca (2004) contended that we couldn't hope to compare two cultures unless we have more accurate understanding of each of the cultures being compared. We must be able to eliminate the things we claim to do but actually don't do. We must be able to describe the things we do without being conscious of doing them, and we must make sure we are able to describe practice accurately, not haphazardly, and we must be able to describe the situations in which we do what we do.

## IV. COMPARISON OF CULTURES

If the native culture habits are transferred when learning a foreign culture, it is obvious that, by comparing the two culture systems, the troubles spots will be predictable. This is of course a huge undertaking. Llorca (2004)) presented a few examples to facilitate cultural analysis and comparison such as follows: a) same form, different meaning, b) same meaning, different form, and c) same form, same meaning, different distribution.

The notion filtered through the above types of misinformation and through others becomes part of the native culture as its 'correct' view of the reality of the foreign one, and as young members grow up they receive these views as truth

through verbal reports and all the other vehicles of enculturation. These preconceived notions constitute very serious obstacles to the understanding of another culture (Jenkins, 2000, 2005).

## V. LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

The native language is learned along with the ways and attitudes of the social group, and these ways and attitudes find expression through the language. In this way the language is an integral part of the functioning social system. The psychologist Osgood (1957 as cited in Modiano, 2001) set out a theory of language "meaning" which maintains that the full meaning of words for individuals is the result of the sum total of experiences they have had with those words in the environment in which they learned them. Since members of a cultural group have had similar experiences, the meaning of a word is shared by them all, but it may differ in certain respects from the meaning this word has for other groups. It is because of this interrelationship of language and culture that one-to-one equivalences can rarely be established between words and expressions in two languages, once one has passed beyond the stage of physical identification of objects. Even here there will be divergences, as the speakers of one language will have identified certain criteria attributes and categories, according to their environmental needs, which may not correspond with the attributes and categories of another language. As Cummins, (2000) stated that "each language lays down its boundaries within the amorphous 'thought-mass' and stresses different factors in it in different arrangements, puts the centres of gravity in different places and gives them different emphases". McKay (2003) contends that culture influences language teaching in two ways, linguistic and pedagogical. Linguistically, it affects the semantic, pragmatic and discourse levels of the language. Pedagogically, it influences the choice of the language materials because cultural content of the language materials and the cultural basis of the teaching methodology are to be taken into consideration while deciding upon the language materials. For example, while some textbooks provide examples from the target culture, some others use source culture materials.

### A. Attitudes toward Other Cultures

One of the major hurdles to the successful implementation of culture goals in language classes revolves around attitudes. Before students can learn about culture, they must be receptive to the concept of learning about cultures other than their own (Alptekin, 2002). Often the teacher has to break down cultural barriers prior to initiating teaching learning activities designed to accomplish cultural goals. One way to begin teaching culture on a positive note is to emphasize similarities among people. From this beginning, the students can move to a discussion of differences among members of their family and among families, schools and cultures. This approach stresses that similarities are presented in all cultures and that differences in the expression of these similarities are natural (Chastain, 1988). Chastain (1988) examined attitudes towards culture from three perspective:

### B. Society

The students' environment exerts a tremendous influence on their receptivity to the learning of cultural concepts. If the students are from a society that is cosmopolitan and they are familiar with cultural diversity, they will be more ready to study and benefit from cultural content (Hofstede, Geert and Hofstede, 2005). On the other hand, students who are products of a rather closed society will probably have less interest in other cultures and subcultures. Teachers should take societal factors into consideration when selecting culture goals and culture content. What can be done will be determined by the local situation. The paradox is that those students most in need of developing cultural awareness and cultural sensitivities are normally those who are least disposed toward these goals (Chastain, 1988).

### C. Teachers

The attitude of the teacher is a crucial factor in determining the extent to which cultural objectives are attained. If she expects all the students to love the second culture as much as she does, she is certain to be disappointed. If she attempts to indoctrinate the students with attitudes from the second culture, she will most likely be rejected by the majority of her students. If she attempts to criticize the students' own culture, she may arouse negative, counterproductive feeling. In short, the teacher should not insist that the students emulate her own affinity for and commitment to the second culture, as much as she may be predisposed to do so. The teacher's task is to make students aware of cultural differences, not pass value judgments on those differences. She is to acquaint, not indoctrinate (Chastain, 1988).

Kang (1992) emphasized this point by saying, "to understand another set of rules for living does not necessarily mean that old patterns are wrong and to be rejected. To do so may mean a loss of cultural identity and regulation to the permanent status of the marginal stranger everywhere".

Obviously, students are more familiar with their own culture than any other and they prefer it. This attitude is normal and healthy because they, like everyone else, need to identify themselves with some cultural group. Kang (1992) expressed that this basic need as follows: "Ethnocentrism, or adherence to a given set of cultural options adjudged right, is a natural and necessary human attitude".

### D. Students

Ethnocentrism has often been painted in negative terms, but such a reaction is not entirely justified (Chastain, 1988). Each individual must make choices as to the desirable behaviour patterns by which his life is most comfortable and

most productive. In modern society, most individuals do not maintain in unaltered form all the cultural patterns of their parents, but neither is it possible for any individual to divorce himself entirely from his cultural heritage (McDevitt, 2004). To exist as a socio-cultural entity all cultures must, by definition, conform to some system of shared beliefs and behaviour patterns. To the extent to which anyone deviates from the native culture patterns depends on the individual. From both the individual and societal points of view, ethnocentrism has its good aspects and it's bad. When the critics decry ethnocentrism, they are actually referring to the myopic extreme that refuses to consider any viewpoint other than that of its own culture (Garcia, 2002).

## VI. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Research on the relationship between education, ideology and power has become one of the most important subjects in the field of critical linguistics and language education (Baik and Shim, 1997). Apple (1993) discussed how the school curriculum serves as the medium through which socially accepted knowledge is propagated, regulated and legitimized. In this discussion, he equates the process of education with the accumulation of legitimized knowledge. The goal of education, then, is seen as the attainment of power that can be translated as the right to 'name the world' (Apple, 1993).

Apple (1993) further went on to assert that the contents of the educational curriculum of any nation or society are made up of "official knowledge" that has been selected by specific groups within the society whose accumulated power of knowledge enables them "to help select the formal corpus of school knowledge" (Apple, 1993). In Foucault's (1980) terms, such as educational curriculum would constitute the core of that which is considered as the 'regime of truth' for any given nation or society. Other scholars (Fiske, Hodge & Turner, 1987) have pointed out that 'culture' acts as the medium of "a procedure and reproducer of value systems and power relations". However, it is also questionable whether language education materials should be absolutely free of ideological content and cultural values, and whether it is even possible to completely take out ideology or culture from language textbooks. Most nations adopt some kind of national curriculum and it is usually designed to promote the ideals that the people of the nation share. Saravanan (1995) stated that, in Singapore, education is an instrument to socialize school going children to create identification and commitment for social cohesion.

Therefore, the problem to be considered is not whether there are values in language teaching materials, but what kind of value is portrayed in them, whether these values influence the language learners and how teachers handle culture in their classroom. The purpose of this study is to try to find out what this tool comprises besides "a system of sounds and structure". It has become clear that the present study is going to analyze the Institute Books. This analysis will determine the cultural value portrayed in these books. In order to find the cultural values in EFL textbooks in Iran and their impact on the users of such books, the following objectives have been raised:

1. What cultural values exist in Institute textbooks (New-Interchange I) taught in Iran?
2. What cultural values exist in Institute textbooks (New-Interchange II) taught in Iran?
3. What cultural values exist in Institute textbooks (New-Interchange III) taught in Iran?

## VII. METHOD AND PROCEDURE

This study is a critical linguistic study of EFL books in which were employed to teach English in some private English language institute in Iran. With roots in communication studies, content analysis focuses on the characteristics of materials and asks "What meaning is reflected in these?" Content or document analysis is a kind of qualitative research method applied to written or visual materials for the purpose of identifying specified characteristics of the material. The materials analysed can be textbooks, newspapers, web pages, speeches, advertisements, musical compositions or any of a host of other type documents. In this study, in order to find the cultural values one series book was chosen as an instrument. This book was the New Interchange series in which comprise three books: new interchange I, new interchange II and new interchange III that each of them comprises 130 pages approximately and have a workbook, as well. These textbooks were read and analyzed to find out the clash of cultural values; the abbreviations of the book's name are as follows: N.I 1: New Interchange I, N.I 2: New interchange II, and N.I 3: New Interchange III.

These books were scrutinized for the cultural values they held. These cultural values were then collected and their frequency of occurrences noted down. At this stage, it became apparent what cultural values are portrayed in such books. To clarify the meaning of each of cultural values is needed a definition is given for each cultural value so for determining the clash of cultural value Thompson framework is applied. In Thompson's (1984) framework of analysis, the concept that links education and power relation is 'ideology', which he defined as "the ways in which meaning serves to sustain relations of domination". A brief outline of the cultural values - based on Thompson (1984) rubrics- included in these books will be given to provide the bigger picture and later the values explained in detail as follows:

### *Outline of cultural values*

1. Hegemony of English which has to do with English speaking countries.
2. Consumerism
- 2.1. Entertainment

### 3. Personal Issues

#### 3.1. Personal characteristics and values

#### 3.2. Health

##### 3.2.1 Physiological health

##### 3.2.2 Psychological health and family relationships

### 4. Social issues

#### 4.1. Education

#### 4.2. Equality of sexes

#### 4.3. Non-Islamic values

## VIII. RESULT & DISCUSSION

The critical linguistic analysis of the EFL books gave rise to a set of values that were found in these books. Some of these values were similar to the values held in the Iranian society and some were different. In order to answer the "what cultural values exist in English textbooks written abroad and taught in Iran?" and to clarify the meaning of each of these values, a definition is given for each cultural value.

The analysis was carried out and the cultural values in EFL books were found. These books have inside them many cultural values that are explained in details. The frequency of the cultural values in each of the books analyzed is presented based on alphabetic order in the following table.

The cultural values portrayed in these sets of EFL books are found. Now, when one of these books was taught the learners, teachers and program developers will know what the learner is learning other than language or through the language.

A close look at the outline of cultural values will show that these values have to do with Iranian everyday life. Incidents that happen to each of people every day and are a part of their lives, therefore, they are very realistic and can be used and may become part of the learners' value system.

One of the main values found is "Hegemony of English". What this means is that everything that has to do with the English language and the countries in which English is spoken is considered superior. In these books, the main example of such a situation is England. As it can be seen, England, the English language, English cooking, and English way of life are all depicted as superior.

It is needless to say that the English are a very shrewd and clever people and don't conquer the world through power. They have thought of subtle means to do so. One way is the one that can be seen in such books. The learners are taught very cleverly an indirectly that whatever is English is good. The learners is so busy learning the language that's/he doesn't stop to question the content of the book, s/he accepts what is written and passes on. This knowledge therefore, becomes part of his/her value system (Santa Ana, 2004).

This can also be realized in the reaction of people all around the world to Western countries and especially England. People all around the world, particularly, from the developing nations have a conception that life in the Western World is synonyms with heaven. This idea has been formed through the picture given by such countries given by such countries and by the Western countries have presented themselves. When all the people who want to immigrate are taken into account it is seen that the presentation has worked and the conception has truly been formed in the minds of these people and they aren't few in number, but very numerous and therefore, it can be said that the technique was successful.

TABLE.I.  
CULTURAL VALUES FOUND IN NEW INTERCHANGE SERIES

Cultural Value	Frequency		
	N.I. 1	N.I. 2	N.I. 3
Charity	-	1	1
Consumerism	1	1	1
Divorce	1	-	-
Education	-	-	2
Environmental Awareness	-	-	2
Exercise	4	-	-
Family Relation	-	1	1
Fashion	2	-	-
Film Industry	2	3	2
Friendship	-	-	2
Hard Work	1	4	2
Health	3	1	-
Holidaymaking	7	7	-
Honesty	-	1	-
Innovation	-	1	-
Music Library	2	-	-
Non-Islamic Value	-	1	2
Planning	1	-	-
Punctuality	-	-	1
Raising Children	-	-	1
Respecting the Law	-	-	1
Responsibility	-	1	-
Risk Taking	-	-	1
Smoking	-	1	-
Television	2	-	-
Valuing Experience	-	-	2
Wealth	-	1	-
Working Women	1	-	-

The second most frequent value that is presented is consumerism. In today's world where a saying goes, "Work, Buy, Consume, Die", this is a very just value. The human race has become a mechanism, the utmost of happiness in the world today is to be able to work, make a lot of money, buy, use and die somewhere in this loop, while you have done nothing else with your life (Pulverness, 2004). People have become nuts and bolts in the huge economics machine. And if this machine is to work well, people have to be trained to be a part of it.

The third and forth cultural values have to do with personal and social concerns. These are concerned with those issues which people face every day of their lives. In this part, the book tries to give awareness about different concerns of everyday life. For example, matters relating to health are very information and may be very helpful for the learner who doesn't have any information about them. Different approaches to child-raising are discussed as well which can be very enlightening.

It is needless to say that such values depict the way of life of the target culture and aren't necessarily similar to the way Iranian see the world. It is life seen through the eyes of other people who don't necessarily look at life as we do.

The social concerns in these books are a bit different from Iran. For example, there are values that were named Non-Islamic values. These cultural values are entirely different from the values Iranian hold as a way of life. These values are not accepted in Iran as the norm of the society. Understandably, lots of parents do not like to expose their children to cultural values so different from their own, when the child is not fully grown and his/her children be brought up with the cultural values held in their own native society. However, parents see these EFL books as teaching their children what they would not like them to learn.

## IX. CONCLUSION

Culture has always been a part of human life and it is the invisible net that binds human beings together. Culture, just like language is an abstract phenomenon. Other than this commonality these two concepts are intertwined and it can be said that language is a vehicle of realization for culture.

In today's world English has become the international language and the language of technology. Therefore, native speakers of all other language feel a need to learn English if they want to survive in today's world. This learning of English may vary from one or two years to many more years so that the learners can acquire proficiency in the language. Needless to say, besides learning the language, the learners are also learning the culture of the target language being learnt. This target language in most cases is English. Therefore, the learner is becoming acquainted with the cultural values held and practiced in the society in which English is spoken. However, the question arises as to whether these values do influence the learners of the language or not. This research strived to find the cultural values portrayed in EFL books in Iran and the next step was to see if these values influenced the learners to create what is called cultural impact.

In the next step, as already explained in the previous parts, the researcher has investigated for the cultural values depicted in EFL books and tried to find their influence on Iranian learners. The results indicated that these cultural

values did not influence learners studying these books differently from those who study English through another set of books. As a matter of fact those learners who study English through the books published by the Ministry of Education were similar in their cultural system to those who had studied English through New Interchange.

Consequently, the results found by the researcher are interesting and comforting to those who are worried about their children's cultural values. This is very good news to those people who worry about the phenomenon of cultural attack. They can now rest assured that this doesn't happen through English textbooks. Of course, if English textbooks are accompanied by other means of foreign input that would be another questions, for other researchers to answer. This study has worked on books teaching English and learners of English, therefore, it has some ideas to add to the field and some implications for TEFL.

#### X. IMPLICATION

In Iran as an Islamic country, at the moment there is a lot of worry about the phenomenon of cultural impact and the stronger version; cultural attack. This is because the cultural values which as an Islamic society live with are very different from those which Western Countries live by. One of the main worries of many parents and the elders of our society is that children will be influenced by the cultural values portrayed in books designed by writers living in foreign countries and holding other culture values.

This study, however, shows that cultural impact does not occur through one book only. If these cultural values are presented in one book which is used for teaching English it does not become part of the learners' belief system, therefore, there is no cause for worry. Those people who want to preserve Islamic culture can rest assured that foreign books will not higher with their work.

This study shows that new interchange series do contain cultural values. This presentation of values is done in a subtle and clever way. This can be a good model. When syllabus designers and material developers start planning books which include cultural values, they can take this possibility into account.

On the other hand, if look at foreign books without bias, will see that there are positive values from our point of view, as well. Therefore, the learners in Iran can be encouraged to learn the positive values depicted in these books. These can be values such as perseverance, planning and problem solving. When make sure that those books will not harm learners, teachers, society and culture; can be then start to employ them to improve learners life.

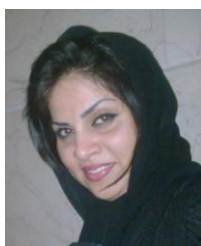
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