

## THE REPRESENTATION OF CULTURES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS: A COMPARISON OF THREE TEXTBOOKS USED IN TURKEY

### İNGİLİZCE DERS KİTAPLARINDA KÜLTÜRLERİN TEMSİLİ: TÜRKİYE'DE KULLANILAN ÜÇ DERS KİTABININ KARŞILAŞTIRILMASI

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#### ABSTRACT

Numerous studies have been conducted in the field of foreign or second language teaching related to the inclusion of cultural elements in foreign language textbooks. In this study, the reading passages from three different textbooks were examined in terms of four components of culture with the help of a checklist prepared by the researchers. One of the textbooks under examination is local, one is localized and one is global. In addition, the opinions of 14 English teachers were taken using two open-ended questions and a simple frequency analysis was carried out. The results indicated that Turkish EFL teachers believe the necessity of the inclusion of world cultures in ELT textbooks and most of them prefer using global ones. It was seen that local and localized textbooks do not possess the qualities which the names suggest. Finally, suggestions were made for textbook developers.

**Keywords:** ELT textbook, home culture, international culture, target culture

#### ÖZ

Yabancı dil ders kitaplarına kültürel unsurların dâhil edilmesi ile ilgili olarak, yabancı dil veya ikinci dil öğretimi alanında çok sayıda çalışma yapılmıştır. Bu çalışmada, araştırmacılar tarafından hazırlanan bir kontrol listesi yardımıyla, üç farklı ders kitabındaki okuma parçaları dört kültür bileşeni açısından incelenmiştir. İncelenen ders kitapları, yerel, yerelleştirilmiş ve küresel ders kitaplarından oluşmaktadır. Ayrıca iki açık uçlu soru ile 14 İngilizce öğretmeninin görüşleri alınmış ve basit bir frekans analizi yapılmıştır. Sonuçlar, Türk İngilizce öğretmenlerinin, dünya kültürlerinin İngilizce ders kitaplarına dâhil edilmesi gerektiğine inandıklarını ve çoğunun küresel ders kitaplarını kullanmayı tercih ettiğini göstermiştir. Yerel ve yerelleştirilmiş ders kitaplarının önerdikleri niteliklere sahip olmadıkları görülmüştür. Son olarak, ders kitabı yazarları için önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İngilizce ders kitabı, yerel kültür, uluslararası kültür, hedef kültür

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## 1. Introduction

In addition to the fact that textbooks have an extremely important place in foreign language programs, they are often the largest source of the linguistic input and the language practice (Richards, 2002). According to Liu (2016), textbooks greatly influence teaching and they help a lot in lesson planning, provide a wide range of tasks and resources, and present topics that need to be covered.

Textbooks generally present a specific way of looking at the whole world through the cultural view of the author. Culture and language are closely related. Culture is present whatever the language discussion is (Ahmed & Narcy-Combes, 2011). In that, language is not just an instrument of communication as it affects both our culture and thought processes (Kırkgöz & Ağçam, 2011).

Since language use is generally connected to cultural values, language itself is regarded as a cultural phenomenon. Çakır (2006) states that understanding a language involves certain features and specialities of culture as well as the knowledge of lexis, phonology and grammar. Each culture has its own norms, and they can vary from culture to culture.

## 2. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to compare three textbooks for teaching English - one local, one localized and one global - in the context of culture. The local textbook was developed by a native speaker of Turkish for Turkish learners of English. The localized textbook was developed by two native speakers of English for Turkish EFL learners. The global textbook was developed by three native speakers of English for all EFL/ESL learners around the world. The study also intends to find out the textbook preferences of English teachers in Turkey. This study is unique in terms of comparing these three types of textbooks and presenting the opinions of English teachers about them. The present study aims to seek answers to the two main questions as follows:

1. Do the textbooks adopt an international, target, or local policy toward culture?
2. Do the teachers/instructors of English prefer local, localized or global textbooks? Why?

### 3. Literature Review

Textbooks used in ELT classrooms create a world for students. This world, in fact, is the world seen through the eyes of the authors. In this world of the authors, students learn about culture only as much as they are taught. The way local culture, target culture and other cultures are handled in certain ELT textbooks is the basis of this study.

Textbooks are universal elements of language teaching. Anjaneyulu (2014) expresses that the use of ELT textbooks is more widespread than before because they provide EFL teachers with guidelines on teaching methodologies, syllabus, and the materials to be taught. According to Richards (2012), textbooks provide syllabi for programmes, standardize instruction, maintain quality, provide a wide range of resources for learning, save time, provide language models and input for teachers, train teachers and they are appealing. On the other hand, textbooks may have some potential negative effects such as involving inauthentic language, having distorted content, not reflecting needs of students, deskilling teachers and being expensive (Richards, 2012).

As Hutchinson and Torres (1994) state, the trouble with textbooks is that they may seem to absolve teachers from responsibility. It is effortless to sit back and just operate the system instead of being involved in the daily decision-making process of what to teach and how to teach it. Most teachers believe that authors of textbooks are wise and virtuous and they can produce the best material for them. Nevertheless, this might not always be the case.

It is generally believed that textbooks are the most common language teaching materials. They guide the learning process and they fulfil the functions of teachers (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). Tomlinson (2008) draws attention to the role of textbooks as de-skillers and emphasizes that overreliance on textbooks may result in failure of many learners. Classroom texts do not engage learners affectively and cognitively; they focus on linguistic items only. Therefore, he believes students do not participate in meaningful communication because of textbooks and meaningful communication is necessary for the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Besides, he argues that textbooks are often designed to prepare students for standardized exams, which do not measure cultural elements. These educational contexts strengthen the trouble

of ‘teaching to the test,’ and as a consequence, they do not give priority to the inclusion of cross-cultural issues (Byram and Feng, 2005).

Assessing the cultural components of EFL textbooks is a great concern (Liu, 2016). General English textbooks gradually incorporate more intercultural dimensions, and analysing such constituent has attracted growing attention in the EFL field (Chen, 2011). The increasing interest suggests the significance of cultural elements in facilitating intercultural teaching.

Language use brings out social rules that require a good understanding of the context where the language is used. Thus, students end up with inevitable culture-specific contexts of the foreign language class. Alptekin (2002) suggests that foreign language learning is a kind of enculturation, in which students acquire new cultural reference frames and a new view of the world.

The mixture of culture and language is one of the central interests of language pedagogy. This integration is consistently becoming more crucial with the growing role of English as a lingua franca. For this reason, integration of cultural elements into language teaching materials is vital so as to break the ice for the development of ICC. It has so far been alleged that government-issued EFL textbooks used in Turkey generally fail to establish a meaningful connection between local and target cultures (Çelik & Erbay, 2013).

The spread of English language has developed the concept of ICC, which has utmost importance in English language teaching. Textbooks used in EFL and ESL classes are expected to incorporate various amounts of intercultural elements (Çelik & Erbay, 2013). Many linguists (i.e. McKay, 2000; Alptekin, 2002; Kılıçkaya, 2004) emphasize the integration of culture into EFL/ESL teaching materials.

It is important for modern language textbooks to serve as means of diverse cultures since English has gradually become depoliticized and culture-neutral in the process of separation from its native speaking sources (Buttjes, 1991, pp. 6-7). Alptekin (2002) argues the requirement of avoiding the adherence to teaching target culture only, claiming that this policy is erroneous for using an international language in a cross-cultural setting. Byram (1991) mentions the role of teachers both

as educators and instructors. Teachers should help students to be aware of the fact that the world is neither mono-lingual nor mono-cultural so that they can expand the horizons of students.

Language is bound culturally and since foreign or second language teaching and culture cannot be thought separately from each other, it is unavoidable that students will encounter some cultural elements of the target language while using EFL textbooks. Moreover, becoming fluent in language requires communicative competence, which encloses a good cultural understanding of some things like discourse nuances and conversational routines in addition to the target norms, values and etiquette (McDonough and Shaw, 1997). According to Çakır (2006), as we teach the foreign language in a classroom, we automatically teach the target culture, home culture or other cultures. Students will become more curious and satisfied when they learn that there also exists another mode of expression to speak about needs, desires and feelings when they read the literature of the foreign country.

Some research has been done on the inclusion of cultural components in the textbooks. According to most of them, target culture elements are seen more frequently in textbooks. To illustrate, Yamanaka (2006) studied English textbooks based on Kachru's (1992) three-concentric-circles model and found out that there is more focus on the inner circle countries than in the outer or expanding circles, and proposed that a balanced focus on countries allows students to learn about a larger variety of cultures. Similarly, Xiang (2007) compared two textbooks of local publishers in Taiwan. The findings indicate that American and British cultures are more common than other cultures. Besides, Lu's (2006) study of a textbook revealed that the book is specific to western culture and it includes some gender stereotypes. According to the research, the role of home culture ought to be introduced, and more varied cultural elements should be considered to benefit disadvantaged students. Moreover, Wu (2010) investigated the cultural contents in a textbook and suggested that more texts should include the culture of other English-speaking countries.

Norrihan (1993) compared a school with middle or upper middle class students and an urban village school with low income families to find out the effect of diverse cultural components in ESL texts. According to the results, many of items were culturally appropriate to the students of middle or upper middle class families. She stated that the textbooks examined were biased towards middle-

class lifestyles and values. Therefore, interactions were meaningful in these classrooms. Conversely, students in the other group were distracted and restless during the classes. She suggested that teachers should carefully select suitable materials considering the learners' culture. The results indicated that culturally-familiar teaching materials facilitate language learning.

The mono-cultural content of locally published textbooks in Turkey has been investigated by many researchers. The textbook Cortazzi and Jin (1999) examined mirrored only the local culture. A lot of information related to food, weather or history was included in the material. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) claim that students learn English in order to be able to talk to visitors who come to Turkey, but they are not expected to go to target countries or learn about target cultures.

Another textbook analysis was carried out by Çakır (2010) who analyzed three ELT textbooks in terms of culture-specific elements. He reached the conclusion that these materials do not incorporate enough cultural elements such as superstitions, idioms and other cultural references. He found that the authors of the textbooks did not really focus on the target culture. His conclusion was that these kinds of textbooks do not foster pragmatic competence of learners sufficiently.

Risager (1998) mentions four approaches of teaching culture; the inter-cultural approach, the multi-cultural approach, the trans-cultural approach and the foreign-cultural approach. Firstly, according to the inter-cultural approach, culture is better learned via comparison of local and target culture in language learning and teaching. In the inter-cultural approach, students are taught to develop ICC and they can act as mediators between their local and target culture. However, due to the multi-cultural character of many countries, the inter-cultural approach is inadequate as an only culture teaching approach in language classrooms. Secondly, the multi-cultural approach dwells on linguistic and ethnic diversity. This approach claims that more than one culture exists within a given culture and this should be considered during culture teaching. Thirdly, the trans-cultural approach regards English as a lingua franca for international communication. According to this approach, a foreign language should not be linked to any particular culture. Finally, the mono-cultural or foreign-cultural approach, targets the foreign language culture only and leaves the local culture behind. It mostly aims to develop the communicative competence and cultural competence of native speakers.

This study is unique in that it examines three different types of textbooks – local, localized, global – in terms of culture. It is thought that the results of this study will be beneficial for teachers in selecting a suitable textbook and for authors in developing appropriate material for the target group of learners.

#### 4. Methodology

In order to be able to investigate the presentation of culture in the three textbooks, descriptive content analysis was employed. This research technique is utilized to explore content in an objective and quantitative way (Neundorf, 2002). It is an appropriate approach to make inferences from course materials designed for people to read and understand (Krippendorff, 2004). With the help of a checklist prepared by the researcher, the frequencies of cultural elements in the reading passages in three textbooks and to which culture they belong to were examined.

Three textbooks were sampled for the purposes of the study: *Ortaöğretim İngilizce 10 Ders Kitabı*, *Solutions Türkiye A2 Student's Book* and *English File Elementary Student's Book*. The first one is a locally published textbook which is currently being used in public high schools in Turkey. The second one is a localized textbook which is designed and published by Oxford University Press to cover the Ministry of Education's new English curriculum for 9<sup>th</sup> graders at high schools in Turkey. The third one is a global textbook published by Oxford University Press.

Randomly selected 14 teachers/instructors of English participated in the study. They answered two open-ended questions. The first question was about their preferences related to three different types of ELT textbooks. The second question was about their suggestions to textbook developers regarding the amount of cultural elements to be included in textbooks:

1. As a teacher / instructor of English, considering the backgrounds of your students, which of the following do you prefer using in your classrooms? Why?

- a) a local textbook (developed by Turkish authors for Turkish learners of English, i.e. textbooks that are used in MoNE state schools)
  - b) a localized textbook (developed by native speakers of English for Turkish learners of English, i.e. Solutions Türkiye)
  - c) a global textbook (developed by native speakers of English for all learners of English around the world, i.e. Oxford English File)
2. If you were to make a suggestion to ELT textbook developers about the integration of cultural elements into textbooks, what would be your suggestion about the amount of home culture, target culture and other cultures? Why?

## 5. Results and Discussion

Out of 14 participants, 10 teachers favoured global textbooks and 4 teachers preferred localized textbooks. Nobody chose to use local textbooks. Those who favoured global ELT textbooks listed their reason as the following:

- They contribute to the idea of global citizenship.
- They provide a more international outlook in general.
- They present the learners with a wide variety of information on different countries and cultures all around the world.
- They include authentic speaking tasks, high-quality images, interesting reading texts, seem to leave enough room for cultural elements and provide an adequate number of materials with high paper quality.
- They have richer exercises, activities, tasks and the content.
- They are designed by professional and experienced writers.
- They give information about the target culture.
- They include element of English varieties.
- They help raise open-minded, tolerant, and culturally aware language learners.

The participants who preferred localized ELT textbooks listed their reasons as the following:



- They are more useful in terms of conveying the cultural codes as the book is expected to be prepared for Turkish learners.
- They can provide more useful opportunities for EFL learners because when they go abroad or meet a foreigner, they are asked to talk about their home culture, not the target culture.
- They can be more adaptable for Turkish learners.
- They include the world culture and we don't just communicate with the British or the Americans.

All teachers who participated in this study agreed that the three types of culture (home, target, international) should be included in the textbooks. Six of the participants (42,8 %) stated that all three cultures should be included in the textbooks equally. Two teachers (14,2 %) said that the number of elements of home culture should be the highest and that the amount of target culture and other cultures can be equal. Three teachers (21,4 %) explained that the amount of elements of the target culture should be more in textbooks. Only one teacher (7,1 %) prioritized the international culture.

As for the cultural elements in textbooks, the local textbook was examined first. The book consists of ten units and the reading passages in the first five units were examined. 54,1 % of the names mentioned in the reading texts in the book belong to the target culture, 29,1 % belong to the home culture and 16,6 % to other cultures. Out of 21 geographical items mentioned in the texts, 15 (71,4 %) were about international cultures, 3 (14,2 %) were about the target culture and 3 (14,2 %) were about the home culture. When it comes to the references to the famous people, the results showed that all of them belong to the home culture. 57,1 % of the food items mentioned in the textbook belong to the home culture while 42,8 % belong to the target culture.

The localized textbook consists of ten units and the reading passages in the first five units were examined. 95,4 % of the names used in the reading passages in the textbook belong to the target culture while 4,5 % belong to the home culture. 72,7 % of the geographical items were related to the target culture, 18,1 % were about the international cultures and 9 % were home culture related. 94,1 % of the famous people in the texts were from the target culture countries and 5,8 % were

from the international cultures. As for the food items, 66,6 % belong to the target culture and 33,3 % belong to the international cultures.

The global textbook consists of 12 units and the reading passages in the first six units were examined. It was seen that 70,9 % of the names belong to the target culture countries, 25,8 % belong to international cultures and 3,2 % belong to the home culture. The results about geographical items indicated that 61,1 % of the locations were related to the target culture whereas 38,8 % were related to other cultures. 75 % of famous people mentioned in the texts are from international cultures and 25 % is from the target culture. References to food showed that 66,6 % of the food mentioned in the texts belong to international cultures while 33,3 % belong to the target culture (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** The distribution of cultural elements in three textbooks

Cultural Elements	Types of Culture	local textbook (%)	localized textbook (%)	global textbook (%)
names	home culture	29,1	4,5	3,2
	target culture	54,1	95,4	70,9
	international culture	16,6	0	25,8
geographical items	home culture	14,2	9	0
	target culture	14,2	72,7	61,1
	international culture	71,4	18,1	38,8
famous people	home culture	100	0	0
	target culture	0	94,1	25
	international culture	0	5,8	75
food items	home culture	57,1	0	0
	target culture	42,8	66,6	33,3
	international culture	0	33,3	66,6

According to the data gathered from the participants of this study, it can be concluded that English teachers / instructors in Turkey agree that elements of home culture, target culture and other cultures should be included in ELT textbooks. However, they have different ideas about the amount of these elements. To illustrate, approximately one-fifth of English teachers believe that the amount of the target culture should be more in textbooks.

In the light of the suggestions of the participants, it can be said that textbook developers should:

- integrate elements from various cultures into textbooks.
- try not to elaborate on one type of culture.
- use corpora.
- try to widen the students' point of view on the world cultures, people and languages.
- help students establish links between cultures.
- use elements to yield tolerance and sympathy towards other cultures on the side of the students.
- use explicit instructions for teachers as to how to make the most of the cultural elements in a textbook.
- get first-hand information from the natives/locals while integrating cultural elements into textbooks.
- consider learners' real needs and possible problems they can encounter, and develop textbooks in accordance with their current exposure to the target culture and their future involvement in that culture.

According to the findings related to the inclusion of cultural elements in three types of ELT textbooks, it can be concluded that in the three textbooks, the names belonging to the target culture is extremely dominant. In terms of geographical items, the international culture is dominant in the local textbook whereas the target culture is dominant in the other two books. All famous people are Turkish in the local textbook; however, the target culture is dominant in the localized textbook and the international culture is dominant in the global textbook. There are no famous people from international cultures in the local textbook, no one from the home culture in the other two books.

The local textbook is not really local and the localized textbook is not really localized. The global textbook hardly ever includes elements from the home culture.

## 6. Conclusion

In the present study, the reading passages in three textbooks were examined and interviews were conducted with English language teachers. The findings reveal interesting facts about different types of ELT textbooks. They also uncover teachers' preferences of ELT textbooks. It is believed that the results of this article will help textbook developers gain more insight and design textbooks which are more inclusive of various types of culture.

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