The sociolinguistic content analysis of imported ELT textbooks' cultural values (global or local) and their impact on Iranian EFL learners' social identity

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Abstract

Purpose: Investigating the cultural content of EFL textbooks is significant in critical discourse studies. The effect of cultural values on EFL learners' social identity has been less investigated in the Iranian context. This study aimed at identifying type of cultural values embedded in New Interchange and Passages textbooks in terms of being global, local or global and the impact of these textbooks' cultural values on Iranian EFL learners' social identity. **Methodology**: 90 upper-intermediate EFL learners at 2 private language institutes and high schools in the city of Gilanegharb were selected among a population of 120 EFL learners based on taking an Oxford Placement Test (OPT). They were randomly divided into an experimental group (45 learners) and a control group (45 learners). The experimental group received global cultural teaching through exposure to private institute textbooks' cultural values while the control group was taught through local cultural values embedded in the local textbooks. A Student Identity Questionnaire (SIQ) was used as both pre-test and posttest. Data were analyzed through Independent Sample T-tests using SPSS 21 software. **Findings**: The results indicated that the most frequent textbook cultural values were social power through the U.S. superiority, social relation through friendship and party, and accomplishments through success. Further analysis showed that the textbook cultural values had a significant impact on social identity scores of Iranian EFL learners showing stronger agreement with global cultural values promoted in the imported textbooks. **Discussion:** Results had implications for EFL teachers, learners, policy makers and material developers.

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1. Introduction

Over previous centuries, human societies have achieved closer relations through the world viewing a dramatic increase in recent years. Language is a system of contacting and communicating shared by people and English has grown as an international language among different languages. Several reasons have caused this outcome such as the political power of the English speaking countries such as U.S. and Britain during the past and the present. Obviously, commerce, science, and culture have played roles in this regard as well, but these aspects can be sub-divided under the major category of politics and language policy. It should be noticed that the policy is not just linguistic (Joseph, 2006).

Learning a language is always accompanied by learning its culture and its speakers' cultural values (Kramsch, 2001). Humans live in communities which provide them with sets of values that are somehow exclusive to their community providing the ground for their identity formation based on interactions with the social world. To share a part in the global community, we need a global language which is played by English now. The main material for a learning a foreign language is the textbook acting as a significant source of providing information about the foreign language. Similarly, Apple (1991) holds that the textbook often defines what elite and legitimate cultures to pass on. When we talk of culture, learner's identity is involved to be affected because the learner as an individual identity or a member of a social identity group is dealing with a foreign language's system of social, national and cultural values (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Contemporary theories on language learning and teaching address the identity of language learners as the ways language learners understand their relationship to the social world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the learners understand the possibilities for the future (Norton, 2000).

In teaching culture, there is a continuous interaction of the target language culture and the local culture. Imported English textbooks include cultural global values which may not be in line with the learners' local identity as demonstrated in his/her beliefs, attitudes, and self. Identity processes basically happen in the interaction of individuals with the society (Norton, 2000; Pierce 1995). An individual's identity is formed in social contexts such as family, school, educational institutions, etc. in interaction with other people. They form their social identity based on the societies' norms and values. When they encounter a set of new global cultural values (here we mean the values embedded in the English imported textbooks), they are involved in a process of comparing them with their own values and this may have influence their sense of self or identity. The effect of cultural values on EFL learners' identity has been less investigated in the Iranian context. For example, Meshkat (2002) investigated the relationship between the textbook cultural values and learners' attitude towards English. Also, Baniasad (2009) did a study on the textbooks ideologies and the teachers' awareness of these ideologies and the learners' attitude toward English. However, no study has investigated the role of textbook sociocultural values in terms of global, local or glocal values on language learners' social identity. Hence, the present study made an attempt to find an answer to the following research questions: 1. What kind of cultural values (global, local or glocal) exist within the imported English textbooks used in Iranian language institutes? 2. Do textbook-embedded cultural values have any significant impact on the Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners' social identity?

2. literature Review

Language and identity share a continuous interconnection. According to Weeden's (1997) poststructuralist theory, language builds our sense of ourselves that is our subjectivity. People's identity is always seen in what they utter and in the understanding that they build of what other people say, and their identity is embedded in their voices, whether it is spoken, written or signed (Joseph, 2004). He figured out the whole phenomenon of identity as a linguistic one. According to Joseph, "identity, and the reading of

identity, forms the fundamental basis of human communication and interaction upon which language in the usual sense is grafted" (p. 39). Language serves people as a mean of reading other people's identity in the process of communication. Norton (2000) asserts that a person uses language to negotiates his/her sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time.

Palvenko and Lantolf (2000) indicate that language learners have an new experience in the stage of loss in the process of learning the second language in a new culture context and then the stage of reconstructing of their identities. They mention the major problem of bilinguals as "the conflict that arises when they attempt to bring their past into the present which could result in the dissonances and their struggle of the past self in the face of new context and convention that is different from the one their past self were constructed" (p. 172). Further, they add that participation is not just participating in new cultural settings; rather it involves a serious struggle of reconstructing a self.

L2 teachers and educators have constantly noticed the logical relationship between language and culture (Byram, 1994; Kramsch, 2001). Kramsch (2001) asserts that involvement of people in language teaching has again started to find out the intertwined relation between culture and language. According to Bada (2000, p. 101), "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."

Similar to language, identity was not seen only as a cultural belonging description; rather, it had a great value to local communities viewing identity as fragile phenomenon requiring protection to be maintained because it may be lost. According to Tomlinson (1999), "globalization, so the story goes, has swept like a flood tide through the world's diverse cultures, destroying stable localities, displacing peoples, bringing a market-driven, 'branded' homogenization of cultural experience, thus obliterating the differences between locality-defined cultures which had constituted our identities" (p. 2). Globalization has been viewed as including a general process of cultural diversity loss. Some cultures which are in the mainstream of capitalism (west and mostly the United States) see their culture as a standardized version and make efforts to export it throughout the world. However, weaker cultures including developing countries are threatened mostly (Tomlinson, 1999). As a result, globalization endangers cultural identity and this threat is directed to a special cultural identity subset called national identity.

Several studies have addressed the issues of culture and identity in second language acquisition. For instance, Nejabat (2016) did a study on the impact of cultural factors in learning and education on Iranian EFL learners. The result of data analysis indicated that the researcher's treatment proved to be effective but in varying degrees with different participants. Farsi, Rad, and Tondar (2013) made an attempt to study the impact of culture on EFL learners and to explore the differences between learners studying particular English textbooks with cultural considerations. Findings indicated that learning English through textbooks with cultural considerations develops the learners' cultural understanding. Kafi, Ashraf and Motallebzadeh (2013) studied the relationship between English textbooks and the cultural outlook of Iranian EFL learners. The results revealed a significant relationship between textbooks and EFL learners' cultural outlook. Also, Afghari et al. (2012) studied the relationship between culture exposure and the identity types of learners of English as a foreign language. The findings revealed that the learners' identities did not change significantly through exposure to foreign culture, beliefs, values, and roles.

3. Methodology

This research included a combination of qualitative and quantitative design. The qualitative part included a content analysis of two ELT textbooks while the qualitative part involved a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test.

The participants of the study included 90 upper-intermediate EFL learners at 2 private language institutes and high schools in the city of Gilanegharb, Kermanshah, Iran. They had been studying English for 2 to 5 years. This 90 EFL learners were selected among a population of 120 EFL learners at the private language institutes and senior high school students based on taking an Oxford Placement Test (OPT). Those learners whose scores were measured one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected as the sample participants. The sample covered both male and female EFL language learners aging from 15-26. The 90 participants were randomly divided into an experimental group (45 learners) and a control group (45 learners). The experimental group studied imported EFL textbooks including New Interchange and Passages series while the control group studied local English textbooks published by the ministry of education.

Two instruments were used for this research, Oxford Proficiency Test (OPT) and Student Identity Questionnaire (SIQ). OPT was used in order to determine language learners' level of language proficiency in order to have homogenized participants. All parts were in the form of multiple choice questions. The test is developed to assess the use of language in real life. It included 60 items and the time allotted was 30 minutes. It was given to 120 EFL learners in two language institutes and two high schools.

A qualitative analysis in the form of a content analysis was done on the imported textbooks to find their cultural values. Moreover, a Student Identity Questionnaire (SIQ) was designed by the researcher based on the imported textbook cultural values and later piloted by giving it to two groups of language learners and language teachers. The purpose of the designed questionnaire was to investigate whether textbook cultural values (not the other English cultural values in other contexts such as movies, literature, satellite, etc.) had any significant impact on EFL learners' social identity. The questionnaire was used both as pre-test before the treatment and posttest after administering the treatment. The questionnaire was in the Likert scale and the responses ranged from completely agree, agree, no idea, disagree, and completely disagree.

When the questionnaire was designed, it consisted of 59 closed and 4 open-ended questions. The next step was to validate the questionnaire. The questionnaire was given to three Ph.D. professors in TEFL and 15 English institute language teachers to study it carefully to check if there was any problem in terms of understanding, length, wording, appropriateness, or whether any questions should be deleted. At the same time, the designed questionnaire was given to 30 students who were mostly similar to participants of the study and they were asked to study it meticulously. They were told to underline or edit anything they considered vague and their opinion about the length and wording of the questions. As a result, the problematic parts were edited, deleted or revised. The number of questions reduced to 57 closed questions. The questionnaire was also given to a psychology professor and a Persian literature professor for any necessary revision or editions. Finally, the identity questionnaire was prepared based on the received feedback and administered to the subjects.

The reliability of the questionnaire was also estimated using the Cronbach alpha for the items of the student identity questionnaire (SIQ). The amount of alpha was .8794 and the amount of Standardized item alpha was .8732. This means that the student identity questionnaire was reliable. SIQ measured 25 cultural values categorized under 10 major values.

Before starting the treatment, both groups were administered a Student Identity Questionnaire (SIQ) as the pre-test. Their scores were calculated for further analysis. Next, the experimental group received global cultural teaching through exposure to the private institutes textbooks' cultural values embedded in different parts of the textbooks such as Snapshot, Conversation, Writing, Perspectives, Discussion, Reading, Pictures, and Interchange parts, Unit topics, Starting Point, Discussion, Vocabulary, Writing, Speaking, and Reading sections. However, the control group did not receive the treatment and was taught through local cultural values embedded in the local textbooks published by the ministry of education. The treatment lasted for 12 sessions. After the treatment ended, the same Student Identity Questionnaire (SIQ) was given to both groups as the posttest. The participants' scores on the posttest were compared with their pre-test scores.

Independent Sample T-tests was used to determine the difference between the identity scores of the experimental and the control group. SPSS 21 was used for the data analysis.

4. Findings

The first research question focused on the type of cultural values that exist within the imported English textbooks used in Iran (New Interchange and Passages). A qualitative content analysis was carried out on the New Interchange and Passages textbook series. Various cultural values were found in the analysis. They were categorized into relevant groups to present a better manifestation. Each value was explained and examples were presented from the textbooks. The criterion for their selection was mostly based on two factors. First, an attempt was made to find those cultural values that were new to Iranian language learners, such as having a laundry room in the house. Second, those values that were not in line or different from the Iranian culture, or not accepted or common. For instance, keeping pets such as dog is not accepted and in line with the Iranian culture. There was an attempt to select the most frequent values of the imported textbooks and they are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Overall Order of Cultural Values from Highest to Lowest Frequency in the Imported Textbooks

N	Cultural value	Category	Frequency	Sample Values in Imported Textbooks
1	U.S. superiority	Social power	16	American lifestyle is given priority others
2	Success	Accomplishments	13	Accomplishments that bring you fame and social position
3	Friendship	Social relations	11	Emphasizing friendship between opposite genders
4	Party	Social relations	9	Taking party in U.S. is different from Iran sociocultural
5	Music	Entertainment	8	Music is a common topic, parts on singers and musicians
6	Personal belief	Morals	8	What society considers appropriate or inappropriate
7	Technology	Consumerism	7	We should use technology more to become more global
8	Movies	Entertainment	7	Hollywood is the dominant power in cinema
9	West superiority	Social power	6	Attention to western figures, music, movies, places
10	Dancing	Entertainment	6	Public dancing is given much significance, opposite to Iran
11	Personal interest	Lifestyle	6	Western or mostly American lifestyle is favored
12	Social norms	Customs	5	Superstitions are a part of life and customs
13	Shopping	Consumerism	5	New ways of shopping such as online shopping
14	Moral values	Morals	5	Public favors are common in Iran, opposite to West
15	Worldly values	Materialism	5	Materialistic views are focusing on fulfilling pleasure
16	Lack of religion	Materialism	4	No mention of God or religious issues
17	Greeting	Communication	3	Handshake and hugging between male and females
18	Small talk	Communication	3	Different subjects are used in small talk in various cultures
19	Education	Accomplishments	3	Differences in the importance of majors, such as fashion
20	Globalization	Lifestyle	3	Emphasizing the idea of global village now and for future
21	Traveling	Consumerism	2	Advertisement hotels and places that cost much
22	Holidays	Customs	2	Little attention is given to religious holidays
23	Invitation	Communication	2	Invitations between opposite genders are very common
24	Sexism in jobs	Social power	2	No sexism and both genders can have desired jobs
25	Eating habits	Lifestyle	1	Emphasizing fast food in public eating occasions

Table (1) shows that U.S. superiority, friendship, success, party and personal beliefs are respectively the most frequent textbook cultural values. In more general terms, social power, accomplishments, social relations, and entertainment were the focus of cultural values. However, eating habits was the least frequent value. U.S. superiority was shown by different means such as showing the U.S. lifestyle as the model of life through textbooks and examples were education majors, vocation places, job types, meaning of names, kinds of transportation in the U.S., and many other examples which were explained previously. Hence, it should be noted that these values are proposing the idea of globalization through U.S. superiority and the overall views of the imported textbook sociocultural values had a global basis. One important point was that, the

negative aspects of the American lifestyle and culture such as crime, violence, racism, etc. we're not presented in the textbooks.

When the textbook cultural values were identified and elaborated, the second question of the study which was whether imported textbook sociocultural values had any significant impact on Iranian EFL learners' social identity was addressed. The population of the 120 EFL learners were given the OPT test to homogenize subjects based on their general language proficiency. Out of 120 participants, 90 were considered as homogenous upper-intermediate learners on the basis of their OPT scores ranging from 47 to 57. The 90 homogenized subjects were randomly assigned into an experimental group and a control group (45 learners in each group). In the next step, the researcher proves that the two groups were homogeneous before the treatment begins.

The researchers compared the experimental and control groups on their identity scores as pretest to prove their homogeneity. The Shapiro-Wilk normality test result shows the normality of the data distribution for the two sets of scores (Sig<.05). Thus, Mann-Whitney U test was the suitable test for mean comparison. Table 2 indicates both groups' descriptive statistics.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for the Pretest of Control and Experimental groups

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
ContPretest	45	1.50	4.20	3.0721	1.03724	1.021
ExpPretest	45	1.50	4.20	3.1210	.95321	.980
Valid N (listwise)	45					

The mean scores of the control and the experimental groups are 3.07 and 3.12, respectively.

Table 3. The Result of the Mann-Whitney U Test for the Comparison of the Control and the Experimental Groups

	Pretest Scores
Mann-Whitney U	441.000
Wilcoxon W	915.000
Z	-.113
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.821

The table 3 indicates that the two groups were homogeneous in terms of their social identity scores before starting the treatment (*sig* = .821, *P* >.05). Next, the posttests social identity scores of both control and experimental groups were compared. The Shapiro-Wilk test of normality analysis indicates that the data for the two sets of scores do not have a normal distribution of (Sig>.05). Thus, Independent Samples T-test would be used for mean comparison.

Table 4. The Descriptive Statistics for the Identity Posttest of the Control and the Experimental groups

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
ContPosttest	45	2.00	5.50	4.3156	1.0745	1.205
ExpPosttest	45	3.00	8.30	5.4621	1.378941	1.650
Valid N (listwise)	45					

The mean and standard deviation of the control and the experimental groups are 4.31, 1.07 and 5.46, 1.37, respectively.

Table 5. The Result of the Independent Samples T-Test for the Comparison of the Control and Experimental Groups

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Homogenized	Equal variances assumed	1.11	.917	2.761	90	.007	-.2624	.09505
	Equal variances not assumed			2.761	88.31	.007	-.2624	. 09505

Based on the result of the above table, the experimental group had significantly higher social identity scores than the control group, (Sig = .007, P < .05) showing stronger agreement with global cultural values promoted in the imported textbooks. Therefore, the null hypothesis that imported textbook sociocultural values do not have any significant impact on Iranian EFL learners' social identity was rejected.

5.   Discussion

The first question of the study investigated the kind of cultural values that were embedded in the New Interchange series and Passages Series. Content analysis of the textbooks demonstrated that U.S. superiority, friendship, success, party and personal beliefs were respectively the most frequent textbook cultural values. Most of these values deal with everyday issues and form a part of our lives since we are always encountering them. As a result, there is a probability that they have an impact on the learners' identity and become part of his/her value system. Generally, the frequency of the cultural value in New Interchange series was more than Passages series. New Interchange 1 had the highest frequency of cultural values.

Similar results were found by Shimako (2000, cited in McKay, 2004) who did a study on textbooks adapted in Japan and found that besides the Japanese culture, Western characters and values were prevalent in the textbooks. He also found that American culture was the main culture that represented Western values and characters. In the textbooks used in Korea, lifestyle of the target language culture is the predominant cultural concept (Litz, 2001). The above findings in line with the findings of our study show that Western nations and especially the U.S. are spreading their values and model of life through EFL language courses in different parts of the world. These values are prevalent in different ELT textbooks used in different parts of the world.

The second question of the study investigated whether imported textbook sociocultural values had any significant impact on Iranian EFL social learners' identity. The results indicated that textbook sociocultural values had a significant impact on institute EFL learners' social identity because they had an inclination toward the target language culture. This inclination was not significant for high school students.

Considering the impact of textbook cultural values, Litz (2001) assert that Korean and Japanese EFL learners think of English culture as the American culture and those learners who were older were to some extent unwilling to learn English, because they did not want to learn the American culture. Our result was not consistent with Litz (2001) who expressed that there was a fear between learners that learning these textbook values might change their attitudes or way of life. Also, incongruent results were reported by Adaskou, Britten, and Fahsi (1990) who found that including Western culture in teaching materials in Moroccan secondary schools caused dissatisfaction among learners with their own culture.

Exposure of institute language learners to the target language cultural values engages learners in a comparison process of learners' local cultural values and target cultural values. Language learners may adapt those target values which they like or prefer in their life which might inevitably change their identity orientations and behaviors. Institute language learners had stronger agreement with cultural values promoted in the imported textbooks in comparison to those who did not attend language institutes or study

these textbooks. The reason might be that high school students studied local English textbook in which the target language cultural values were not frequent. In fact, high school students were less exposed to these cultural values and as a result received less impact on their identity.

In each country, government policy makers make some plans to preserve the nations' social identity. Western and U.S. policy makers are spreading their culture as a model through different means and one is through EFL textbooks as confirmed by the results of the present study showed that U.S superiority was the most frequent value in the analyzed textbooks. Therefore, local policy make should make some policies to present the Iranian sociocultural identity as well as increasing intercultural awareness of language learners.

It was said that language learners engage in a new community with new values when they learn another language (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Also, Norton (1997, cited in Ellis, 2008) said that when language learners do not approve of these new values of the foreign language because of their own value system, they may get a negative feedback or attitude toward the foreign language and this might hinder their learning or achievement. Educational psychologists should be aware of these psychological processes to make a cultural balance. Sometimes textbooks want student to make do some tasks based on the target culture, but since some cultural values are not socially accepted in the Iranian community, language learners are not willing to do them. An example is performing a role play about finding a date, or asking questions about parts of history of the target culture in which learners have no or little information. This is when learners might get a negative feedback because of the target culture. Some cultural note should be presented to the learners to change the kind or topic of the tasks that are culturally inappropriate.

The results of the study showed that language learners have a positive view toward using global cultural values in teaching another language. Banning the target language culture for just using Iranian culture is not suggested. So far, local textbooks have dealt with the issue of culture in language learning in a superficial way. A good solution is to use the idea of glocalization which was proposed by Rebertson (1992). He used the idea in social sciences. Its use in language learning is even more recent. The term "glocal" refers to the individual, group, division, unit, organization, and community which is willing and able to think globally and act locally. Glocalization uses both the local and global culture at the same time. This helps learners to both preserve their identity and increase their cultural awareness.

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