

Semiotic Analysis of Culture in ELT Curriculum through EIL: ‘Prospect series’

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Abstract

The current study intended to examine the representation of culture in Iranian locally developed ‘Prospect series’ textbooks in light of English as an international language (EIL). The study engages EIL and Cultural Semiotics adapted by Dinh (2016b) as the theoretical and analytical frameworks to explore culture across texts, visuals and tasks. The conversation sections of ‘Prospects 1, 2, and 3’ including texts, visuals, and tasks were investigated. The findings reveal that 1) culture is evident in both implicit and explicit manners in texts and visuals; however, it is limitedly represented in the tasks, 2) expanding circle cultural content dominates the textbooks, 3) cultural diversity has not much been attended to, and in-depth levels of culture belonging to ‘small’ c categories and socio-cultural awareness are neglected, 4) there is indexical relation between texts and visuals, and occasional detached mismatch between texts and visuals, and 5) majority of questions are language and information-based while speculative and comparative questions addressing culture are extremely limited. The findings are discussed in light of existing studies, and some recommendations are suggested for textbook writers, curriculum developers, and researchers in the field.

Keywords: Cultural content, Cultural Semiotics, EIL, ELT textbooks, ‘Prospect series’ textbooks

1. Introduction

‘Global processes such as human mobility and the new technology have changed the English language to the extent that Graddol (2006, p. 11) refers to it as a new phenomenon’ (Sharifian, 2014, p. 37). English is increasingly used by many communities of speakers around the world which engenders the development of growing number of varieties of Englishes. This is in line with what Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL) paradigm gives prominence to, that is, developing intercultural communication skill rather than native-speaker competence. However, according to Seidlhofer(2003), there is a scarcity of literature on EIL to assist ELT professionals in the development and effective use of resources to enhance instruction. ‘The notion of culture in teaching of foreign languages is a hotly debated issue’(Kramsch, 2013, P. 58), and many scholars have accentuated the need for further research on the representation of the culture in English Language Teaching (ELT) curricular materials (e.g., Gray, 2002; Weininger & Kiss, 2014).According to Dinh (2016b), there are still certain gaps and pitfalls in the literature as follows: a) many previous studies have defined culture in the national/ethnic sense and adopted a simplistic approach of documenting nation-specific cultural referents such as proper names, cultural products and so on when identifying cultures (Kiss & Weninger, 2013; Weninger & Kiss, 2015). And b) although most textbooks use multimodal texts, rare research has been conducted adopting multimodal analysis focusing on different channels of modes like visuals, texts and tasks to yield the data (Weninger & Kiss, 2015).

2. Literature review

2.1 *Theoretical and analytical frameworks*

2.1.1 English as International Language (EIL)

‘EIL tends to be conceptualised differently by different scholars: ‘paradigms or perspectives’ (McKay 2002; Sharifian 2009); ‘the functions or uses of English in international contexts’ (Matsuda and Friedrich 2010); and ‘a variety of English’ (Tomlinson 2003; Widdowson 1997)’ (as cited in Marlina, 2014, p. 4). In the current study, EIL is conceptualized according to Sharifian (2009), as a paradigm for thinking, research, and practice. As Sharifian (2009) defines, ‘EIL marks a paradigm shift in TESOL, SLA and the applied linguistics of English, partly in response to the complexities that are associated with the tremendously rapid spread of English around the globe in recent decades’(p. 2). With regard to the global spread of English, EIL emphasizes that English is pluricentric language including many varieties used for intercultural communication. According to Sharifian (2014), ‘rapidly increasing use of English by communities of speakers around the world has led to the development of more and more varieties of Englishes, in particular in what Kachru termed the ‘Expanding Circle’ countries’ that has lead to the development of variety of Englishes (p, 37). According to the model of World Englishes by Kachru (1985), the use of English is categorized into three concentric circles of ‘inner’, ‘outer’, and ‘expanding circles’ to define varieties of English. The inner circle refers to the variety of English used by native speakers in countries such as

the USA, the UK, Canada, and Australia. The outer circle consists of countries such as Singapore, the Philippines, and India, where English is used as an official language. Finally, the expanding circle is comprised of countries like Iran, Japan, and South Korea, where English is used as a foreign language. Teaching English as an International Language (TEIL) is teaching English as a truly pluricentric language from which the fundamental goal is competence in intercultural communication not native-speaker like competence. Discussing materials in TEIL, Brown (2012), Matsuda (2012a, 2012b) and McKay (2012a, 2012b) propose that they should reflect the reality of English use today (as cited in Dinh 2016b). Therefore, curricular materials should also take linguistic and cultural diversity into account. In designing and choosing materials factors like local context, course objective, learners' needs must be taken into consideration. Considering the learners' needs, according to Shin et al., (2011), there is an immense volume of studies in the literature analyzing needs of learners reporting that the need to native culture was significant. For the reasons above, EIL is the main framework for this study since it provides principles for ELT materials, especially for cultural content in materials.

2.1.2 Semiotic approach to ELT textbook analysis

Semiotics has emerged in linguistic anthropological theory over a period of two decades out of the common acknowledgement of culture as a process rather than a product (Agha, 2007, as cited in Dinh, 2016b). Adapting concepts from the semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce, these approaches have been able to address how linguistic, social, and ideological processes interrelate in cultural production and participation (Weninger, 2013). A semiotic approach to examine culture in textbooks 'will not teach us what meaning must be definitely attributed to a work; it will not provide or even discover a meaning but will describe the logic according to which meanings are engendered' (Barthes, 1966, p. 66, as cited in Weninger 2013). According to Weninger (2013), applying semiotic approach, we will be able to investigate the semiotic potential that particular text and image give rise to in foreign language textbooks, without the need to identify any one potential meaning as primary. In particular, we look at the relationship between text, image, and pedagogic task(s) within the framework of an activity as the unit of analysis in order to understand how they invite or make possible certain interpretations. Consequently, this study uses semiotics as its primary analytical approach. 'Given that most foreign language textbooks published nowadays mainly use multimodal texts, it is somewhat surprising that very few studies have examined images in a systematic manner' (Weninger and Kiss (2015). Therefore, in this study, the semiotic approach is employed in that it investigates the representation of culture in texts, visuals in relation to each other. As the aim of the study is to identify whose culture, at what levels, in what forms and how they are embedded in textbooks, the study draws on the analytical framework adapted and employed in the study undertaken by Dinh (2016b) investigating culture representations in English language teaching curriculum in Vietnam.

2.2 Previous studies on culture in the ELT curricular materials

Numerous studies have been undertaken examining culture in English language textbooks whether locally produced or internationally marketed ones. Several studies have applied

content analysis or critical discourse analysis as the methodology of their studies. For example, Victor (1999) has taken a content analysis approach investigating cultural context in two English language textbooks in Gabon named as 'You're English', and 'L'anglais Vivant'. The study revealed that the textbooks do not satisfy the demands of learners in terms of their needs and learning situation. Ilieva (2000) utilized a critical discourse analysis approach examining culture in 'Canadian Concept' 3 textbook for adult language learners. The study aimed at answering research questions investigating concepts in the texts. The study found that the target language cultural concepts was remarkable in the texts, and the texts were less likely to lead second language learners reflect on their own culture in the new immigrant setting. Aliakbari (2005) carried out a study focusing on the role of culture in Iranian-English textbooks for students' intercultural competence at four levels of English Book 1 to 4. The outcome of the content analysis of the textbooks was that the textbooks were not successful enough to evolve learners' intercultural competence. Garcí'a (2005) investigated the international and intercultural aspects in fourteen first- and second-course Bachillerato EFL textbooks in Spain. To examine the cultural aspects, the researcher employed a qualitative analysis of cultural content. It was found that the textbooks did not follow a cross-cultural and contrastive approach. Yuen (2011) conducted an investigation into the representation of foreign cultures in two English language textbooks used by Hong Kong secondary school: 'Longman Elect' and 'Treasure Plus'. The study sought to find out whether the representation of foreign cultures in these textbooks reflected the status of English as an international language. Overall, the study revealed that the cultures of English-speaking countries are represented, while the cultures of Africa were underrepresented. Shin, Eslami, and Chen (2011) carried out a study on the presentation of local and international culture in seven series of internationally distributed English-language teaching textbooks, providing a total of 25 books. The study found that a) cultural content related to the inner circle was prevalent in all these textbooks compared to content related to outer/expanding circle countries, b) the textbooks displayed a heavy bias towards the traditional knowledge-oriented level of cultural presentation, and c) do not engage learners in deep levels of reflection. Naji Meidani, and Pishghadam (2013) examined four different textbooks published in different years based on four criteria of references to Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circle countries, non-native accents, dialogues in non-English speaking countries, place of home culture, and famous people. The main finding of the study was that as we go further along, the textbooks adhere to more principles of EIL, depicting more aspects of the Expanding and Outer Circle countries. Dinh (2016a) examined the representation of culture in locally produced English textbooks for Vietnamese grade 10 students: the basic version of English 10. The study aimed at investigating a) the representation of culture in the textbooks, b) students' comprehension of the cultures embedded in texts/visuals and c) the relation of these cultures to students' self-experience. The analysis of texts and visuals revealed a) the dominance of Vietnamese culture over others, b) students' incomplete comprehension of the local culture in the material, and c) similarity in the revised national curricula in South Korea and Vietnam in that they stress the roles of culture and intercultural communication. In another study, Dinh (2016b) has adopted a semiotic approach to investigate the representation of cultures and cultural conceptualisations in English language teaching curriculum in Vietnam. The study

investigated two sets of textbooks: a) locally developed English textbooks ('English 10, 11 and 12') and internationally marketed English textbooks ('New Headway' – intermediate, upper and advanced). The study found that a) Vietnamese culture is the dominant culture represented in local textbooks and American and British cultures are the dominant ones in internationally marketed textbooks, while leaving other cultures underrepresented, b) the tasks provided in the textbooks are more linguistic oriented rather than fostering intercultural communication. The study also found that Vietnamese cultural conceptualizations and Anglo-English cultural conceptualisations were evident in the textbooks in both visuals and texts.

2.3 Previous studies of Iranian newly developed EFL 'Prospect series' textbook

A number of studies have been carried out evaluating the newly developed English 'Prospect series' focusing on one single aspect like culture, language functions, and so forth or evaluating the book as a whole covering more criteria like content, activities, skills, design, organization, and so on. The literature have shown that there is a salient commonality among most of the studies carried out in this area; they have investigated this newly authored textbook series from teachers' or practitioners' perspectives. Hassankiadeh and Faraji (2013) carried out a content analysis study investigating authenticity of 'Prospect 1'. To analyze different sections of the textbook, the study focused on categories of social and linguistic aspects. The result of the study revealed that the proportion of authenticity is not distributed properly in the textbook. Unremarkable proportion is given to the target culture and informal linguistic elements, while intercultural category of authenticity was the most dominant. Derakhshan and Ahmadi (2014) investigated the strengths and weaknesses of 'Prospect 1' from teachers' perspective. The findings of the study revealed that most of the participants had positive attitude toward the new textbook. The main strengths were as followings: a) The emphasis is on CLT approach, b) the four main language skills are integrated, and c) in developing the textbooks focusing on learner needs. Some main weaknesses are as followings: a) Alphabet letters are not given in the right alphabetical order, b) time allocated to the teaching of book in curriculum program is not enough, and c) the reading and writing skills are given less attention. Ostovar-Namaghi and Davari-Torshizi (2015) performed a qualitative study investigating EFL practitioners' perspectives on 'Prospect series' textbooks. This study aimed at investigating the textbook from more perspectives to come to a richer evaluation rather than carrying out a single-aspect investigation study like culture Aliakbari (2005), authenticity (Abdullahi-Guilani, et al, 2011); (Hassankiadeh & Faraji 2013) and gender bias (Amini & birjandi, 2012). The participants from Mashhad and Kashmar were interviewed regarding the strength and weaknesses of the textbook that were reported as followings: Strengths: 1) Message-Oriented approach, 2) Optimal reduction of form-focused activities, 3) Learner-Centeredness, 4) Effective activities and exercises, and 5) Effective illustrations. Weaknesses: 1) Ignoring time-constraints, 2) Ineffective teachers' guide, 3) Ignoring reading and writing, and 4) Impaired audio materials. Beydokhtinezhad, Azarnoosh, and Abdolmanafi-Rokni (2015) carried out a structured interview exploring the strengths and weaknesses of the Iranian junior high school English textbooks of 'Prospects 1 and 2' from teachers' perspective. The findings of the research were so much in line with the findings of

Derakhshan and Ahmadi's study (2014). The findings revealed some main strengths like: a) following CLT approach, b) the integration of four skills, and c) paying attention to the learners' needs, as well as some major weaknesses such as a) not enough time allocation to the book in curriculum program, and b) paying less attention to the reading and writing skills. Kheirabadi, and Alavimoghaddam (2016) evaluated the 'Prospect' textbook series from teachers' perspective. The participants were all English teachers of the city of Tehran in academic year of 2014-2015. The instrument was a questionnaire developed and conducted by the researchers of the study distributed among 100 teachers including 50 males and 50 females. The findings of the study were as followings: a) the most significant privilege of 'Prospect series' is its more updated approach that is CLT, b) the other strength of this series is its supporting components: Teachers' guide, audio CD workbook, teachers' flashcard, and teachers' video file, c) 'Prospect' series textbooks are very poor in terms of shape and printing quality, d) the time allocated to this series is too short, and e) lack of supplementary material, teacher training and in-service courses, some facilities and tools such as high quality audio player in some cases is reported.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research questions

The main objective of this study is to examine how Iranian newly-developed English 'Prospect series' textbooks represent culture in light of EIL perspective. The study employs the first stage of semiotic analytical framework adapted by Dinh (2016), to answer the following research questions:

- (1) Is culture represented in the newly authored Iranian EFL 'Prospect' textbook series? If yes,
- (2) How is culture represented in Iranian EFL 'Prospect series' textbook?
- (3) Do the tasks in the Iranian EFL 'Prospect series' textbook address culture?

First main research question deals with finding the culture implicitness or explicitness of the texts. If a specific culture is identified, then the two subresearch-questions are answered. First sub-research question asks what aspects and levels of culture are represented. The second sub-research question aims at finding whether the tasks address culture or not.

3.2 Sample

The data for this research are the locally developed English language textbooks used at Iranian junior high school called 'Prospect series'. The locally developed set, 'Prospect 1', 'Prospect 2', and 'Prospect 3' have been used in schools since September 2013, 2014, and 2016 respectively. The selection of local textbook developed by non-native speakers were based on the following reasons: a) They lent themselves to potential analysis of culture, b) textbooks were written by Iranian materials writers for Iranian student population. Such shared cultural background of both authors and potential users of the materials creates

opportunities for cultural reflection that is harder to achieve in textbooks for a global market (Weininger, 2013), and a) the 'Prospect series' textbooks are newly developed following the fundamental shift in approach in 2010, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The locally developed 'Prospect 1, 2, and 3' each includes 8, 7, and 6 units, respectively. The researchers chooses the conversation sections, as kernel part, accompanied by visuals in student book for text and visual analysis and the tasks provided for the conversations in the teacher's guide book for task analysis.

3.3 Data analysis

The analytical method of the current study is based on the Cultural Semiotics framework adapted by Dinh (2016b) represented in Table 1 which emphasizes the analysis of texts, tasks and visuals in relation to each other. This study has made some adaptations to the framework for aspect of culture analysis in texts at the level of Big culture dimensions by adding three more general categories of artefacts, art forms, and institution (Moran, 2001), and omitting the too specific category of food. To achieve the purpose, all the texts, visuals, and tasks included in the conversation section of the textbooks will be all examined. To do so, I first classify a text as culture-implicit or culture-explicit, based on the topic, participants' roles, actions and attitudes. With this method, the questions about the representation of culture in the textbooks can be answered. If a text is culturally specific, this method can help identify which culture is described. Then, the forms of culture will be analyzed based on the aspect and level of culture. The examination of the aspect of culture yields two sets of data. First, culture presented in the curricular materials will be explored at the surface level (Big C) and the deeper level (small c culture). Then, the origins of the culture represented will be traced based on Kachru's World Englishes model to see if the textbooks adherence to the concept of EIL. Culture in textbooks will be also investigated under level of culture i.e. whether it is communication-oriented or knowledge-oriented.

After the text, the visuals will be analyzed. The aim of visual analysis is to examine what message the visual conveys, whose image is represented and whether or not it matches the text content. The visual analytical framework will be based on the four key elements of Identification (participants), Activity (actions), Circumstances (settings) and Attributes (characteristics). Finally, once the visuals are analyzed, a comparison between visual and text content is made to see if they correspond to each other and share the cultural content or message.

After the examination of texts and visuals, the tasks will be analyzed. For tasks analysis, a version of McConachy's (2009) framework is employed, based on which speaking question are categorized into five types: language-based questions, information-based, function-based questions, comparative questions, and general speculative questions. This study analyses the tasks provided for the conversation sections of this textbook series in the teachers' guide book, as there are no tasks for conversations given in the student book. Therefore, the teachers' guide book goes through the task analysis to find out whether they address culture or not. Some examples of the analysis are provided in the following sections.

Culture-implicit text

Applying the four criteria proposed by Orton (2009) including the topic, participants' roles, actions and attitudes as expressed in the content of the text, the text in Figure 1 is identified as culture-implicit. The topic is 'My Family', the participants are called 'Student 1' and 'Student 2' (not bounded to any particular country or culture). The action depicted in the text is students' asking and talking about each other's families. A neutral attitude is apparent throughout the text without the insertion of subjective opinions or personal feelings. Therefore, this text is considered as culture-implicit as it does not explicitly address any particular country's culture.

Culture-explicit text

As figure 2 represents, the content of Lesson 6 of 'Prospect 2' centres on Big and small culture categories focusing on location and daily life. The topic is 'village', and the participants are two males named 'Sam' and 'Hamid', the action depicted is asking and talking about Hamid's hometown that is the village of 'Ghez-ghal'eh' located in West Azarbaijan, the city of Khoy: A mountain village with many trees and flowers, famous for sunflower fields. The villagers work on farms and raise animals there, the weather is windy in summer, fall and winter, and gets very cold from 'Aban' to 'Farvardin'. The attitude of Sam is in a way that he finds it an interesting place. This topic and text content represent Iranian culture as this village is located in the country of Iran. In addition to that, the names of speakers, 'Hamid' and 'Sam', and the names of Persian months, 'Aban' and 'Farvardin', provide more signifiers to dominant the representation of Iranian culture.

Culture-implicit visual

Considering figure 3, the participants in the picture are three post boxes and letters that can be found in many parts in the world and it is difficult to identify which country is represented; therefore, the culture is implicit. In some other cases, no particular culture is represented since there is a mixture of different signifiers. For instance in lesson 2 of 'Prospect 3':

This visual illustration in figure 4 is considered as culture-explicit, but no single culture is represented. The visual presents the flags of Germany, Spain, Bangladesh, Japan and some other flags which are not identifiable. The woman's clothing style wearing 'Manteo' and 'Maghnae' represents the country of Iran.

Culture-explicit visual.

According to the visual semiotic analytical framework, figure 5 is categorised as culture-specific to Iranian culture. The illustration is apparently of an Iranian setting with the flag of Iran at the school and three Iranian students greeting and shaking hands. The characters' physical features and the cultural artifact like outfits provide more hints to consider the visual as culture-explicit.

Texts and visuals correspondence

The visual analytical framework was employed not only to classify visuals as culture-implicit or culture-explicit but also to examine whether or not the visuals and texts correspond. It has been found that there is an occasional mismatch between texts and visuals occur when visuals

are culture-implicit whereas texts are not or vice versa. For instance, with regard to figure 6, there is a detached mismatch relationship between the text and visual of lesson 8 of ‘Prospect 1’. The topic is ‘my favorite food’ and the text corresponds with the topic of the lesson as the participants talk about foods. However, the visual does not correspond to the topic and the text. The visual depicts two girls sitting in a living room talking to each other. However there are no hints to signify that the participants are talking or thinking about food.

Representation of culture in tasks

Considering the tasks, majority of questions rely on linguistic meaning and information comprehension, and questions triggering the awareness of culture, requiring students to employ communication strategies are rare. Below are examples of language-based, information-based, and comparative questions. Function-based and general speculative types of questions were not provided in the textbooks investigated.

Language-based question:

Make sure they understand the meaning of these words. Elicit the meanings from the students, and provide the Persian equivalents if necessary, for instance,

gym سالن ورزش **stay** (at home) در خانه ماندن relax استراحت کردن

sure! حتماً عالی. خبلی خوبه.

(When can you) start? از کی می توانید شروع کنید؟

I'll let her know. به او خبر می دهم.

Alavimoghadam, B. et al, (2016). *‘Prospect 2’ Teacher’s Guide* (Fourth). Tehran: Textbook Publishing Company in Iran, p. 39.

The aim of this task is to check students’ understanding of the denotative meanings of lexical items. The focus is on linguistic meaning of the language items.

Information-based question:

Now ask questions (in Persian) to check what your students have understood.

Example Questions:

1. نام معلم چیست؟

2. نام دانش آموز نخست چیست؟

3. معلم چگونه با این دانش آموز احوالپرسی میکند؟

4. دانش آموز چگونه به معلم پاسخ میدهد؟

Alavimoghadam, B. et al, (2016). *‘Prospect 1’ Teacher’s Guide* (Fourth). Tehran: Textbook Publishing Company in Iran, p. 23.

These are information or content-based questions which their answers are found in the text provided. To answer these questions, students have to refer to the text, understand the presented information, and locate the specific information.

Comparative question:

Phase 3. Post listening: Ask some comprehension questions: 3 types of questions can be asked: display, inference, and opinion gap.

-Display question: Is Reza helpful?

-Inference question: Does Reza help Parham?

-Opinion-gap question: Is your friend kind?

Alavimoghadam, B. et al, (2016). *'Prospect 3 'Teacher's Guide* (Fourth). Tehran: Textbook Publishing Company in Iran, p. 39.

There are three questions provided for post listening stage that the third question is an example of comparative self-relation question. This question requires students to talk about their own experience and reflect on themselves.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Research questions 1: Is culture represented in the newly authored Iranian EFL 'Prospect' textbook series?

The findings show that culture is represented in both implicit and explicit manners in 'Prospect' textbook series including Prospect 1, 2 and 3. Culture is represented in visuals to the great extent, and fairly represented in texts in both explicit and implicit manners. There are 33.33% culture-explicit texts, and 61.9% culture-explicit visuals that represent only the local country which is Iran. In 'Prospect 1', units 2, 4, 5, 6, and 8 contain culture-implicit texts. Their topics are, 'classmate', 'Family', 'appearance', 'house', and 'favourite food'. In 'Prospect 2', units 3, 4, and 7 contain culture-implicit texts. Their topics are 'abilities', 'health', and 'hobbies'. In 'Prospect 3', units 1 and 4 are culture-implicit. Their topics are 'personality', and 'services'. These units may imply a certain culture, but do not belong to any specific culture or country; therefore, they are regarded as culture-implicit. Culture-explicit texts contain information on a specific culture or a mixture of cultures in contact. A certain amount of background knowledge on the culture is essential to understand the texts. In 'Prospect 1' out of 8 lessons, there are a total of 3 culture-explicit texts. In 'Prospect 2' out of 7 lessons, there are a total 4 culture-explicit texts. The text of lesson 1 represent mixed countries, where the local Iranian culture seems dominant. The texts of lessons 2, 5, and 6 represent local Iranian culture. In 'Prospect 3' out of 6 lessons, there are a total 4 culture-explicit texts. Three of them represent Iranian culture and one of them represent mixed countries of Iran and Germany, but the dominant country represented is Iran. Regarding the content of visual illustrations, it has been found that amongst the total of 29

visual illustrations in all the three textbooks, there are 6 culture-implicit visuals and 23 culture-explicit visuals. Culture-implicit visuals include lessons 5 and 7 in 'Prospect 1', and lessons 1 and 4 in 'Prospect 2', and lessons 1 and 4 in 'Prospect 3'. Both texts and visuals have a tendency to avoid representing specific cultures except Iran, and low percentages of 19.04%, and 9.76% respectively in texts and visuals are devoted to mixed countries.

This study following Dinh (2016b), categorized texts and visuals which represent topics and content without cultural hints as culture-implicit. While other studies like Ajideh and Panahi(2016), Rashidi and Najafi (2010), and Aliakbari(2005) categorised them as culture-free/free-culture or culture-neutral implying that in these texts and visuals culture is not at all represented. This study is in agreement with what Dinh (2016b) argues that culture is also represented in these types of texts and visuals, but differs in that they are implicit and explicit. The findings of this study regarding culture-implicitness and explicitness in texts and visuals support the outcomes of previous studies by Ajideh and Panahi (2016), Hassankiadeh and Faraji (2013) into the Iranian newly developed textbooks, in that local Iranian culture is dominated, and lacks cultural diversity. However, this study had different result with previous study done by Ajideh and Panahi (2016) in interpreting the data investigating the explicitness and implicitness of texts. For instance, as figure 7 shows, the conversation text of Lesson 1 in 'Prospect 1' was investigated as culture-free by Ajideh and Panahi (2016); while, this study regards it as a culture-explicit text:

The text content centers on 'small c' category that is expressing greeting custom classified as deeper level of the aspect of culture. The content of the text is not explicitly devoted to describing greeting custom in Iranian society and culture, but the text content represents Iranian greeting custom in formal situations like schools considering the sentence 'thank you sit down'. In relation to Iranian cultures, according to Kim et al, (2009), the most important posture toward authority in Iran could be described as getting up whenever a person enters the room and standing still when you are greeting them. Accordingly, the text of lesson 1 of 'Prospect 1' is culture-explicit conveying cultural hints and information particularly of 'small c' category.

The study has found that over 33% and 47% of visuals and texts are culture-implicit, and there are no specific representation of other countries in texts or visuals. This great amount of culture-implicit texts and visuals can be regarded as a problem in the locally developed EFL 'Prospect' textbook. The disadvantages could be as follows: a) 'Prospect series' textbooks will not succeed in providing enough information of culture associated with different varieties of English and their understanding, and b) they will not succeed in preparing learners for intercultural communication, and developing intercultural communicative competence.

4.2 Research question 2: How is culture represented in the Iranian EFL 'Prospect series' textbook?

The goal of this research question is to investigate if the textbook reflects the cultural perspective of EIL paradigm by examining the aspect of culture, and examining the level of presentation of culture and the correspondence between texts and visuals. Regarding the

aspect of culture, this study has found that expanding circle cultural content dominated the cultural content in the ‘Prospect series’ textbook. Local Iranian culture is dominant in both text content and visual illustrations in the whole ‘Prospect series’ textbook, and there is lack of cultural diversity. Iranian culture is introduced in ‘Prospect series’ textbooks in 33% of texts, and 61% of visuals; while other countries are not represented specifically. Other countries including inner, outer circle, and expanding circle countries are represented in mixed manner including the USA, the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Bangladesh, Japan, India and so forth. Furthermore, according to the data, the representation of culture in texts is ‘Big C’ oriented, presenting cultural products at levels of entertainment, artefacts, institution, food, merchandise and travel, and cultural practices including customs, daily life, and society but not at deeper levels of perspectives and persons, i.e., ‘small c’.

The other finding of the study regarding the level of representation of culture in texts and visuals reveals that cultures are represented in ‘Prospect series’ textbook in communication-oriented manner. In other words, they are represented in the form of conversations among people from different cultures rather than fact-oriented manner. However, it needs to be taken into account that the textbooks do not directly devote sections or contents mainly for the purpose of informing learners of cultural information.

Regarding the relationship between texts and visuals highlighted in the semiotic approach, it has been found that the dominant relationship between texts and visuals is indexical, and the detached type of relationship is found in ‘Prospect series’ textbook at over 33%. The finding of the study is in line with the outcome of the study by Dinh (2016b) that the problematic detached relationship was the dominant in Vietnamese local English textbook series. Visuals and their important functions as an important channel of information in comprehending the unit content cannot be disregarded; therefore, this worrying issue needs to be taken into consideration by Iranian material developers.

4.3 Research question 3: Do the tasks in the Iranian EFL ‘Prospect series’ textbook address culture?

In ‘Prospect 1’, it is noticeable that culture is minimally addressed in the conversation questions, only 11.8% of the questions operate at comparative (self-relations) level. The comparative questions, mostly ask students to make comparisons between what is presented in the text and their life. Significant attention has been placed on information based questions since 88.4% of the questions are information-based. In ‘Prospect 2’, language-based and information-based questions are about 16.6% and 94.4%, and questions, which require examining culture at deeper level like comparative and speculative questions are absent. In ‘Prospect 3’, in pre-listening stage, 40.7% of the questions are language-based, and 48.1% are information-based (text-based). In while-listening stage, 27.9% of questions are language-based and 72.% of questions are information-based (text-based). In post-listening stage 72.2% of questions are information-based (text-based) and 27.7% are comparative (self-relations) questions. The findings demonstrate that culture is represented in texts and visuals in both culturally implicit and culturally explicit forms but it is limitedly addressed in the tasks. This domination of language and information-based questions needs to be revised.

5. Conclusion

As already mentioned, this study investigated the representation of culture in Iranian English Prospect textbooks across texts, visuals, and tasks in light of EIL perspective. It has demonstrated the expanding circle cultural content domination in the whole locally developed 'Prospect' textbook series. In other words, local Iranian culture is highly valued; while, other countries including inner, outer, and expanding circles are underrepresented. This is not in line with EIL perspective that is exposing learners to one single culture. It is recommended that textbook writers expose learners with diverse cultures both in quality and quantity across texts, visuals, and tasks. With regard to the important function of visuals as an important channel of information; the problematic detached relationship between texts and visuals in some lessons needs to be taken into consideration by textbook writers. This shortcoming demonstrates the effectiveness of semiotic approach in examining texts and visuals in relation to each other. Furthermore, as majority of tasks were of information and language-based types, it is recommended to design tasks requiring learners examining culture at deeper levels, allowing them employing different communication strategies, and developing intercultural competencies. To conclude, the current Iranian locally developed 'Prospect' English textbooks demonstrate the localization of English in the world due to the expanding circle cultural content domination rather than exposure to the Anglo-based cultures; however, the textbook is not in line with globalization of English and inherent perspective in EIL that is providing learners with exposure to the diverse cultures of communities in the world. Therefore, the locally developed 'Prospect' English textbooks should reflect the reality of English use today to by taking linguistic and cultural diversity both in quantity and quality into account and thus preparing learners for intercultural communications.

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Appendix

Table 1. Cultural Semiotics framework

Components	Purpose of analysis	Analytical frameworks	Items to be analyzed
Texts	Culture-implicitness or culture-explicitness	Culture in texts (Ramirez & Kelly Hall, 1990; Gee, 1999; Freebody, 2003; Orton, 2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topics - Nouns/ adjectives relate to a nation - Participants' role - Actions - Attitudes
	Whose cultures in culture-explicit texts		
	'Big C' or 'small c' Communication-oriented or information-oriented	Aspects and levels of culture (Murayama, 2002; Moran, 2001) 'Big C' and 'small c'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Text content -Text form
Visuals	Culture-implicitness or culture-explicitness	Semiotic analysis of images (Halliday, 1994; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Identification (participants) - Activity (actions) - Circumstances (settings) -Attributes(characteristics)
	The correspondence between texts and visuals		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How they represent the world - How they address the audience - How the parts of an image relate to form a meaningful whole
Tasks	Social-cultural awareness in tasks	Social-cultural awareness task evaluation (McConachy, 2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language based questions - Function based questions - Comparative questions -General speculative questions

Student 1: Nice picture! Is that your father?
Student 2: Yes, he is.
Student 1: How old is he?
Student 2: 38.
Student 1: What's his job?
Student 2: He's a mechanic.
Student 1: And your mother?
Student 2: She's 35. She is a housewife.

Figure 1. An example conversation from 'Prospect 1'

Sam: Where are you from, Hamid?
Hamid: Ghez-ghal'eh.
Sam: Where is it?
Hamid: It's a village in West Azarbaijan, near the city of Khoy.
Sam: What's it like?
Hamid: It's a mountain village with many trees and flowers.
It's famous for its sunflower fields.
Sam: What's the people's job?
Hamid: They work on farms and raise animals.
Sam: What about the weather?
Hamid: There's a lot of wind in summer, fall and winter.
It's very cold from Aban to Farvardin.
Sam: It sounds to be a very interesting place.

Figure 2. An example conversation from 'Prospect 2'



Figure 3. An example visual from 'Prospect 3'

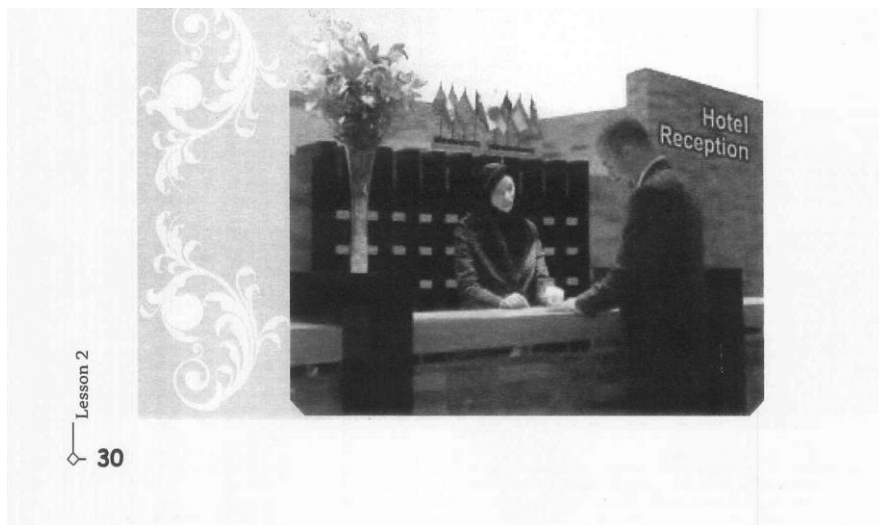


Figure 4. An example visual from 'Prospect 3'



Figure 5. An example visual from 'Prospect 1'

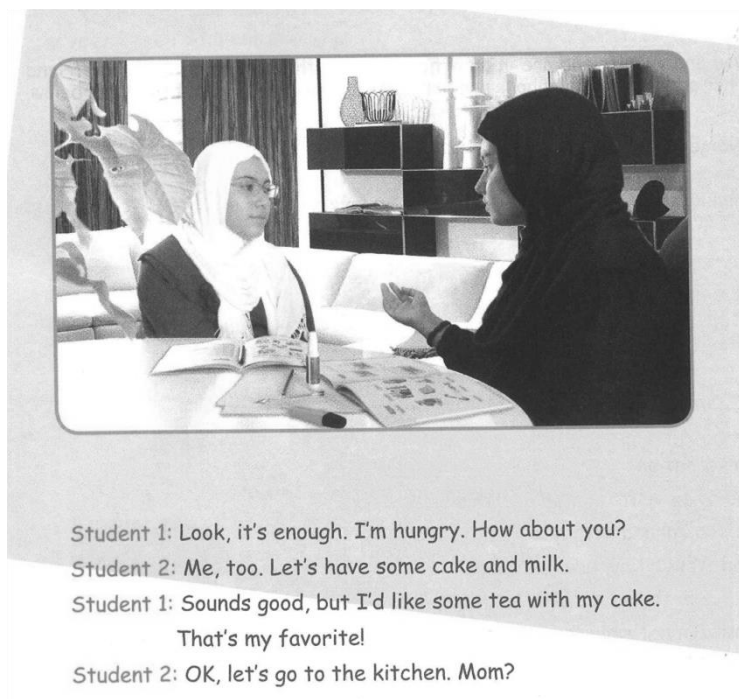


Figure 6. An example from 'Prospect 1'

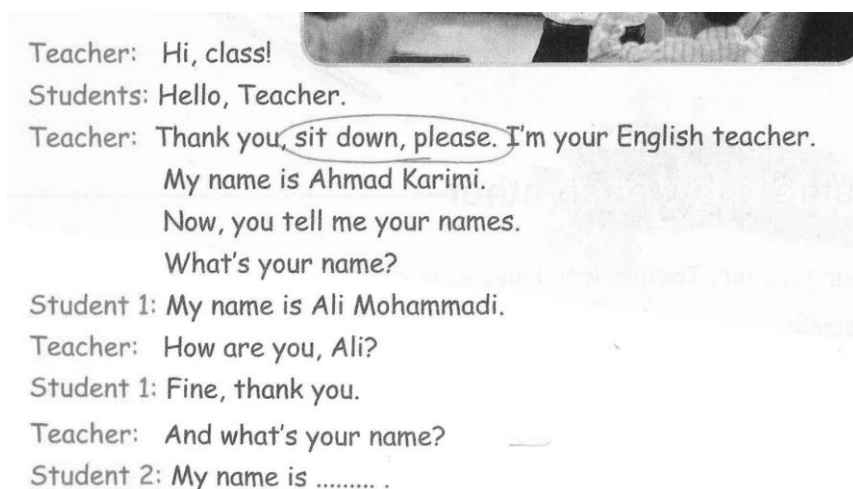


Figure 7. An example from 'Prospect 1'

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