Examining Cross-Cultural Clues as to Globalization and Iran's Culture in an International ELT Book Series - *American English File*

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Abstract *This study aims to investigate the cross-cultural issues in four volumes of an English textbook- American English File. For the aim of this study the different countries mentioned in the book were highlighted and classified based on different aspects of culture. This study believes in global English and intends to discover the extent to which these books consider this issue. The results suggest the UK and the USA were the most frequent mentioned countries in the reading texts. Iran as an Asian country had no room in this book and Japan was the most frequent Asian country.*

Keywords: Culture, World Englishes, Globalization

1. Introduction

Culture which has been defined as "the behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought, esp. as expressed in a particular community or period" in *The American Heritage Dictionary* has been defined and considered by many scholars. For instance, Chastain (1988) divided culture in small and large ones. By large, he meant the major products of the society in general, and by small he referred to the way people live. Lessard-Clouston (1997) referred to Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1954) who found over three hundred definitions for culture. For instance Robinson (1988) defined culture as a system of symbols on which past experiences influence to make meaning and it affects the future experience.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Language and Culture

Rashidi and Najafi (2010) stated that culture and language are related. They believed "relationship between language and culture is so great that they are referred to as the sides of the same coin" (p.624). But should they be related in the sense of language teaching in classrooms? Harumi (2002) stated that since Sapir (1921), language and culture have been considered to be taught in a close association. According to Clouet (2006) in the last three decades culture has been becoming a significant part of language teaching. In his view, every particular language is composed of a particular system of values which manifests the culture. Therefore, learning a language necessarily involves learning the culture in order to be able to communicate successfully, but this learning should be comparative and contrastive. Students learn a new system of values by learning the target culture which can be understood in the light of learners' existing cultural knowledge to be meaningful for them. This will lead to their appraisal of the target culture and better understanding of their native culture.

Hayati (2009) stated language is a means to convey cultural information and it reflects ways of thinking. He referred to some authors (Byram 1997; Harumi, 2002; Kramsch 1993) and emphasized the impossibility of teaching English without culture.

Ketabi and Talebinezhad (2009) also emphasized that teaching and learning a foreign language is not tantamount to teaching grammar and vocabulary because as Kachru and Nelson (1996) stated readers

receive any text in three levels: intelligibility, interpretability, and comprehensibility, and according to Chastain (1988) what affects comprehensibility is the students' familiarity with the foreign culture. In addition, Mobasser and saeedi tavakoli (2011) believed that we cannot separate language and culture; learning a language without culture means failure in its use. They said if we could perceive the others' message by words and without culture, everyone would be able to learn a language only by help of a bilingual dictionary and a grammar book.

2.2. Globalization

Al-Salman (2007) believed that in the last two decades, languages especially English has been influenced by globalization.

Kachru and Nelson (1996) the key figures of the *world Englishes* theory stated that the accepted varieties of English are American and British, whereas there are many other national varieties of English such as Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, Dominican, Indian, Tanzanian, Ugandan, Kenyan, and so many others. In theses countries English is the native or the official language. So, why not their English should be considered the accepted version?

English has been widespread because of immigration, colonization, or other purposes. Thus, in addition to the countries in the Inner circle (natives), the countries in the Outer circle (ESL) and the Expanding circle (EFL) should be considered as well. Singh, Lele, and Martohardjono (1988) mentioned that the majority of people in the world worry about being misunderstood by the American or British who are the minority (cited in Chick, 1996) Therefore, we might come up with these questions that "Which of these countries' culture entails to be integrated with English as an international language? Or "Do we have to select one or a few of these countries and cross the others out?" Or "Shall we refer to English as a global language and include many cultures in teaching English?" Harumi (2002) confirmed Smith (1981) and declared that nobody needs to become like native English speakers to use English well. Therefore, it does not need to clean forget your own culture to learn English.

Clouet (2006) also declared it is true that language and culture are integral parts, but he raised a question that whose culture made up that integral part. He stated that English has become "de-nationalized, and there is no longer any particular culture associated with the language in general", so it seems really difficult to select which culture should be taught (p.56). Moreover, Hayati (2009) quoted Savignon and Sysoyev (2002) that English is a global language and a specific culture should not be highlighted.

For the purpose of this study, the adopted approach toward English culture is the global English or the world Englishes, and since "the first step toward being able to discuss English in its global context is to overcome a quite natural or intuitive concept of the ownership of language" (Kachru & Nelson, 1996), this study considers no owners for the English and tries to scrutinize the four volumes of *American English File* series to see whether or not there is a matter of ownership by American and British writers in these books or whether the target culture- Iran's culture- as a country in the Expanding circle is emphasized, because based on Johnson (1981, 1982) students better understand the texts which are based on their background culture (cited in Chastain,1988)

2.3. Culture in Textbooks

There have been plenty of theories and studies on the interaction of reading texts and culture and on the issue of globalization. For example Baker (2003) believed that teaching of culture, unlike in Thailand, should be an integral part of normal language classrooms. Teaching culture in his opinion should take place in three levels: teacher training, materials development, and course content. Learners should be aware of the new culture and should be able to compare it with their own culture.

Sadeghi (2007) referred to culture as one of the key factors to reading comprehension. In his study,

cultural knowledge was proved to be one of the distorting factors in comprehension, especially when a text contains cultural elements with which readers are not familiar enough. However, his emphasis was more on cultural invasion rather than globalization. It means he believes foreign cultures should be adjusted to our own culture before stated in our textbooks.

Al-Salman's (2007) findings recognized the global role of English which can be due to its ability to deal with technology and due to its role in international decision making.

In the issue of globalization, 96 percent of the participants in a study by Al Jarf (2008) declared they consider English superior to Arabic because they think English is the language of the global village. English is used in all countries, while Arabic is restricted to some countries.

Ketabi and Talebinezhad (2009) searched for socio-cultural patterns in high-school books of Iran and believed that educational foreign texts should contain various cultures while it seems to be a shortage in these books and it might be due to the fact that these books are written by Iranian authors.

Baleghizadeh and Jamali Motahed (2010) realized that compared to British textbooks, American textbooks contain more cultural contrasts. They stated the American textbooks show the American way of life and how one should behave in the United States, but the British textbooks mostly depict the British way of life and how one should behave in different situations.

Rashidi and Najafi (2010) examined ILI (Iran Language Institute) advance reading texts and perceived nineteen percent of the texts do not carry any specific culture and only seven per cent of the texts are related to Islamic culture. However, their study revealed a good variety of cultures in the reading texts, that is, although their study confirmed lack of the presence of some cultures, it corroborated the presence of variety in introducing cultures in reading texts.

3. Objects of the Study

Rashidi and Najafi (2010) who scrutinized the ILI advanced books stated that there is lack of studies on the materials and the culture taught in Iran institutes. Therefore, the major purpose of this study is to examine the content of four volumes of one of the textbook series in English institutes - *American English File*- to see whether they are culturally based and whose culture is emphasized. In order to achieve this goal, the current study addresses the following questions:

Q1. Do the reading texts in *American English File* series (Start, 1,2, 3) convey the idea of world Englishes?

Q2. Which circle (Inner, Outer, or Expanding) is the center of attention in the reading texts of these books?

Q3. Do the reading texts in *American English File* series (Start, 1,2, 3) include Iran's culture and values as an Islamic country?

4. Method

4.1. Materials

The *American English File* series has recently started to be taught in language institutes of Iran. These books are going to be taught in 15 terms in an English language college- Azaran. The number of terms might be different in other institutes. Currently, only three books have been taught and from next terms the other volumes will be covered too. That is why this study considers only 4 volumes, i.e., Start book, books 1 and 2 which are being covered and book 3 which is going to be taught from next term. Start and book 3 contain 7 units and books 1 and 2 have 9 units. We cannot consider the same pattern for all units because while one of them starts with grammar, the other may start with reading.

The reading texts are the focus of this study, because reading is more a receptive skill than a productive

one, and it can be a good means to enrich or invade a culture. In these books, reading texts are generally accompanied with other skills such as listening or speaking or with language components like vocabulary. Only the texts which are labeled "Reading" are taken into account for the aim of this study.

   Name of the book: American English File (2010)
   Authors: Clive Oxenden and Christina Latham-Koenig
   Publisher: Oxford University Press

4.2. Procedure

In this study, all the reading texts in all four books were put under investigation. The countries which are mentioned in the books were classified into five groups. Rashidi and Najafi (2010) observed Ramirez and Halls' (1990) study of content analysis and established a coding scheme with eight categories: reference to English speaking countries (H), reference to non-English speaking western countries (I), reference to eastern countries (L), Cross-national comparison (M), reference to Iran (N) and, reference to Islam or Islamic traditions (O), general texts such as those related to science(J) (p.627). Observing their research, this study preferred to establish 5 categories: 1) Asian countries, 2) European countries, 3) African countries, 4) American countries and 5) Australian countries. Even only a name of a country was considered. The researcher went through this process for any individual book and for all the books together. If the name of a country was not specified, the clues such as names and identities were taken into account.

   Baleghizadeh and Jamali Motahed (2010) adopted Taki's (2008) five major categories to analyze the content. These five categories are: "a) cultural contrast, festivals and customs, b) entertainment, human interest stories, discussion starters ranging from trivial matters to social issues, c) occupational, d) consumer-oriented, and e) Interpersonal, introspective, interactional regarding individuals and institutions". In addition, they added four more categories including law enforcement, advertisement, politics, and education (p.8). This study accumulated a) and b) and made a new category: behavioral patterns which contain subjects like general lifestyle, way of dressing, activities on vacation, parties and festivals. Institution as another category in this study can cover c) to some extent because institutes and offices go to this category.

   The categories selected here can mostly show the researcher's approach toward culture and the most important aspects of culture in her viewpoint. Therefore, instead of adding categories, the researcher establishes her own categories, based on different aspects of culture. These categories are as follows: 1. Behavioral patterns 2. Art (e.g., Painting, sculpturing) 3. Beliefs/ thought 4. Institutions (e.g., schools) 5. Product of work (e.g., books, films). 6. What to eat and drink.

   The percent of coverage of the 5 continents were calculated and then in another table the number of referring to each country based on the different aspects of culture was counted.

5. Results

The results of this study, as shown in Table 1, can reveal the following facts:
1. In the *Start* book, there was about 26% reference to the Asian countries, while this percentage for the European, American, African and Australian was about 48%, 26%, 0% and 0% respectively.
2. In *book 1*, about 11% and 46% of the mentioned countries were Asian and European respectively, while 37.5% was dedicated to American countries and only 3% was specified to each African and Australian countries.
3. In *book 2*, the percentage for Asian, European, American, African and Australian countries were about 6%, 51%, 37%, 0%, and 6% respectively.
4. In *book 3*, Asian and Australian countries took about 6% of the reading texts, while European countries took 48.5%. American and African countries were mentioned in 26% and 14% of the texts

respectively.

5. Generally, in all four books, European countries with about 47.5% were the highest mentioned countries. The American countries were ranked the second with about 32%, and Asian countries came third with 11.5%. African and Australian countries took the joint fourth place with about 4%.

6. The only countries to which there are references in all aspects of culture, which were considered in this study, are the US and the UK. Other countries are mentioned in one or a few of the aspects.

Having a look at the first and second ranked continents, we can realize that among European countries England, Britain and the UK were the most repeated ones; other countries like Italy, Norway, France, Germany, Spain, Russia, and Scotland were mentioned too, but much fewer than those three altogether. For example in all four books, about 22 times, i.e., about 1/3 of all European countries, the related cities or countries to the UK were mentioned while only 5 times Germany was taken into account. Besides, the American cities and countries in these books include all English speaking ones except for a few of them such as Brazil, and Mexico. This could reveal that the Inner circle countries are centralized in these books.

Among Asian countries, Japan was the most frequent one with about 44% reference. The countries mentioned in this category like Japan, Turkey, Vietnam, China, Thailand and Singapore could be considered in the Expanding circle in which English language is considered a foreign language.

Table 1. The percentage of considering each continent in each book

Continents / Books	Asia	Europe	America	Africa	Australia
Start	26.08	47.82	26.08	0	0
1	15.62	40.62	37.5	3.12	3.12
2	6.12	51.02	36.73	0	6.12
3	5.71	17	9	5	2
Total	11.5	47.48	32.37	4.31	4.31

Table 2, which is following, is the second step to detect the cultural concern in these books. As it is clear, the Japanese culture was the Asian culture which was the most frequently mentioned in this book series. Among the European countries, the UK and among the American ones, the USA were the most frequently mentioned. On the other hand, African and Australian countries, and consequently their cultures, could be said to have been ignored to some extent.

In Table 2, the distribution of cultural features of different countries which were referred to in the texts is shown under six categories which were stated in procedure section, i.e., 1. Behavioral patterns 2. Art 3. Beliefs/ thought 4. Institutions 5. Product of work 6. What to eat and drink.

Table 2. Distribution of cultural features of different countries in the texts

Features / Continents	1	2	3	4	5	6
Asia	J(5) T(2) V(2)		J(2)	J(2)		J(4)
Europe	S(6) N(4) I(7)	U(2) F(1)	S(1) F(2) U(5)	F(2) U(4) I(1)	G(1) I(2) S(1)	F(3) I(2) U(6)

	U(17) W(1) F(7) G(3) R(1) f(1) Gr(1)		G(1) R(1) I(2) f(1)	S(1) R(1)	U(1)	N(1) R(2)
America	Us(43) C(2) B(3) c(2)	Us(6)	s(12)	Us(7)	Us(14)	Us(12)
Africa	K(2) b(1) Af(2) M(1)					
Australia	A(1) Nw(1)					

J=Japan T=Turkey V=Vietnam S=Spain N=Norway
I=Italy U=UK W=Sweden F=France G=Germany
R=Russia f=Finland Gr=Greece Us=USA C=Canada
B=Brazil c=Colombia K=Kenya b=Borneo Af=Africa
M= Mali A=Australia Nw=New Zealand

6. Discussion

The goal put forward by this study was to examine the ownership of English by the native countries which provide the English books for other countries, and to study whether the authors consider the issue of *World Englishes* and in particular, whether they include Iran's culture in their texts or not.

   With regard to the results of this study, our first hypothesis agreeing with Rashidi and Najafi (2010) can be confirmed. It means these books include the other countries' culture in their reading texts although some of countries may be ignored and some may be highly focused.

   The second question in line with Baleghizadeh and Jamali Motahed (2010) could be answered in this way that although some non-English speaking countries are included, the Inner circle countries, especially the UK and the USA, are more highlighted in these books, and all considered aspects of their culture are covered. Therefore, the Inner circle is the center of attention.

   To answer the third question of the study, we can conclude that Iran's culture has no room in these books. First of all Iran as an Islamic country can have many common points with Islamic countries, but to our chagrin, there is no reference to any Islamic culture in the reading texts. Secondly, Iran as an Asian country can have some common points with its neighbor countries, but only 11.5% of all the four books have been specified to Asian countries which was mostly focused on Japan.

   Although, based on studying the reading texts, Iran's culture has not mentioned in these books, it can be influenced by different cultures due to globalization's role in facilitating cultural integration. In fact, this integration can influence all cultures including ours. In this process the countries which are introduced more frequently might be more influential than the countries which are never or hardly ever mentioned. But does this integration enrich or weaken our culture? This is a question which must be answered in a full research, considering the fact that thanks to technologies, such as the Internet, satellite, cell phone, etc., culture has turned into an ever-changing subject. In fact, we cannot easily judge if a difference has a positive or negative effect on our culture. Therefore, in this study, we only compare these differences to our system of values to see whether they are in line or against our values and we do not claim that they enrich or weaken our culture.

To judge whether or not they are taboos and against our system of values, we should wonder if an Iranian author wanted to write a book, they would be allowed officially to include these topics. Some of the cultural differences in the books under study will be stated in the following paragraphs.

As an example, in the *Start* book, there are some texts in which a man cuts women's hair or the youngsters who go to bar or clubs for fun or work in a pub, or walk their dogs in parks. There are also texts about friendship of girls and boys and their dancing and singing together. Some Iranian might have been used to such behavior, but they are completely against our Islamic and Iranian culture and values. Beforehand, talking about girlfriends and boyfriends used to be a taboo in classrooms, but these days even if teachers want to avoid talking about these topics, books prepare the requisites. At the same time we should consider the fact that these books are not only for Iran and in many other countries, such topics may be acceptable. Other topics which are mentioned in reading texts of *Book 1* and are against our system of values are as follows: referring to women's smoking, making a girl or boy friend on the Internet, dancing in club, drinking alcohol, the relation of a married man with a girl, the relation of a married woman with a man, and using phrases like "spend one night together" or "have a passionate love affair", teenage traveling to other countries with the opposite sex friend, talking about their problems with their boy or girlfriends, girls' going home from bar at midnight and drinking.

Book 2 and *3* also contain taboo topics such as dating, dancing, and living with girlfriend. Apart from the reading texts, the pictures included in these books can be against our system of values; pictures such as that of a woman swimming in a bikini, a girl and a boy kissing each other, or women in such clothes which are generally taboo in our countries.

As it was mentioned earlier, the Inner circle countries were the focus of the reading texts, excluding Australia. It may show that although the authors try to refer to other countries and cultures, they are still likely to be in favor of British and American culture. Asian culture is mostly restricted to that of Japanese especially their food and Islamic culture is ignored. African culture has no considerable reference, except for one text which is about difficulty of living. Some other countries may also have been mentioned negatively. For instance in two texts, the people who lived in Norway talked about leaving the country. But many people are going to the USA to work or live (e.g., p.28, *Book 2*). Naming USA sightseeing and the films produced in the USA also can be in their favor too. There are also some general texts which are culturally neutral and cannot belong to only one culture (e.g., p.79, *Book 1*).

Therefore, these books might be able to claim they take a lot of countries and cultures into account, but they cannot claim they are appropriate in all countries such as Iran. By teaching these kinds of books the unacceptable topics may become common ones and gradually start to become a part of our culture regardless of their positive or negative effect.

The researcher believes that the authors of English textbooks should consider religious issues in their materials development. They can also prepare different textbooks for different geographical areas. Despite, teachers should be aware of cross-cultural issues and inform their students of the differences and teach them to compare and contrast the cultures in a way that can enable them to appreciate their own culture, not just get fascinated by the foreign culture.

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