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Exploring Culture in Locally Published English Textbooks for Primary Education in Turkey

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～ Since language and culture are closely interwoven, the integration of culture into textbooks used for teaching English as a second/foreign language has become a widely accepted phenomenon. This study investigates the cultural elements in locally published English textbooks used for Turkish primary schools following two major curriculum innovations in ELT. A total of 18 textbooks, of which 8 were published after the 1997 curriculum innovation and 10 after the curriculum innovation introduced in 2005, were investigated to find out the extent to which textbooks contain references to the source (Turkish) culture, the target (British/American) culture and the international target culture. A quantitative analysis of the cultural elements demonstrated that while references to the source and target cultures included in textbooks published between 1997 and 2005 outnumber international target cultural components, a different trend was obtained in the cultural analysis of books published after the 2005 curriculum innovation. The study reveals that representations of the source culture, the target culture and the international target culture are favoured in locally produced ELT textbooks in a fairly balanced way.

Key words: Cultural representations, Culture, EFL/ESL, International target culture, Source culture, Target culture, Textbooks

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Introduction: Language and Culture

Language is more than a means of communication since it influences our culture and even our thought processes. It is the expression of human communication through which knowledge, belief, and behaviour can be experienced, explained, and shared, and this sharing is based on systematic, conventionally used signs, sounds, gestures or marks that convey understood meanings within a group or community (O'Neil, 2006). Culture is the complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor, 1871). It is the product of socially and historically situated discourse, which, to a large extent, is created and shaped by language (Kramsch, 1998). Language is an integral part of a culture, which comprises the totality of beliefs and practices of a society, and is always related to the entities, events, states, processes, characteristics and relations within a culture; a culture depends in large measure on language in order to function and perpetuate itself (Nida, 2003).

During the initial decades of the 20th century, language was viewed by American linguists and anthropologists as being more important than it actually is in shaping our perception of reality (O'Neil, 2006). Today, many linguists, especially those who follow the Communicative Approach, advocate that one can not achieve full competence in a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL) as long as one ignores learning the culture of the people who speak that particular language natively. In other words, the individual needs to know when and how to address someone in the language s/he is attempting to learn in order to be viewed as a successful language learner, otherwise the learning process is deemed to be incomplete.

A number of studies that have been conducted on the relationship between language and culture have indicated that language and culture are mutually integrated. Wenying (2000) proposes that these two phenomena cannot exist without each other, since language simultaneously reflects culture and is influenced and shaped by it, suggesting that languages are culturally loaded. According to her, people of different cultures can refer to different things while using the same language forms. Administering a survey of word association among native speakers of English and those of Chinese, Wenying (2000) has found an intimate relationship between language and culture. Similarly, Brown (2001) contends that language and culture are intricately

interwoven so that one cannot separate them without losing the significance of either language or culture.

It can be concluded from the preceding discussion that any language acquisition process that ignores the culture of the people who speak the language natively would be incomplete. This is a point on which many linguists have recently reached consensus with respect to EFL/ESL teaching. Accordingly, the transmission of cultural information by means of language teaching materials is an issue of wide interest among researchers in the field of ELT. Since learning a new language involves the learning of a new culture (Allwright and Bailey, 1991), language teachers are also teachers of culture, as pointed out by Byram (1989). In a similar vein, Jourdini (2007) is of the opinion that teaching culture as a skill, comparable with reading, writing, speaking, and listening, should no longer be underestimated in language instruction, and that the language instructor should not assume that emphasising the four aforementioned skills is sufficient, as students may have already acquired some knowledge of a particular culture.

Culture in EFL/ESL Textbooks

Throughout history, people have inevitably resorted to a common language, a *lingua franca*, in order to communicate with each other when there has been no shared mother tongue between them. A variety of languages, including Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, French and German, have undertaken this role. However, as Phillipson (2010) highlights, there has been a dramatic decline in the use of other languages in recent years as English has become increasingly popular over the past 40 years, especially in Europe, as illustrated by the following figures.
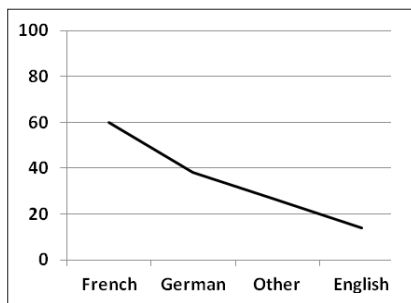

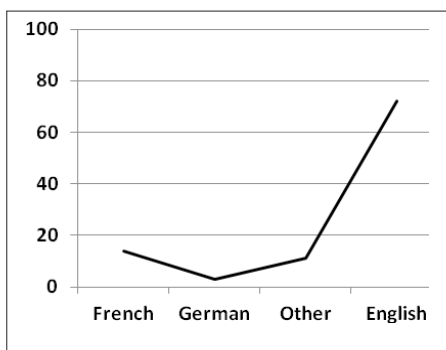**Figure 1.** Most frequently spoken languages in Europe (1970)

Figure 2. Most frequently spoken languages in Europe (2006)

Considering the fact that it is impossible to account for the existence of one without the other, many linguists strongly suggest that culture should be integrated into EFL/ESL teaching materials (see Alptekin, 1993, 2002; McKay, 2000; Kılıçkaya, 2004). McKay (2000) emphasises that language teaching materials should include a variety of cultural elements in order to help learners develop an interest in language learning and to foster learner motivation. Likewise, Kılıçkaya (2004) suggests that textbooks that focus students' attention on grammatical structures are uninteresting and do not stimulate students who need variety and excitement in language learning in order to develop a genuine interest in the language learning process. Consequently, as posited by Peterson and Coltrane (2003), language classrooms should be environments where learners develop intercultural awareness in their attempt to learn the language; namely, they should know how to address people, make requests, and agree or disagree with someone who is a member of the target language speech community. Thereby, it could be possible for them to view the world from the perspective of others.

Categories of Culture

Cortazzi and Jin (1999) propose three categories in which culture in English textbooks can be investigated. The first category is the source culture, which refers to the learners' native culture. The second category is the target culture where the target language is used as a first language, e.g., American or British culture. The third category is the international target culture, which refers to different varieties of the target culture from both English and non-English speaking countries, e.g., France, Spain, etc. Similarly, McKay (2000) identifies three

types of cultural materials: target culture materials, learners' own culture materials and international target culture materials. She maintains that international target language materials supposedly cover a variety of knowledge from different cultures all over the world using the target language.

Culture in EFL/ESL Textbooks

A number of studies have demonstrated that some locally produced EFL textbooks primarily reflect the source culture of the particular country rather than the target or the international target cultures. Scott (1980), for example, notes that Chinese EFL textbooks are designed to transform and reinforce Chinese norms and values. Similarly, in their investigation of a Venezuelan textbook Cortazzi and Jin (1999) demonstrate that the book mainly gives details of Venezuelan national heroes, while the settings illustrated in the book refer primarily to Venezuelan cities and places. In addition to textbooks that primarily contain the source culture there also exist many EFL textbooks that mainly reflect the target culture. A good example of this is *Success - Communicating in English* (Walker, 1994), produced in USA but marketed to other countries. The textbook portrays the multicultural nature of American society as well as including references to the culture of minorities. A third category of EFL textbooks are those which include a wide variety of cultural values from both English speaking countries and those countries where English is used as an international language. As noted by Cortazzi and Jin (1999), EFL/ESL textbooks in this category include characters from all over the world that use English as a global language in order to promote learners' intercultural competence.

It follows from the above discussion that the learner's perception of his or her own culture, in addition to the foreign and international target culture, is an important factor in the development of his/her cultural awareness. Although the inclusion of the local culture is important in nationally produced materials, it may be argued that EFL/ESL students should also be exposed to materials that focus on the cultures of English speaking countries. This allows students to compare and contrast their culture with other global cultures, increasing their awareness of the social conventions of other cultures and thereby expanding their cultural knowledge. Thus, in using English as an international language a good balance between local, target and international target cultural elements in teaching materials is needed.

The creation of this synthesis would help learners to understand other cultural perspectives. In this way, as contended by Alptekin (2002), "learning a foreign language becomes a kind of enculturation, where one acquires new cultural frames of reference and a new world view, reflecting those of the target language culture and its speakers" (p. 58).

ELT in Turkish Primary Education

The strategic and geopolitical status of Turkey as a crossroad between Europe and Asia makes the learning of English, the main language for international communication as well as the world's *lingua franca* of science, technology and business, particularly important for Turkish citizens in order to enable the nation to pursue its international communication and to keep up with developments in many fields in which English is the most widely used language (Kırkgöz, 2007). Currently, English is offered as the only foreign language at public schools in Turkey. However, it could be inappropriate to claim that the goals of foreign language education have been thoroughly fulfilled in the country. At a press conference held in 2004, the Turkish Minister of Education made a momentous confession: "we do teach English to everybody (students) at schools but nobody can speak it upon graduation". In order to overcome a chronic failure in concern the Ministry of National Education (henceforth MNE) in Turkey made several changes within the framework of the 'Ministry of Education Development Project', which was developed in cooperation with the Turkish Higher Education Council in 1997. As Kırkgöz (*ibid*) states, the project in question aimed to promote the teaching of English in Turkish educational institutions. In accordance with this project, the duration of compulsory education was increased from 5 to 8 years and the starting age for foreign language education was lowered to 4th graders (aged 9) in primary education. The 1997 curriculum stands as a landmark in Turkish history because, for the first time, it introduced the concept of the Communicative Approach into ELT (Kırkgöz, 2005). The basic goal of the policy is stated as the development of learners' communicative capacity in order to prepare them to use the target language (L2) for communication in classroom activities (Kırkgöz, 2007). In Turkey, the second curriculum innovation in the ELT was introduced in 2005. As in the 1997 curriculum, the recent curriculum also highlights communicative views of ELT (for details please refer to Kırkgöz, 2010). Thus, recent regulations concerning foreign language instruction in

Turkish primary schools are intended to raise students who will be able to use the foreign language studied for communicative purposes rather than merely having sufficient knowledge of it to enable them to pass the related examinations offered during the school year.

With regard to language teaching materials, following the introduction of the two aforementioned curriculum innovations (1997 and 2005) a series of locally published textbooks were introduced to be used in Turkish state primary schools. Currently, all state schools use MNE-approved textbooks. Another significant step taken by the Ministry has been the incorporation of elements of the target and international target culture into the foreign language curriculum. Teachers are expected to present the native culture along with the culture of the target language as well as some elements of the international target culture in foreign language classes in order to raise students' cultural awareness. Teaching materials have been designed in accordance with this major goal to fit the language teaching hours. Currently, three lessons per week are allocated to the teaching of English for primary grades 4 and 5 (each class lasting 40 minutes), and four lessons for grades 6 to 8.

The aim of our study is to investigate the extent to which textbooks that are locally published to be used in Turkish primary schools contain the source culture (Turkish), the target culture (British or American) and the international target cultural components. The study also aims to identify whether textbooks published after the 1997 curriculum innovation, as well as those published after 2005, differ with respect to the quantity of cultural components they contain.

Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive in design and is based on a quantitative analysis of the cultural elements in textbooks recommended to be used by the Turkish MNE in state primary education covering grades 4 through 8. Of the two groups of textbooks that have been included in the evaluation process, eight textbooks were published between 1997 and 2004, corresponding to the first ELT curriculum innovation, and ten from 2005 onwards, corresponding to the second ELT curriculum innovation. The following tables provide information about the textbooks investigated.

Table 1. EFL textbooks published between 1997 and 2005

Name of the Book	Grades	Author(s) & Publication Date
Spring	4	Kocaman et al (2000)
Enjoy English	4	Sönmez & Yitim (2004)
Enjoy English	5	Sönmez & Yitim (2004)
English Today	5	Tarlakazan (2004)
A Modern English Course for Turks	6	Akdikmen (1999)
Quick Step	6	Genç, Şeremet & Oruç (2004)
A Modern English Course for Turks	7	Akdikmen (2002)
Easy English	7	Yalçınkaya (2000)

As seen in Table 1, eight of the locally published English textbooks included in the present study were published after the first ELT curriculum innovation covering grades 4-7. Table 2, below, lists ten English textbooks that were published after the 2005 curriculum innovation corresponding to grades 4-8.

Table 2. EFL textbooks published from 2005 onwards

Name of the Book	Grades	Author(s) & Publication Date
Texture English	4	Pakkan (2007)
Time for English	4	Ersöz et al (2008)
Time for English	5	Ersöz et al (2007)
Build Up Your English	6	Erin (2006)
Trip	6	Oztürk (2007)
Spot On	6	Kurt et al (2008)
Spot On	7	Kurt et al (2008)
Let's Speak English	7	Yalçınkaya et al (2005)
Spot On	8	Kurt et al (2008)
Let's Speak English	8	Yalçınkaya et al (2005)

The textbooks identified in Tables 1 and 2 have been randomly selected from among those recommended to be used for grades 4 through 8 in state primary education by the MNE between 1997 and 2009. Each textbook has been examined with respect to the cultural references it includes. The following section describes the way the analysis has been carried out.

Identifying Cultural References

A study was carried out to identify cultural references in each textbook under examination. To carry out the cultural analysis, the total number of units in each textbook was examined with respect to cultural representations both visual (pictures, maps, photographs,

illustrations, etc.) and written (names of characters and places, theme of the written texts, etc.), and a list of different cultural references in each textbook was compiled. The next step involved categorising those cultural references into three categories: the source (Turkish), the target (British/American) and the international target culture (French, German, Spanish, etc.), in accordance with the framework proposed by Cortazzi and Jin (1999) and McKay (2000). Those visuals and written texts that had no direct reference to any culture, some referring to general categories such as students, teachers, doctors, etc., were considered as *culture-free statements* as they did not represent any particular culture and were therefore not included in the cultural analysis.

The process of identifying cultural references in each textbook was carried out independently by each of the authors of the present study. Both assessors agreed on 98% of the cultural references while differences regarding the remaining 2% of the categories were resolved through discussion. The results obtained from this analysis are presented as a whole: source culture, target culture and international target culture, representing the periods 1997-2005 and 2005 onwards, respectively.

Findings

Figure 3 displays the results of the quantitative data in terms of the related percentages produced by the lists of cultural references in the 18 textbooks as a whole, covering the years 1997 to 2005 and 2005 onwards.
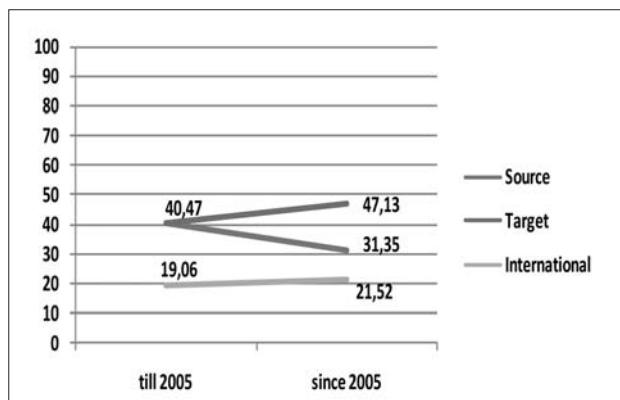

Figure 3. Distribution of the percentages of cultural elements

As can be clearly seen in Figure 3, EFL textbooks for 4th through 8th grades recommended by the MNE between the years in question differ with respect to the dispersion of cultural references they contain. The source and the target cultural references included in the textbooks published between 1997 and 2005 account for 40.47% of the total cultural references, pointing to an equal distribution, whereas cultural references belonging to the international target culture constitute 19.06% of all of the cultural references in the books examined. In other words, references to the source and the target culture outnumber those to the target international culture.

Since 2005, however, there has been a decrease in the number and percentage of references to the source culture in favour of an increase in the target and the international target cultural references. Thus, since the 2005 curriculum innovation references to the target culture have occupied the highest percentage, representing 47.13%, with the source culture occupying the second highest position with 31.35% and the international target cultural references accounting for 21.52%. Although the international target culture constitutes 19.06% of the cultural references in the total texts examined between 1997 and 2005, this percentage increased to 21.52% after 2005.

References to culture in general were manifested in various forms, such as dialogues, pictures, illustrations, activities and short texts. Considering the cognitive developments of learners in different primary grades, the content of EFL culture was presented in situations and topics relevant to learners' daily life experiences. At lower primary grades (4-5), the cultural elements in relation to the source culture were usually introduced through simple topics, including *classroom, family, body parts, home sweet home, food and drinks, colours, introductions, daily routines*. The most common topics dealt with at upper primary grades (6-8) were *the lives of famous people, celebrations, discoveries, jobs, TV stars* and *cities.*

References to the source culture were manifested in various forms. Firstly, Turkish characters were depicted as family members. For example, *Necdet* talks to his brother *Bilge* about what to buy for their mother as a birthday present. Similarly, *Metin, Fatma, Zeynep, Mert* and *Suzan* are displayed as family members, each introducing himself/herself and his/her family members by using a family photo.

Exposure to the source culture was also identified through pictures of different Turkish cities, e.g., *Ankara*, the capital, and various tourist cities, e.g., *Antalya, Istanbul* and *Izmir*. There were also

references to Turkish geography, e.g., *Nemrut Mountain, Manavgat Waterfall* and well known rivers, e.g., *Sakarya*. Other famous historical places referred to include the *Topkapi* and *Dolmabahçe Palaces* and *Euphesis* in *Izmir*. Turkish culture was also manifested through references to history, such as *The Ottoman Empire*, and Turkish cuisine like *coffee* and *Iskender kebab*. Furthermore, references to the Turkish culture are strengthened through characters from Turkish history, e.g., the leader *Mustafa Kemal Atatürk*, and Turkish celebrities such as *Beyazıt Öztürk, Barış Manço* as well as famous sportsmen like *Naim Süleymanoğlu* and the climber *Nasuh Mahruki*. Turkish traditional cultural values are portrayed through a picture of folk dancers dressed in their traditional clothes, and Turkish students celebrating *Children's Day*.

As in the source culture, the target culture was represented through topics engaging students' interest. In books published for lower levels (Grades 4 and 5) elements of British culture were depicted through British newspapers, e.g., *The Daily Mail, The Observer, The Telegraph* and *The Guardian.* Other references to the target culture included characters depicting a British family. The *Smith family* could be seen at home and introduced themselves using a family photo: the children *Tom and Mary*, with *Jane and Paul* as parents. Students' knowledge of British culture is increased through pictures of tourist locations, e.g., *Buckingham Palace, The British Museum, The London Tower, The National Gallery* and *Hyde Park*. Similarly, the impact of the target culture was portrayed by giving information about *London, Wales* and various other British and American cities.

Other examples of the target culture were manifested through references to famous British and American characters. *Oprah Winfrey*, the presenter of an American talk show, was depicted interviewing *Brad Pitt* on a TV programme series. *Madonna* was referred to as a singer giving information about herself, *Elvis Presley* as a rock singer, and *Marilyn Monroe* as a film star. Similarly, *Bill Gates* was depicted as the inventor of Microsoft through a picture portraying him working in his office.

Curtain and Pesola (1994) state that incorporating elements of children's literatures e.g. songs, fairy tales and chants into the foreign language instruction can provide cultural knowledge to learners. Another way in which the target culture was represented was through the story of various cartoon characters, e.g., the *Red Hen* baking bread.

References to the international target culture were mainly from countries such as France, India, Pakistan, Spain and Italy. Intercultural

awareness is manifested through a brief introduction of cities, such as *Venice* in *Italy*, a picture of the *Chinese Wall, the Taj Mahal* in *India, the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre Museum* and *Eurodisney* in Paris, *tulip gardens in Rotterdam; kangaroos in Australia* and *petrol in the Middle East.*

The international culture is also reflected through characters from countries such as Poland, Germany, Austria, France and Russia, and references to famous people from different countries. These characters were mostly based on scientists, singers, writers, inventors, musicians, etc., being the most famous people known all over the world such as *Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Mozart, Leonardo da Vince, Edison, Mahatma Gandhi* from India and *Winston Churchill.* By including the topics *inventors, explorers* and *discoveries*, upper primary levels introduced learners to various international scientists. *Isaac Newton* is depicted as discovering the law of gravity, while *Benjamin Franklin* is portrayed as discovering electricity. Other manifestations of cultural representations were pictures of flags of different countries, nationalities and currencies that referred to instances of the source, target, and international target cultures.

By integrating the above cultural elements primary education textbooks lay the foundation for culture acquisition at higher levels.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study investigates whether textbooks published between 1997 and 2005 and those issued from 2005 onwards differ with respect to the cultural elements they contain. The results of the study have revealed that representations of various cultures exist in English textbooks used in state primary education in grades 4 through 8 between 1997 and 2005, and from the 2005 curriculum innovation until the present time. Quantitative analysis of the textbooks recommended by the MNE reveals that the source and the target cultural elements included in textbooks published between 1997 and 2005 outnumber those of the international target cultural components, with source and target culture references indicating an equal distribution, each constituting 40.47% of the total cultural references, while cultural references referring to international target culture account for 19.06% of the total cultural references in the books examined. However, in examining the books published after the 2005 curriculum innovation a different trend is obtained. It was found that references to the target culture (47.13%) outnumber those to the source culture (31.35%) and the international

target culture (21.52%).

The overall results of the study indicate that locally published textbook materials for Turkish state primary education are designed to foster learners' familiarity with the source, target and international target culture simultaneously at every stage of the English language learning experience. In this way, a reasonably good balance between these three sources of cultural elements has been maintained. In so doing, it is hoped that Turkish learners of English will be able to acquire different cultural frames of references, and become aware of their own culture as well as British/American and international target cultural elements simultaneously during the process of learning the English language within the teaching time devoted to teaching and learning English, at a superficial level. Findings of the study also give insights to teachers as users of textbooks in informing them of different cultural elements, and assisting them to integrate different sources of culture into their teaching practice to achieve inclusive teaching practices.

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