A content analysis related to the cross-cultural/intercultural elements used in EFL coursebooks

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Abstract: This study aimed to examine some coursebooks of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to see whether they involve any cross-cultural topics belonging to different cultures from different countries in the world. Assuming that EFL coursebooks written after the communicative movements in foreign language teaching and learning in the 1970s and the 1980s would have a plenty of cross-cultural elements, it was expected to see these coursebooks would also have a lot of cross-cultural elements, especially regarding their publication dates. This study aimed to investigate to what extent teaching materials used in EFL setting involve intercultural elements. Accordingly, 5 coursebooks were evaluated, and topics and number of cross-cultural elements were presented. The coursebooks used in the study were published in 1998, 1999, 1999, 2001 and 2006 namely. However, as the results displayed, the frequency of cross-cultural elements were not mutually related to their publication dates. The distribution and frequency of cross-cultural elements were not balanced with the dates chronologically.

Key words: English as a Foreign Language (EFL); Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC); coursebooks; cross-cultural elements

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that, today, Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) aims to enable students to get the necessary skills in order to communicate in the Target Language (TL). Language is generally seen as a means of filling in information gaps by present communicative methods of second or foreign language teaching. Communicative language learning assumes that learners can naturally develop the linguistic skills by bridging a series of information gaps (Corbett, 2003). As English has become a world language, there have been considerable attempts to integrate culture in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), emphasizing the social functions of the target language and making learners interculturally sensitive. Communicative competence is no longer the only objective of EFL teaching. It broadens its definition and accepts Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) which is related to one's awareness on others' cultures as well as his/her own culture. As teachers are required to help learners acquire ICC, they need to be equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes and change their views about the objectives of Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) (Sercu, 2006). Moreover, cultural information is required to take place in teaching materials.

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There has been considerable research investigating teachers' intercultural understanding, such as to be familiar with the foreign cultures, to make their students tolerant of other cultures, accepting teaching intercultural competence as an objective of foreign language teaching. It is revealed that there are some similarities as well as some striking differences in teachers' perceptions across countries (Baumgart & Hales, 2000; Sercu, 2002). The differences signal a lack of intercultural understanding and the findings indicate the need for increasing shared programs, exchanges and other opportunities for reciprocal relations that foster genuine dialogue, partnership and intercultural understanding between countries (Baumgart & Halse, 2000).

Regarding the integrating intercultural approach into educational programmes, some studies have investigated to what extent established models of language teacher education acknowledge and address the needs of integration of the intercultural dimension into language teaching and learning, and how intercultural awareness of future teachers can be promoted. The findings suggested that more teacher training programs will help to "shape" or "construct" new understandings held by the future teachers and to help "construct" more professionalism in the educational system by facilitating mutual understanding and respect for other individuals and cultures (Dooly & Villanueva, 2006; Garrido & Alvarez, 2006; Siberry & Kearns, 2005).

2. Intercultural communicative competence

Byram (2002) defined intercultural competence in terms of a number of "savoirs". The first "savoir" is defined as "the knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction". It is clear that this savoir involves both culture specific and culture general knowledge allowing one to deal with a large diversity of foreign cultures. "Savoire-etre" is defined as "the curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own". "Savoir-comprendre" is "the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own". "Savoir-apprendre/faire" is defined as "the skill of discovery and interaction: Ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction". "Savoirs' engager" is described as "the critical cultural awareness/political education: an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries".

While accepting the obvious importance of language as a means of communication, supporters of an intercultural approach also emphasize its social functions. For example, the ways in which language is used by speakers and writers to understand the attitudes and the behaviours of the target community. Integrating culture into foreign language teaching means broadening its scope from a focus on acquiring the "four skills" of reading, writing, listening and speaking, and providing learners necessary help to acquire cultural skills, such as "the ability to acquire new knowledge and to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (Byram, 2002). As the ultimate goal of an intercultural approach to language education is no longer acquiring "native speaker competence" but rather an ICC (Guilherme, 2002), foreign language teachers require to have ICC so that they can help learners involve in the interculturalisation process.

Sercu (2006) specified the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes that foreign language teachers should have in order to teach ICC on the basis of Byram's definitions. In regard to knowledge, she stated that foreign language teachers should be aware of the culture of the target language and should have frequent contact with the

foreign culture they teach. They should have sufficient knowledge of both their own culture and the foreign cultures in order to be able to show similarities and differences between them and their learners. They should know learners' attitudes towards foreign cultures and choose appropriate teaching materials to promote intercultural competence. With respect to skills, Sercu (2006, p. 63) stated, "Teachers should be able to employ teaching techniques that promote the acquisition of 'savoirs', 'savoir-apprendre', 'savoir-comprendre', 'savoir-faire' and 'savoir-être'". Teachers should be able to select teaching materials that enable learners to compare cultures and be sensitive to foreign cultures. With respect to attitudes, teachers should be open to the idea of integration of ICC teaching into foreign language education and their objectives should involve the acquisition of ICC.

Wandel (2002) indicated that rather than providing information, it is important to apply an approach supporting the affective level of learning, to select teaching material that contains and reflects the experience of the students' peer-group. Wandel (2002, p. 73) also stated that "Textbooks should contain material that allows and provokes opinions and discussions on cultural stereotyping. Students should be given communicative and pragmatic tools to 'negotiate meaning', to develop interactive and meta-linguistic skills, to be able to tolerate and endure ambiguity".

Considering the eminence of cross-cultural discussion in EFL and the presentation of cross-cultural elements in coursebooks which are the most significant agents of foreign language education, this study aimed to investigate to what extent teaching materials used in EFL settings involve intercultural elements. Accordingly, 5 coursebooks were evaluated and the number of cross-cultural/intercultural elements was detected. Besides, the contents of those elements were examined to describe their genres.

3. Method

In this study, a content analysis through five EFL (English as a Foreign Language) coursebooks was conducted. The selected coursebooks were examined to see whether they involved cross-cultural topics or not and the frequency of occurrence was evaluated as well. The back cover of the coursebooks was examined prior to see whether cross-cultural objectives were explicitly defined there or not. Through the inspection, the cultural elements belonging to the USA and England were excluded as they are counted as the elements of target culture. The other cultural elements belonging to some English speaking countries such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand were taken as cross-cultural elements since they are not the main target culture countries.

4. The selected coursebooks

Five EFL coursebooks were selected for this study. The coursebooks were all published by well-known publishing houses. The information about the coursebooks was summarized in Table 1.

5. Results

In this section, the results of the content analysis on five EFL coursebooks were displayed through the lists of topics for cross-cultural/intercultural subjects. Frequencies of cross-cultural topics/elements involved in each coursebook were also displayed in a table. Table 2 below presents the frequency of cross-cultural/intercultural elements appeared in the coursebooks.

In the following section, the frequency list for the presentation of cross-cultural topics was given first. Then

separate lists were provided to display what those cross-cultural elements were.

Table 1 Information about the selected coursebooks

Name	Level	Authors	Publisher	Publication date	Cross-cultural objectives displayed on the back cover
New Hotline	Starter	Tom Hutchinson	Oxford	1998	Students are encouraged to compare their own language and culture to that of the world of English speakers.
New Streetwise	Intermediate	Rob Nolasco	Oxford	1999	Not explicitly stated. Cultures of English speaking countries were used more.
Enterprise 2	Elementary	Virginia Evans/Jenny Dooley	Express Publishing	1999	Reading sections capture students' interests with meaningful texts on cross-cultural topics.
Matrix	Upper-int.	Kathy Gude/Jayne Wildman	Oxford	2001	Cross-cultural topics offer valuable preparation for school-leaving examinations.
Total English	Intermediate	Antonia Clare JJ Wilson	Longman	2006	Not explicitly stated. Cultures of English speaking countries were used more.

Table 2 Frequencies of cross-cultural topics involved in the coursebooks

Coursebook	Total number of cross-cultural elements
New Hotline (1998)	14
New Streetwise (1999)	0
Enterprise 2 (1999)	32
Matrix (2001)	11
Total English (2006)	26

5.1 Hotline (Starter)

Unit 1

- Introducing yourself: Characters from Australia and Argentina.
- Pictures of famous people from Canada, Cuba, Brazil, Turkey, Pakistan, Australia, Ireland, Switzerland (matching the people to the places).

Unit 8

- Information about Turkey, pictures and map of Turkey (Project: ideal place for holiday).

Unit 10

- A day of an African girl (reading exercise).

Unit 11

- Loch Ness Monster from Scotland (reading exercise).

Unit 13

- Biography of Arnold Schwarzenegger from Austria (reading exercise).

5.2 Enterprise (elementary)

Unit 1

- People from Japan and France (matching descriptions to the people in pictures).
- Information about Thailand with 8 photographs (reading exercise).
- Characteristics of people from different cultures (vocabulary exercise), e.g.:
  - The Japanese are…famous…for their popularity.
  - The Spanish…celebrate…a lot of festivals every year.
  - Indian people like…spicy…curries.
- Description of a holiday in Norway with 4 photographs (reading & listening exercise).

- People from Australia, Germany and France (grammar exercise: asking and answering questions).

Unit 2

- Picture of life in ancient Egypt (grammar exercise).

Unit 3

- Information about Paris (reading exercise).

Unit 5

- Ambitions of three people from Japan, Italy and Scotland (reading exercise).
- Advertisement for holiday in Sri Lanka (reading exercise).

Unit 7

- Information about Martina Hingis from Switzerland (listening exercise).

Unit 8

- Information about Kaikoura—an island in New Zealand (reading exercise).

Unit 9

- Information about Wieliczka Salt Mine in Poland (reading exercise).
- Sentences with cross-cultural elements (grammar exercise), e.g.:
  The ancient Egyptians…the Pyramids.
  Gustave Eiffel…a huge iron tower for Paris.
  The Romans…the Colosseum in 82 AD.
- Listening exercise with cross-cultural elements, e.g.;
  The *Mona Lisa* was painted by….
  The Parthenon was built by….
  Information about Eiffel Tower (Paris) and Parthenon (Athens) (speaking exercise).
- Information about a famous place in Denmark (grammar exercise—sentence completion).

Unit 11

- Ideas of people from Kenya, Italy and Brazil about their countries (reading exercise).

Unit 12

- Information about locations of cities in Italy (grammar exercise), e.g.:
  Milan is situated in the south-east of Italy.
  Florence is situated in the south of Italy.
- A postcard describing a holiday in Mexico (grammar exercise).
- Information about Ice Hotel in northern Sweden (reading and listening exercise).
- Information about Jamaica and Scotland (listening exercise).

Unit 13

- Information about a Japanese festival (reading exercise).
- Information about a festival in Poland (grammar exercise).

Culture clips

- Favorite sports of Australia and New Zealand (reading text).
- Information about Ireland (reading text).
- Shopping centers of Canada (reading text).

5.3 Matrix (upper-intermediate)

Unit 1

- Information about an Irish rock group, U2 (grammar exercise).

Unit 2

- Describing pictures of Japan, India, Korea and Iran (speaking exercise).

Unit 4

- Information about a special kind of dog from Scotland (listening exercise).
- A trip to Scotland (reading exercise).

Unit 5

- Mountains in Europe (reading exercise).

Unit 6

- Famous monuments and buildings of the world (speaking exercise).

Unit 7

- A guide book about New Zealand (grammar exercise)
- General knowledge quiz about New Zealand

5.4 Total English (intermediate)

Unit 1

- Letter from an Italian student (writing exercise).
- Origin of Adidas and Puma (reading exercise).

Unit 2

- Strange stories of people from Australia, South Africa, France, Germany and Thailand (reading exercise).

Unit 3

- Information about Seville—Spain (reading and speaking exercise).
- Interview with a Spanish family (listening exercise).

Unit 5

- Creative people from different countries, Salvador Dali, The Bronte sisters, Boris Spassky (speaking exercise).
- An interview with a Japanese film-maker (listening exercise).
- Information about food and restaurants in Iran (reading exercise).
- Information about a sport originated in Brazil (listening exercise).

Unit 6

- Travels across Africa (reading exercise).
- A quick guide for Dublin, Ireland (reading and speaking exercise).

Unit 8

- Information about Mexico City, Sao Paulo and Naples (speaking and listening exercise).

Unit 9

- Information about a Brazilian company (reading exercise).

Unit 10

- Famous women from different nationalities, Mother Teresa, Frida Kahlo and Maria Curie (listening and speaking exercise).
- Biography of a French designer, Gabrielle Chanel (reading exercise).
- Biography of an Italian fashion designer, Gianni Versace (grammar exercise).

6. Discussion

The results of the analysis were attempted to be based on the publication year of the book presuming that the tendencies in EFL/ESL/ELT methodologies in so-called periods would affect the choices of the authors. However the results did not support such an argument. The results revealed that each coursebook involved cross-cultural/intercultural topics in varying degrees, except for the New Streetwise which does not present any intercultural elements but cultural elements from the USA and England as the target culture of the main English speaking countries.

As it is shown in Table 1, New Hotline states its cross-cultural/intercultural objective on its back cover explicitly. It is claimed that students are encouraged to compare their own language and culture to that of the world of English speakers. The analysis shows that New Hotline involves 14 cross-cultural elements not only from English speaking countries, but also from other countries around the world, such as Turkey, Pakistan, Argentina, Africa, Austria, Switzerland, Cuba and Brazil. When we consider authors' choice of intercultural elements from English speaking countries, we can see cultural elements from Canada, Australia, Ireland and Scotland. The main cultural focus in these elements is characteristics of foreign people where students are provided with pictures of people from different cultures to be able to make comparisons. It should be noted that the number of cross-cultural elements used throughout the coursebook is not equal in each unit. For instance, there are not any intercultural issues in the Units 2-8. This situation could be contrary to the argument of equal distribution of cross-cultural elements to the units. We can conclude that the author is partially successful at getting his claimed objective true considering the publication year of the book, 1998, as the trend of using cross-cultural/intercultural elements in teaching materials had become popular after the 2000s.

The second book used for analysis is New Streetwise. Although the book was published in 1999, there are not any cross-cultural/intercultural elements belonging to other cultures other than England and the USA as the target culture countries in the coursebook.

The third book evaluated is Enterprise having the highest frequency of cross-cultural issues (with a total number of 33) presented among all coursebooks. The authors claim related to the cross-cultural objectives on the back cover is "Reading sections capture students' interests with meaningful texts on cross-cultural topics". Throughout the coursebook, cultural elements from both English speaking countries and the other countries are presented. Cultural elements of English-speaking countries such as Australia, Scotland, New Zealand, Ireland and Canada are presented in the coursebook. Other cross-cultural topics are chosen from India, Japan, France, Thailand, Spain, Norway, Germany, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Poland, Greece, Denmark, Kenya, Italy, Brazil, Mexico, Sweden, and Jamaica. The cultural focus of the authors is mainly famous people, festivals, hotels, holidays, food, weather, and the characteristics of local people.

Cultures of some nationalities are presented in more than 1 unit. Japanese people and their festivals, for instance, are mentioned in Units 1, 5 and 13. Some elements of French culture such as the characteristics of French people and the historical places of France are presented in Units 1, 3 and 9. Also, Italian culture (and the characteristics of Italian people, and the locations of the cities in Italy) is involved in the book in 3 different units, namely Units 5, 11 and 12. When we consider the cultural issues of English-speaking countries, we can say that important places, shopping centres and favourite sports are mentioned rather than the characteristics of people which are a common issue for most of the other non-English-speaking countries. It can be concluded that authors may aim to change the imagined stereotypes about non-English speaking countries by providing information

about the characteristics of local people from non-English speaking countries. The results of the evaluation show that the authors designed the coursebook successfully in terms of the number and the focus of cross-cultural/intercultural topics used throughout the units.

Matrix is the fourth coursebook analyzed in terms of cross-cultural/intercultural elements presented throughout the units. Although it was published in 2001, it involves only 11 intercultural elements. Like Enterprise, this coursebook also indicates its cross-cultural/intercultural objectives on the back cover page as "Cross-cultural topics offer valuable preparation for school-leaving examinations". The cultures of countries such as Ireland, Japan, India, Korea, Iran, Scotland and New Zealand are presented in the units. So, we can say that cross-cultural topics do not include a plenty of different cultures, but involve only a limited number of cultures including some English speaking countries' cultures as well. Cultural elements involve music, social life, interesting places, holidays and local foods. The distribution of cultural elements in the units is not equal. Although the coursebook has 10 units, any cross-cultural/intercultural topics are not presented in Units 3, 8, 9 and 10 at all. We can conclude that authors can not prove their claim by their presentation, choice and number of intercultural issues provided in the coursebook.

The last coursebook evaluated is Total English which was published in 2006. As this is a very recent coursebook, we can expect more cross-cultural topics in it than the other books have. However, the analysis shows that the coursebook involves only 26 intercultural topics which are relatively low in quantity when it is compared to Enterprise published in 1999. Italian, German, Australian, South African, French, Thai, Spanish, Japanese, Iranian, Brazilian and Mexican cultures are presented throughout the units. Those cultural elements involve social life, family life, famous people, food, sports, holidays and biographies of important people. Almost in each unit cross-cultural/intercultural elements are presented. The authors do not state cross-cultural/intercultural objectives explicitly, yet they successfully integrate them into the units.

7. Conclusion

To sum up, although the number of cross-cultural issues varies in numbers and cultures chosen, the types of exercises that cross-cultural/intercultural issues are used for are generally the same. Cross-cultural topics are generally presented in reading texts to provide language input in context and to raise awareness of students' familiarity with foreign cultures. Listening exercises are also frequently used to present cross-cultural issues showing how pronunciation, intonation and stress of people from different cultures differ.

Such an analysis may refer to some vagueness in the field of cultural discussion related to coursebooks. The exploitation of culture, obviously, cannot relate only the time period, but may also relate to the authors' perspective, awareness and intention, the political choice of the publisher's, the market tendency and demand for the cross-cultural/intercultural elements. The effects of such variables can only be tested and evaluated through further research which can be conducted with authors and publishers of the coursebooks.

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