



The place of culture in Algerian ELT designed textbooks: A historical perspective

Zouleykha Belabbes ^{a1}, Chadli Bendjedid University El-Tarf / DLCNT Research Laboratory, El-Tarf, Algeria, belabbes-zouleykha@univ-eltarf.dz

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Abstract

The present study examines how and which culture is designed in Algerian ELT textbooks, through a literature review. More specifically, this research is an outline of cultural components used in the ELT textbooks before and after the recent Algerian Educational Reforms. The current study further scrutinizes how the contact of cultures (source and target), which was previously considered a negative aspect in ELT settings since it could lead to cultural hostility, is heavily introduced in the current textbooks as a way to build up the learners' cross-cultural awareness. Throughout this review, it has been revealed that within the recently conducted educational reforms, the representations of the Self (learners' local culture) and the Other (Foreign language culture) are carefully selected and introduced in the EFL textbooks to develop learners' intercultural competence.

Keywords: Education; ELT textbooks; intercultural competence; source culture; target culture.

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Zouleykha Belabbes, Chadli Bendjedid University El-Tarf / DLCNT Research Laboratory, El-Tarf, Algeria. E-mail address: belabbes-zouleykha@univ-eltarf.dz

1. INTRODUCTION

Acquiring cultural knowledge of a language whether it is target or foreign is often regarded as the fifth skill in language learning. Accordingly, understanding a language involves not only knowledge of grammar, phonology, and lexis but also certain features of its culture. That is why, it is so important to incorporate cultural elements in the curriculum for developing intercultural communicative competence as Byram (1994) called for in a way stressing that language teaching aims to develop both linguistic and cultural competencies.

In effect, the main objectives of English teaching policy in Algeria after the independence as stated in the national Charter 1976 (Nellis, 1980) is 'to facilitate a constant communication with the world and to gain access to modern sciences....' Hence, the overall objectives of ELT in Algeria in that period reflected a predominantly instrumental motivation; that is, more academic and occupational than cultural. Yet, it was not until the 2003 reform of the educational system that cultural objectives were introduced in the curriculum more clearly. It is stated in the Ministry Guidelines (2003) that the cultural objectives consist of making the learner open his mind through discovering the context of English civilization and culture to express themselves cross-culturally.

1.1. Purpose of study

This study looks at which cultures are included and how in Algerian ELT textbooks. More precisely, this study provides an overview of the cultural elements that were included in ELT textbooks both before and after the most recent educational reforms in Algeria.

2. METHOD AND MATERIALS

To compare the cultural content and design of Algerian ELT textbooks before and after the most recent educational changes, this study conducts a thorough literature analysis. The study focuses on locating and characterizing cultural elements in these textbooks, looking at how the learners' own culture (Self) and the foreign language culture (Other) are portrayed. The study examines how the incorporation of cultural aspects has changed from being perceived unfavorably to increasing cross-cultural awareness and intercultural competency among learners by evaluating pertinent academic literature, policy papers, and prior studies on ELT materials. To comprehend the effects of these educational reforms on ELT practices in Algeria, the analysis draws attention to the modifications in the cultural representation tactics used in the textbooks.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Definition of Culture

Culture has long been thought of as a complex issue and a challenging concept to define with a wide range of relevant perspectives and interpretations. The following definition of culture is one of 164 that the American anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) after critically examining many concepts and definitions of culture:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups. Including their embodiment in artifacts, the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture system may, on the one hand, be considered as products of actions, and on the other, as conditional elements of future action.

Indeed, the term "culture" refers to a broad concept that encompasses all facets of human existence. This explains why it is challenging to settle on a single definition of culture. Liddicoat et al., (2003) posit

that culture is “a complex system of concepts, attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviors, practices, rituals and lifestyles of the people who make up a cultural group, as well as the artifacts they produce and the institutions they create”.

Tylor (1871) was the first to use the term "culture" in which he defines it as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other abilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Ulaywi & Khayri 2013). Thus, the cumulative set of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, religion, roles, objects, and properties acquired by a group of people and passed down through generations is what is meant by culture according to these aforementioned definitions.

3.2. Language and culture

According to Kramsch (1998) and Banaruee et al., (2023), the relationship between language and culture is entwined once language expresses, embodies, and symbolizes cultural reality. This proves beyond a doubt that language and culture are inextricably linked. Hence, in contexts where language is being learned, the connection between language and culture is meaningful. As a result, learning a language apart from its cultural foundations prevents one from becoming socialized into its contextual use (Tavassoli & Ghamoushi 2023). Language structure knowledge on its own does not provide any unique insights into the political, social, religious, or economic system or even knowledge of when to speak and when to remain silent (Seelye, 1993). That is, “the study of language cannot be divorced from the study of culture, and vice-versa” (Seelye, 1993).

It should be noted that the expression of culture is accomplished through language, which also serves as a vehicle for cultural transmission. According to Jiang (2010), “Language is the mirror of culture in the sense that people can see a culture through its language”. Likewise, Goodenough (1981) asserts that knowledge of a particular culture or social group would greatly help any individual to successfully and effectively communicate within that environment and this is done, of course, through the language.

3.4. Historical background of culture teaching

Teaching culture is considered important by most teachers and scholars. In the past, culture used to be distinct from language teaching; nowadays, it has become integral to it. If it is important to teach a foreign language to enhance communication, it is also vital to enroot in learners an intellectual and emotional appreciation of the target culture, so that communication will not be weakened. (Ghazi, 2001).

In the audio-lingual time in language teaching, Brooks (1968) "emphasized the importance of culture not for the study of literature but for language learning" (as cited in Steele, 1989). After that era, many scholars endeavored to consider different ways of incorporating cultural aspects into foreign language teaching such as Hammerly (1982); Seelye (1984); and Damen (1987).

In the 1970s, there was more highlighting on favoring the situational context in the arena of foreign language teaching. Consequently, the role of culture and its integration into the foreign language curriculum was highly welcomed especially within the communicative approach. Canale and Swain (1980) claimed that “a more natural integration of language and culture takes place through a more communicative approach than through a more grammatically based approach”.

However, it was not until the late 1980s that educators began to look into the dynamics of culture and the ways of its incorporation into the realm of foreign language teaching and learning. Thus, many approaches have been elaborated in the field of teaching culture such as The Foreign Cultural Approach, The Intercultural Approach, The Multi-cultural Approach, and The Transcultural Approach.

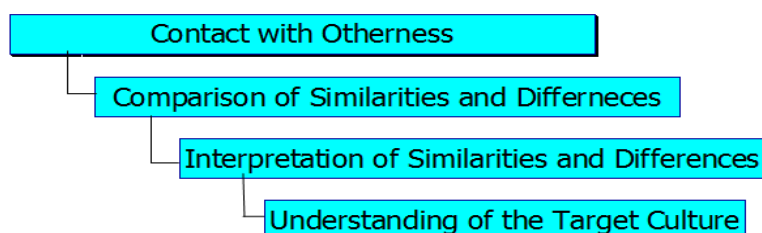
The Intercultural Approach is the most widely used in culture teaching; on the one hand, its principles

denote that different cultures are structurally related, and learners' own culture is important as it is taken as a point of departure in the process of comparison between the native and the target culture (Byram, & Fleming, 1998).

Indeed, the Intercultural Approach aims at directing learners toward gaining insights into the target culture through the development of practical communication skills. Moreover, it encourages positive attitudes toward the target culture community; i.e., developing a reflective attitude in learners as shown in (Figure 1). This attitude takes them back to their practices and beliefs and enables them to modify their negative attitudes toward the target culture and its users (Byram, & Fleming, 1998).

Figure 1

Process of Reflective Attitude



Source: Benmoussat, 2003

3.5. Algerian ELT-designed textbooks

After its independence (1962), Algeria relied, in her educational system in terms of teaching English, on French-designed textbooks. In other terms, the Algerian Ministry of Education had first, prescribed ELT textbooks that were used in France at that time (1960's). These textbooks were well known as P.M Richard and Wendy Hall's Series (as cited in Benmoussat, 2003). These Series were used at the third (3rd) and fourth (4th) levels of middle school and first (1st), second (2nd) and third (3rd) secondary school years.

In the 1970s, government officials adopted English-designed textbooks, which were made for EFL teaching purposes to be used in the Algerian educational context. The textbooks were those of G. Broughton (1968) and L.G Alexander (1967). Their textbooks (Success with English, Practice and Progress, and Developing Skills) were applied at the middle and secondary school levels in which target culture is strongly introduced (Benmoussat, 2003).

By the late 1970's there were home-made ELT textbooks; that is, Algeria had started to design her textbooks without depending on other foreign textbooks. In this light, the Learning of English with US series; Andy in Algeria and Madjid in England were prescribed to be applied at the middle school levels (3rd and 4th year) respectively. At the secondary school levels, the textbooks prescribed for the first, second, and third years were 'New Lines', 'Midlines', and 'Think It Over' respectively. Within these textbooks, a tendency to present the local culture is highly observed as stated by Benmoussat (2003). However, it was thought that these books had run their course and became no longer valid. Thus, they were replaced by other home-designed textbooks in the 1980s; the books were labeled 'Spring Book One' and 'Spring Book Two' and designed for the fundamental school level (the and the 9th grades); and as far as secondary school level is concerned, the books of first year and second year mentioned above were kept as they are yet the book of third year was replaced by a new one called COMET.

In 2003 there have been changes in the educational system along with the re-introduction of the "Middle school" system and obviously, there should be new prescribed textbooks that are designed in the light of the newly adopted Competency-Based Approach principles. In effect, from 2003 till 2016 two

reforms led to designing different textbooks: the First-generation textbooks were textbooks launched starting from 2003 and were entitled Spotlight on English MS1, Spotlight on English MS2, Spotlight on English MS3, and Move MS4. The Second-generation textbooks were launched in 2016 and are still in use nowadays and are all entitled My Book of English adding to each one the year of the corresponding level.

3.6. Cultural components in the Algerian ELT-designed textbooks

Since gaining independence in 1962, Algeria has made efforts to enhance English language education to foster international communication and promote economic development. The period from 1970 to 2000 witnessed significant developments in ELT textbook design. Initially, textbooks were heavily influenced by French methods due to historical ties between Algeria and France. However, there was a shift towards more communicative approaches as Algeria sought to align its educational system with global standards.

It is worth noting that by the 1970s, the main objectives of English teaching policy in Algeria as stated in the National Charter 1976 (Nellis, 1980) are

- To increase the learner's cross-communication skills to develop the exchange of ideas across nations.

- To develop the learner's capacity to have access to materials written in English, knowing that at one time or another, graduate or postgraduate learners have to consult reference books which are available only in English. Therefore, the overall objectives of ELT in Algeria, at that time, reflect a predominantly instrumental motivation; i.e., more academic and occupational than cultural. "This utilitarian perspective is deliberately made explicit by the educational authority to discard the cultural dimension" (Benmoussat, 2003).

To this end, the Algerian educational system from 1962 till 2003 (before the latest reforms) favored "An ideology of Algerianness characterized by the perpetual authentic and constant values motto, still aiming to maintain the Algerian spirit intact conforming Ibn Badis reducing triptych: ' Algeria is our land, Islam our religion and Arabic our language'" (Benmoussat, 2003). This ideology was developed by the ancient regime represented by FLN, the party in power from 1962 to the advent of political pluralism in the late 1980s. Accordingly, this ideology implies that "the loss of the Arab-Islamic Identity has always been a deep-rooted fear" (Benmoussat, 2003).

For the sake of comparison, it might be wiser to describe the aims of teaching foreign culture in England. The British National curriculum contains the following aims: to offer insights into the language and civilization of countries where the language is spoken. To encourage positive attitudes toward foreign languages and a sympathetic approach to other cultures and civilizations (Benmoussat, 2003). However, in the Algerian constitution there is a neutral statement "...as a means to facilitate a constant communication with the world" (National character, 1976). Thus, in the official Ministry guidelines as stated by Benmoussat (2003) a very sketchy and naïve reference is made about the target culture to understand the linguistic and cultural differences between first language (L1) and English.

Nevertheless, the recent developments and reforms in the national educational field have resulted in the designing of a new series of textbooks devoted to teaching English and intercultural aspects. It is, hence, demonstrating a positive attitude towards the foreign culture which is no longer considered as a threat. Those textbooks contain a considerable and well-developed amount of culture that fits the needs of EFL learners and raises their cultural awareness.

3.7. Cultural Content in Algerian ELT Textbooks: Early Years (1970s-1980s)

During the early years of Algerian ELT textbooks in the 1970s and 1980s, cultural content was

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introduced to promote learners' awareness of their own culture and its relationship with English-speaking countries. Textbooks often included descriptions of traditional Algerian clothing, food, and historical landmarks. Culture was integrated through texts, pictures, and activities that focused on Algerian traditions.

3.8. Cultural Content in Algerian ELT Textbooks: Transition Period (1990s)

The transition period of the 1990s witnessed changes in Algeria's political landscape, which had an impact on ELT textbook design. The focus shifted from promoting national identity to fostering global perspectives. Cultural aspects were approached from a more international standpoint, with increased exposure to English-speaking cultures beyond Algeria. This shift aimed to prepare learners for intercultural communication in diverse contexts.

3.9. Cultural Content in Algerian ELT Textbooks: Recent Approaches (2000s - 2020)

In recent years, approaches to incorporating culture into Algerian ELT textbooks have become more nuanced and inclusive. There is a greater emphasis on intercultural understanding rather than simply presenting cultural facts or stereotypes. Authentic materials such as literature excerpts, films, and multimedia resources are used to facilitate a deeper exploration of different cultural practices and values (Di Fuccio et al., 2024; Mozaffari & Hamidi 2023; Peng, 2023; Sánchez-Auñón et al., 2023).

In effect, the adopted approaches advocate for mastering cultural competencies to cope with any circumstance. That is, Algerian textbook designers, have integrated the local culture alongside the target culture and other cultures within the EFL materials for the sake of promoting intercultural awareness amongst the learners. This latter is going to realize how facts, events, history, and life in general can be perceived through culture. They will be able to infer the similarities and differences between their own culture and British / American or other cultures so that they can express themselves cross-culturally.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, culture plays a crucial role in Algerian ELT textbooks as it enhances learners' intercultural competence and language acquisition skills. Over the years, there has been an evolution in how culture is integrated into these textbooks, moving from a focus on national identity towards a more inclusive approach that embraces global perspectives.

However, challenges persist in accurately representing diverse cultures while avoiding stereotypes or biases. Despite these challenges, incorporating culture into Algerian ELT textbooks has proven to have a positive impact on learners' language acquisition journey by providing authentic contexts for learning and fostering intercultural understanding.

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