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## **ON THE MOVE: TARGET VS. SOURCE CULTURE REPRESENTATION IN TWO EFL COURSEBOOKS**

### **1. Introduction**

Although supplementary materials and resources in foreign language teaching are more varied and easily available today than they were some decades ago, the reliance on the coursebook as the major source of information in foreign language classes is still widespread. Coursebooks are reference points that accompany students through their learning experience, especially in former instruction, and teachers often treat them as the syllabus they have to follow. The choice of a coursebook is of crucial importance, because, on top of other factors, they set the road to or provide a model of how to discuss and interpret culture.

Although the cultural component of foreign language teaching is frequently viewed as a set of factual information to be learned by students, language and culture should be treated as inter-related and inter-dependent aspects of social life, therefore inseparable (Chozet and Liddicoat 1997; Mahmood *et al* 2012). Even if the participants of the language-teaching interaction are not fully aware of it, language teaching is also culture teaching (Qu 2010), and the foreign language classroom is one of the richest platforms for discussing issues in life. Cortazzi and Jin (1999: 204-210) distinguish between three main categories of cultural focus in textbooks:

- b). textbooks based on target culture(s), such as the US, the UK or other English speaking countries;
- c) textbooks based on source culture, which is the learners' own culture;
- d) textbooks reflecting international cultures with the view that the target language is used as an international language.

The present study analyzes two recently published coursebooks to see how similarly (or differently) culture is dealt with and what the underlying assumptions of culture are in these books. Both books appeared on the Hungarian textbook market in the last three years and target similar student groups. The main questions raised here

are how target and source cultures are portrayed in the books and to what extent they emphasize international communication as the main goal of EFL learning.

## 2. Literature review

Kramsh in 1993 rightly stated that “traditional thought in foreign language education has limited the teaching of culture to the transmission of information about the people of the target country, and about their general attitudes and world views” (Kramsch 1993: 205). Since then, more need for well-informed and both linguistically and culturally prepared second and foreign language users has emerged. Today English is clearly used as a *lingua franca* in a variety of settings, which challenges the traditional view described by Kramsch. The following sections review the concepts related to the cultural context of language teaching in general and textbooks in particular.

### 2.1 Culture

Culture is intertwined in all walks of our life, and it is a complex task to provide its definition. Kramsch (1998) describes culture as “membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings” (1998: 10). Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler (2003) define culture as “a complex system of concepts, attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviours, 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” (2003: 45). Qu (2010) also underlines this complexity and deep-rootedness of culture in our everyday life. According to his definition culture reflects the “ways of looking at things, doing things, expressing things and solving certain problems in certain ways” (2010: 58).

### 2.2 Approaches to culture in language teaching

Four main approaches to the role of culture in language teaching exist. These are labeled as “high culture”, “area studies”, “culture as societal norms” and “culture as practice” (Liddicoat *et al* 2003). The first, traditional approach views culture as high culture in which cultural knowledge is gained from reading literary texts and translating them. Communicating with other speakers has a very limited role. The second approach considers sociocultural learning in forms of learning about the target country’s history, geography and institutions through which learners accumulate a body of knowledge. Yet, students remain observers of a foreign culture, and the target language is mainly used for naming and describing events, places and famous people. The third approach looks at culture as societal norms and describes typical practices and values. It needs to be highlighted, though, that this view is still static and is likely to stereotype and simplify culture. Learners’

interaction with speakers of the target language is still minimal. What is more, cultural information given in textbooks may go out of date quickly, therefore simple factual information may not be relevant from this point of view either (Ghorbani Shemshadsara 2012). The last approach, in contrast, looks at real people and their own, lived experiences. This view sees culture as highly individual, context-sensitive and variable. Culture is dynamic, ever changing and is built of experiences, and learners are expected to interact with other speakers of the target language in appropriate ways. Overall, the goal is to develop intercultural communication.

Intercultural communicative competence refers to people's ability to interact with others across cultural boundaries, from a variety of cultural contexts, and, while doing so, reflect on their own culture (Byram 1997). Liddicoat *et al* (2003) summarize the main features of the models of intercultural language teaching as follows:

- exploration by the learners of the target language and culture and of their own language and culture;
- discovery of the relationship between language and culture;
- developing conceptual and analytic tools for comparing and understanding cultures;
- developing a reflective capacity to deal with cultural difference and to modify behaviour where needed (Liddicoat *et al* 2003: 23).

Foreign language teachers should also be foreign culture teachers, but in order to promote intercultural understanding teachers need to be familiar with both the target and sources cultures (Qu 2010). If a teacher is unfamiliar with the everyday practices, beliefs and values of a culture, he or she may feel unprepared to discuss cultural content in the classroom or may restrict class materials to the static representation of a culture instead of its dynamic view. This is very much understandable, but is infrequently taken into consideration in teacher training. Similarly, Qu (2010) questions the superiority of a native-speaker teacher over the non-native teacher when being less familiar with the student's source culture.

### 2.3 English as an international language and its implications for teaching

McKay (2003) rightly argues that the status of English as a global *lingua franca* has crucial implications for English language teaching pedagogy. Due to the changed purposes of English language learning and use, learners are not predominantly immigrants whose final goal might be cultural and linguistic assimilation. The majority of English learners today use this language in multilingual settings with academic, trade, tourism, entertainment and job-related purposes. In these settings English serves not only as a window to the target cultures of English-

speaking communities, but also as a means to share pieces of information about one's own country and culture. The author challenges four basic assumptions related to the spread of English, the cultural content and the methodology of its teaching. He argues against the following assumptions:

- c) the spread of English and the interest in this language is mostly due to linguistic imperialism;
- d) the native-speaker should be considered as the norm for linguistic and cultural practices;
- e) the cultural content of teaching English should be the target culture;
- f) communicative language teaching is the most appropriate method for dealing with culture.

McKay (2003) cites Smith (1976), who over 35 years ago addressed related issues that are still relevant today. According to these, language users of an international language like English employ this language to discuss their own cultures, while they do not need to internalize target culture norms. Moreover, culture does not belong to one nation or country, but becomes de-nationalized. Similar ideas of the changing motivation for learning English are addressed by Hedge (2000) and Dörnyei *et al* (2006). It also needs to be stated that target culture identification in the case of English is especially difficult, unlike for countries in the case of which the country-nation-language triad is more clear-cut. For example, when someone is studying Italian, Hungarian or Polish, the traditions, values, institutions, beliefs met during language learning are easily tied to specific countries and their citizens. This is not so for English, where on top of Kachru's (1986) inner circle countries (which are already many in number), cultures attached to World Englishes should also be considered (Kilickaja 2009).

## 2.4 Textbooks

Instructors pay attention to a number of factors before selecting a textbook for their students. They need to weigh, among the many, economic, social, academic factors, students' needs, expectations and goals, textbooks previously used by the students or used in the school, the marketing campaigns of large international and local publishers, layout of the book, topics covered, and other items in the coursebook packet (CD, instructor's manuals, interactive or online tasks, workbooks). The so-called cultural component of coursebooks often comes as one or the last factors to be considered in textbook selection. Rahimpour and Hashemi (2011) point to the need of a systematic rather than impressionistic textbook selection.

Catalan and Francisco (2008) summarize the ideas related to textbooks, namely they can be considered containers of information, as sources or as guides. In terms of culture, the traditional role of textbooks is that of providing a set of information about the history, literature, major institutions of a country and what Byram (1997: 19) calls an “intuitive selection” of some aspects of everyday life. The topic selection is either truly intuitive or follows the traditional patterns which are also reflected in many proficiency language exam topics.

Large publishing companies produce textbooks for as broad audiences as possible, and organise marketing campaigns to sell the same books in many corners of the world. There are, however, no ‘one size fits all’ types of books. As Kilickaja (2004: 1) rightly points out, “native speakers may write textbooks and teachers’ books, prepare cultural content, may be strong advocates of absolute authenticity in the materials, and make pronouncements and recommendations. However, their English is that which is associated with the communicative and communal needs of their community, and may not be relevant to those learning English as an international language”. Course materials should fit the needs of the specific learner group, the teacher and the learning context. McKay (2003) also favors well-informed bilingual teachers and curricula designed on the basis of local pedagogical needs. Moreover, Ndura (2004) stresses the need for a careful selection and adaptation of textbook materials, adequate teaching methods and classroom management strategies. While textbooks reflect and legitimize the authors’ and publishers’ selections of the cultural content, it is up to the teachers and the students to interpret and, if needed, reinterpret the views expressed in the textbooks (Ilieva 2000). This critical point of view is especially important in order to correct or balance for the biases found in textbooks. Ndura (2004) discusses the problems of stereotyping male and female roles, the invisibility of minorities, religions and socially disadvantaged groups, and the unreality of societal views in some textbooks. The author argues that the avoidance of certain topics not only gives limited exposure to real life issues, but may also distort students’ views of target and source cultures and limit their understanding of them. Sherman (2010) reports on speaker status bias in ESL textbooks; namely lower status assigned to non-native speakers in conversations.

### 3. Research Questions

In light of the issues raised above the following research questions are formulated:

1. To what extent are target cultures of English speaking, inner circle countries are represented in the books?
2. To what extent is the source culture (Hungarian culture) represented in the books?
3. Does the book reflect the English as an international language view?
4. Are there any biases that may be disturbing for students?

#### 4. Methodology

For the present exploratory study two coursebooks were chosen. The selection procedure included the following criteria: the textbooks are recently published (not earlier than 2009), both are used with similar student populations in secondary schools, and one is internationally published, while the other one is published locally. For the international book, Mitchell's *Traveller pre-intermediate* was selected, published in 2009 by MM Publications. This is the third volume of a seven volume series (proficiency level A2). The target audience is young adults, most likely college students, which is indicated by topics such as job interviews and pictures which portray this age group. Sample materials from the series are available online (<http://mmpublication.com>).

For the Hungarian textbook, Judit Fehér's *Bloggers 1* was chosen, published by the Hungarian national textbook publisher in 2010. This is the first of a three volume series and the intended audience is 9<sup>th</sup> graders who come to secondary school with a diverse English language background. The indicated level is A1-A2, so it is not designed for complete beginners. The book can be viewed online on the publisher's homepage (<http://flipbook.ntk.hu>). Also, the title of both books refers to people on the move, in a virtual or real world, suggesting the nature of English as an international language.

In order to carry out the analysis, the two textbooks were systematically reviewed for any mentioning or indication of the target and source cultures, including people, names, places, institutions, habits, pictures and drawings. Both written (texts, task instructions) and visual modalities (pictures, drawings) were considered.

#### 5. Findings

##### 5.1 Representation of cultures

In *Traveller*, the USA, the UK, Ireland, Australia and Canada are represented and discussed in a variety of ways, including reading passages, dialogues and pictures. At the end of the chapters there are also culture and cross-curriculum pages which focus on inner circle countries while introducing topics such as US fandoms, the discovery of America, emergency phone numbers in the US and the UK, and the history of the dollar. The main settings vary in the book, but implicit focus remains on inner circle countries. This is not always clearly stated, but depicted through pictures or indicated by the names of the characters. There is no mention of Hungary in the book, and tasks which require the reflection of the learners' own culture are minimal. A subchapter entitled "Cultural differences" discusses greetings in various countries through stories of young people who witnessed consequences of culturally inappropriate behaviors.

Most cultural representations in this book point to low culture, the only literary text is a section from the book *The last of the Mohicans* by Cooper. Although this book is shown as a relevant source for Native American culture, it is highly biased as no alternative or present day pieces of information are provided about Native Americans. In terms of the categorization of culture teaching proposed by Liddicoat *et al* (2003), all four approaches are represented in the book, the two mid categories, area studies and culture as societal norms, being the most frequently suggested models. The fourth one, culture as practice view that discusses real personal experiences, is also present, yet, the reader remains an outsider, observer and not someone to whom models to interact with the characters of the book are provided.

In *Bloggers*, the interaction framework for using English, as the title and the front page suggest, is predominantly young people communicating with each other through blog posts. This implies that the focus is on written informal language use (e-mails, short messages, blog posts, mmses) and less space is given in the book to oral interactions. From the inner circle countries, the USA, the UK and Australia are mentioned, but a high number of other countries are also introduced in the book. Bloggers come from places in Hungary, Poland, England, Australia, Germany, Botswana and Spain. The pictures also indicate a variety of countries and geographical areas, including many Hungarian places. Through their communication, while they are discussing daily routine, food, hobbies, parties and school, real people profiles are formed. Through the posts of one of the characters, a 15-year-old Hungarian 9<sup>th</sup> grader, students are provided with a concrete model of how to discuss their own culture, while contrasting it to those of others. Reference to famous Hungarians, such as the footballer Ferenc Puskás and the great traveller András Jelky, is made in parallel with other famous international athletes and the English cyclist Dervly Murphy. This insures that role models are not only international recent media stars. The source and target cultures are not dominant or stereotypical. There are no specific 'culture corners' in the book, but separate sections in the units are used for sports history, schools in the past and for famous travellers. This means that three of the categorizations of culture teaching by Liddicoat *et al* (2003) are present in this book, while the most static, high culture model is fortunately missing. The book suggests a greater, more systematic shift towards the third and fourth models, namely culture as societal norms and culture as practice. The reader has the impression that real people's experiences are discussed throughout the book when the main characters interact and talk about their own life stories. This strategy also invites students to reflect on their own experiences, and not stay simple observers of other cultures.

The choice of content and graphic representation in two cases may be disturbing, and in doing so makes the framework of blogging less credible. The first example is a girl from Botswana, who stands out with her shocking story of losing her AIDS



infected parents, having inadequate access to water, food and schooling. While this may be a real story, it easily deepens students' and teachers' existing biases towards Africa. The other example is the picture of an Australian man who seems older than the rest of the group and is depicted as a fat, half naked person wearing shorts, with long hair and beard, sitting on his porch with a kangaroo. This may confuse students' image of Australians and unwillingly deepens or builds cultural bias. Lesikin (2000) rightly states that graphic representation can help or hinder the understanding of the cultural content of textbooks.

## 5.2 English as an international language

The characters in *Traveller* are all young adults, some of them are introduced through person profiles, real life stories. Being on the move and travelling, which makes English a widely used international language, are frequent topics. Some of the countries/geographical regions mentioned on top of the inner circle countries are France, Singapore, Italy, China, Brazil and Sahara Africa. Many topics are related to young people's everyday life, such as Internet communication, music, films, sports, food, housing, jobs and festivals. While these topics are truly international, the majority of role models come from target cultures. In *Traveller*, the native-speaker model is stressed throughout the book. While there are frequent conversations between native and non-native speakers, there are unfortunately no interactions between non-native users of English.

In the Hungarian book *Bloggers*, a true sense of international communication is provided. The characters in the book come from very different backgrounds and interact with each other through real life-like intercultural interactions. The only problem is that their communication is restricted to blogging, therefore students do not see models for other common forms of communication, such as e-mails, face-to-face conversations or phone calls.

## 6. Discussion

The general aim of this study was to find similarities and differences in the treatment of culture in two recent EFL coursebooks used in the Hungarian public education. Results indicate that both books adopt an international communication approach, highlighting various cultural aspects of English-speaking and also other countries, although they adopt different strategies to do so. The goal is the active use of English in a number of settings, with a variety of people. Stress is put on interaction between young people, which is most probably motivating to secondary school learners. However, an even larger variety of text genres and model interactions with older generations should be included in both books. Cultural themes are varied, reflecting many areas of life of young adults. Acknowledgment of other cultures is done through texts, pictures and character choices.

While international settings are provided in both books, the source culture is integrated only in the Hungarian book, which is done very nicely and systematically. In contrast, *Traveller* was written for an international audience, including adults studying in the UK, and a reflection of the students' source culture is missing from the coursebook. The same tendency is reported in Meidani and Pishghadam (2013), who comment on textbooks produced for the global market, which are more ESL than EFL products. Most large publishing companies have powerful campaigns, therefore their books are sold and used in many countries, and the source culture representation is either accidental, marginal in forms of tasks asking students to compare content with their own experiences, or fully absent. In these cases, it is the teachers' responsibility to invite students to build a wider world view, critical thinking and reflection on social issues and institutions. As for the biases, it is difficult to have definite answers to research question number four, as people have different views and attitudes to the same topics, texts and pictures. A few instances of biases were pointed out in the analysis of both books, but teachers should monitor students' and their own reactions to detected biases in order to adjust the teaching materials or methods.

While the coursebooks provide a model for culture teaching, two things need to be highlighted. First, the Liddicoat *et al* (2003) categorization in the earlier sections was discussed based on the texts, pictures and tasks found in the books, not on the actual use of the books in classrooms. Teachers have a crucial role in turning static representations of culture found in textbooks into culture as practice as much as possible, by involving students in discussions in which they are asked to reflect on the information they hear, to provide parallel examples from their own lives, and by always stressing the individual differences among individuals living in the same countries or cultures. This helps both teachers and students overcome cultural stereotypes. Second, both textbooks offer a variety of supplementary materials, such as workbooks, teachers' manuals, listening materials or online links. These could provide additional cultural information that is not part of the coursebooks themselves.

## 7. Conclusions

This study set out to provide an exploratory analysis of the cultural content in two ESL coursebooks used with young adults in Hungary. Overall, it can be concluded that both books adhere to the principles of English as an international language by presenting both international settings and different cultures. They also offer topics that do not have a clear attachment to any particular culture or are culturally mixed in all settings such as entertainment, daily routines, food and travelling. The analysis of the Hungarian coursebook proved the assumption that locally produced textbooks can be of high standard, reflecting current needs for

international communication, while placing students in their own environment rather than in an international context most likely foreign to young adults studying in Central Europe. The analysis also shows that the cultural content is a crucial element of coursebooks and should be indicated as such both to teacher trainees and in-service teachers. As Turkan and Çelik (2008) point out, language teaching and culture awareness raising should be done in parallel.

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