

# The Promotion of Intercultural Understanding in English Language Teaching Textbooks: A Content Analysis

Anna Maria De Bartolo

Università della Calabria, Italia

Costanza Mancuso

Università della Calabria, Italia

**Abstract** The paper centres around the idea that second language learning is an intercultural process. The global role of English as a primary means of intercultural communication has highlighted the need to develop intercultural competences in language learners. Based on these premises, this study will explore the extent to which intercultural aspects are incorporated in course materials and textbooks. A content analysis of 4 textbooks will be conducted. The preliminary results will highlight the limited coverage of intercultural content in most of the textbooks analysed and the need to promote intercultural knowledge and understanding in the language classroom.

**Keywords** Language and culture. ELT/ELF textbooks. Intercultural communication. Teachers' awareness. Content analysis.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Theoretical Background. – 2.1 Textbooks and Intercultural Communication. – 2.2 Approaches to Culture. – 2.3 Cultural and Intercultural Content in Teaching Materials. – 3 The Study. – 3.1 Aim of the Study and Research Focus. – 3.2 Methods. – 3.3 Analysis. – 4 Discussion. – 5 Conclusion.



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## 1 Introduction

“It is widely recognized that the English language has reached an unprecedented role in the world. Its widespread use among non-native speakers and its characterization as a ‘lingua franca’ have had major implications for language teaching education in Expanding Circle countries” (Gimenez et al. 2015, 225; cf. Gimenez 2006; Kachru 1985; 1992), those countries where English is widely spoken “as a Lingua Franca for intercultural communication” (Baker 2015, 33). English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is an established area of research. Empirical findings and theoretical studies (Baker 2015; Cogo, Dewey 2012; Jenkins, Cogo, Dewey 2011; Jenkins 2012; 2014; Mauranen 2014; Seidlhofer 2011) have largely drawn attention to the need of recognizing the global role of English as a medium of intercultural communication by questioning many of the traditional assumptions about what counts as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ in language use (Gimenez et al. 2015). “Although English is a global language” (Crystal 2003, 2), it has become diversified within local contexts, and therefore learners need to be exposed to a variety of other voices to develop new perspectives and to be able to recognize and counteract prejudiced attitudes and ethnocentrism (Kramsch 1993; 1997). In this light, pedagogical aims should focus on “global appropriacy and local appropriation” (Alptekin 2002, 63) in order to prepare learners “to be both global and local speakers of English, and to feel at home in both international and national cultures” (Kramsch, Sullivan 1996, 211; Alptekin 2002 in Siddiqie 2011, 111). The more learners are able to see that different cultures represent equally legitimate ways of looking at the world, the higher is the chance for them to act like intercultural citizens (in Siddiqie 2011, 111-12). Thus, the changing role of the English language has contributed to bringing intercultural abilities to the fore (2011, 112). Scollon and Scollon (2001) argue that we need to develop intercultural abilities in order to meet cultural challenges and respect cultural differences (in Siddiqie 2011, 111). The need to build intercultural competence to better equip language learners for intercultural encounters is a key question language teaching professionals are coming to terms with, and is leading to more investigations of the extent to which intercultural aspects are represented in course materials and textbooks. The qualitative study conducted in the present paper will therefore attempt to gain further insights by analyzing four ELT textbooks from a cultural and intercultural perspective. The aim will be to raise teachers’ awareness of the need to critically analyze the intercultural content present in ELT textbooks and therefore support learners for successful intercultural communication.

## 2 Theoretical Background

### 2.1 Textbooks and Intercultural Communication

The predominance of cultural aspects in teaching materials, however, reflects those few countries where English is spoken as a mother tongue. Many language teaching materials today are textbooks produced in countries where English is a native language or are designed by native English speakers (in Gimenez et al. 2015). “Beloved by some and demonized by others, the textbook is certainly a highly desired element. It is a guide and a supporting tool for both teachers and learners” (Siqueira 2015, 245). According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), the textbook is viewed as a teacher,

a map, a resource, a trainer and an authority. As a teacher, the textbook gives students relevant information about grammar and vocabulary, as well as English speaking countries and their cultures. As a map, it shows an outline of linguistic and cultural elements as a structured program and it guides students and teachers to follow the steps taken in previous lessons. A textbook is viewed as a resource as it contains a set of materials and activities available to the teacher from which one can choose. It can also be a trainer for novice teachers who need valuable instructions, support, and guidance. As an authority, a textbook is seen as valid and reliable, written by experts and authorized by important publishers or ministries of education. (Radić-Bojanić, Topalov 2016, 139)

Richards (2002, 26), highlights that “much of the language teaching that occurs throughout the world today could not take place without the extensive use of commercial textbooks”. Textbooks have a major role in the sense that they represent the basis for a large and important portion of classroom practice and therefore have the power to transmit linguistic and cultural input for learners. They are rich sources of cultural knowledge and information. Cunningsworth (1990; 1995) and Bao (2006) “believe that a thoughtful incorporation of culture in textbooks may help learners to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and assist them in becoming tolerant and receptive to values” of other cultures (in Siddiqie 2011, 112), while Risager (1991, 191) claims that textbooks can have a great impact on learners’ intercultural knowledge and skills, as well as on their attitudes towards the target culture. Similarly, Byram (1997; 2012a) highlights the dominant role of textbooks in developing Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and calls for language professionals to become aware of the importance of intercultural issues in second language textbooks. The most widely-used and popu-

lar model of intercultural competence is the one proposed by Byram (1997; 2008, 2012a; 2012b) which consists of four dimensions, those being linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and intercultural competence. According to him, intercultural competence comprises the following five factors: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating and skills of discovery and interaction, as well as critical cultural awareness (in Jhaiyanuntana, Nomnian 2020, 207).

Nevertheless, Cunningsworth (1984) claims that

No course book will be totally suited to a particular teaching situation. The teacher will have to find his/her way of using it and adapting it if necessary. So, we should not be looking for the perfect course book which meets all our requirements, but rather for the best possible fit between what the course book offers and what we as teachers and our students need. (in Radić-Bojanić, Topalov 2016, 139)

## 2.2 Approaches to Culture

Defining culture is not an easy task. It is “mostly too large a concept” (Scollon, Scollon, Jones 2012, 10), “it is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language” (Williams 2014, 86), and even though we arrive at a definition, our understanding of culture will always be “partial and open to revision and change” (Baker 2015, 46). Having said this, various approaches have been suggested to frame culture within a theoretical background. One approach to culture is the one related to the cognitive perspective which considers culture as a thing in the mind, patterns or schemata shared by individuals who are part of the same cultural group (Wierzbicka 2006). More recent theories integrate the notion of culture as internal mental systems with that of external shared social meanings. According to this theory, culture takes place in social interaction. Cultural conceptualizations are not seen as static systems but are constantly negotiated and renegotiated (Sharifian 2011). Another important approach to culture is the one that sees culture as discourse and which focuses on participants’ use of different discourse systems which are used simultaneously and cut across the traditional boundaries of cultural analysis (Scollon, Scollon, Jones 2012). This theory is closely related to the idea of culture as practice which views culture as subjective and constructed between people in interaction (Risager 2007). Research into Global English and ELF have shown that one language is not necessarily related to one culture, there is a huge variety in the way English is used and the ‘cultural scripts’ through which linguistic forms operate. Therefore, users of English

do not share 'cultural schemata' embedded in the language (Seidlhofer 2011; Widdowson 2012), rather they bring their unique 'cultural scripts' which are negotiated and recreated in the interactional process. This approach is reflected in the great variety of languages and cultures which are shared in intercultural contexts where English as a lingua franca is used to communicate and will form the theoretical ground of the present study. The idea that different cultural patterns are displayed, shared and negotiated through the use of English needs to be reflected in English textbooks, embedded in the way cultural content is offered to language learners.

### 2.3 Cultural and Intercultural Content in Teaching Materials

The need to acknowledge the diversity of language and cultural topics in teaching materials is well highlighted by Jenkins (2007, 244) when she reports that the current problem is not only the lack of non-native speaker-oriented materials, but also "the fact that ENL [English as a Native Language] is almost always presented as the only real English, and its speakers as the only experts" (244). The need to incorporate activities within language textbooks, which reflect the use of English as the language for intercultural communication is also pointed out by Matsuda and Friedrich (2011, 333). Textbooks need to raise awareness about the diversity of English. They need to demonstrate the variability, flexibility, as well as the highly diverse and emergent nature of communicative practices which occur when English is used in intercultural communicative contexts (Baker 2015, 173-5). The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR) (Council of Europe 2009) emphasizes that developing intercultural competence is a vital part of identity creation and also affects a learner's personality. Furthermore, the CEFR also stresses that "knowledge of the shared values and beliefs held by social groups in other countries and regions, such as religious beliefs, taboos, assumed common history, etc., are all essential to intercultural communication" (Aguirre Quiroga 2016, 2). Learning resources, therefore, should include examples of many different types of interaction between non-native speakers, respect local varieties of English, develop tolerance for differences, and promote cultural diversity (Gimenez et al. 2015, 226).

In spite of the global interest in the intercultural nature of textbooks, intercultural competence as a major component in teaching materials so far has been rather under-represented (Tajeddin, Teimourzadeh 2014). Among the studies surveyed, there are a few which have analyzed local and international English language teaching (ELT) textbooks in terms of the degree to which they represent intercultural awareness and development. For instance, García Méndez

(2005) examined intercultural aspects in fourteen ELT textbooks in Spain. The study aimed at finding the extent to which an intercultural approach was present in the design of the textbooks. It was found that the textbooks did not follow a cross-cultural approach and were not successful in developing learners' intercultural competence. Korean textbooks were investigated by Lee (2009) to find out about the intercultural treatment in them. Lee's study (2009) was conducted on eleven conversation textbooks at a high school level. Content analysis of the textbooks revealed that cultural and intercultural aspects were not dealt with. Shin, Eslami and Chen (2012) in their study on the representation of local and international culture in a series of international ELT textbooks found that cultural aspects of inner circle countries (see Kachru 1985 and 1991 for a detailed overview of Inner, Outer and Expanding Circle countries) were still dominant in them. They further concluded that cultural and intercultural representations in the textbooks were at the knowledge-oriented level meant specifically to transfer cultural information and did not mean to engage learners in critical reflection and intercultural awareness process. Investigation into teaching materials (e.g. Gilmore 2004; Gray 2010; Tomlinson 2011), on the presence of ELF in English language textbooks (e.g. Kivistö 2005; Eggert 2007; Takahishi 2010; Vettorel, Corrizato 2012; Tomlinson, Masuhara 2013; Naji Meidani, Pishghadam 2013; Vettorel, Lopriore 2013) has shown that even though some recent textbooks try to encourage awareness of the intercultural nature of English and present issues related to Expanding and Outer Circle countries (see Naji Meidani, Pishghadam 2013, 93), this is still given limited coverage and has not yet resulted in substantial adjustments to the purposes for which the language is used and taught, or how effectively it can contribute to making meaning in "the contexts of use" and not only in the "contexts of learning" (Caleffi 2016, 64).

### 3 The Study

#### 3.1 Aim of the Study and Research Focus

The present study attempts to examine whether intercultural issues are dealt with in the ELT textbooks selected, and the extent to which intercultural awareness and competence are promoted and enhanced throughout the activities and topics proposed. The main research focus aims to respond to the following questions (based on Gimenez et al. 2015, 23):

1. Do the units include tasks which develop students' intercultural skills?
2. Do the units include varieties of English other than standard American or standard British?

3. Do the units address topics and themes covering a wide range of social and global issues?
4. Do the units enable understanding of the spread of English in the world and its connection with globalization?
5. Do the units encourage the learners to rethink why they are studying English?

### 3.2 Methods

The first step was to identify the English-language textbooks that would form the corpus of the analysis. It was decided to choose four textbooks:

- *Skillful 2*, second edition, student's book, intermediate level, 2018;
- *Language Hub*, student's book, intermediate level, 2019;
- *Life*, second edition, student's book, intermediate level, 2018;
- *New Language Leader*, student's book, intermediate level, 2014.

The reasons for selecting these particular texts depended on the fact that they had been recently adopted as coursebooks in a number of classes at the University of Calabria where the authors teach. Moreover, *Skillful 2* was used, at the time the study was carried out, as the main course material in all English for basic academic skills courses held at the University of Calabria. Secondly, these textbooks seemed to meet the requirements the authors were looking for, in particular, updated and recent materials that could hopefully cover a variety of global topics, highlight different varieties of English, and promote cultural and intercultural diversity. The overviews of the four textbooks maintain, to some degree, to be aware of issues such as English varieties, native and non-native voices, and claim to have been designed with the purpose of offering authenticity, real-world and international settings of language use. Therefore, it was believed that the chosen textbooks could offer better hints in terms of the research questions and shed some more light into the relationship between intercultural issues and course materials. For the sake of homogeneity, intermediate level books were chosen. The authors believe that examining intermediate level materials may be relevant to them as teachers working mainly towards intermediate targets and to the teaching community they are involved with.

Drawing on the methodology of several empirical studies (e.g. Byram 1989; Risager 1991; Mineshima 2008; Juan 2010; Kim 2012; Liu 2012; Lario Oñate, Vázquez Amador 2013; Melliti 2013), content analysis was selected as the research method of the study. The analysis was carried out in the period between July and September 2020. For reasons of time, it was decided to concentrate the analysis on the content of the units in the students' books, following the above checklist. Productive skills

were not part of the analysis at the present stage. Similarly, listening materials were not examined. The content of each unit in the four textbooks was analyzed in detail on the basis of the research questions and a checklist created in order to cross-check whether or not the required aspects were included in the course contents. When interesting issues emerged as related to the research questions, they were discussed and noted down. In the end, it was decided to include in the analysis section only the observations and reflections which were considered relevant from an intercultural perspective. The ultimate objective was to find out whether results provided further insights or reflected previous research in the field. Nonetheless, the limitations must be highlighted. Firstly, the study does not mean to be comprehensive or to draw definite conclusions. The analysis has relied on a qualitative methodology exclusively, and offers preliminary conclusions which need to be validated by further research and empirical investigations with larger samples and mixed-method approaches.

### 3.3 Analysis

#### 3.3.1 Textbook 1: *Skillful 2*

The content analyzed in each unit of the textbook *Skillful 2* is based on whether the content was of the big 'C' type or small 'c' type (in Aguirre Quiroga 2016, 10). The need is felt at this point to briefly outline what is meant by types and levels of cultural content. Lee states "two specific aspects of culture learning are suggested as necessary to achieve. They are the culture-general aspect of culture learning, and the culture-specific aspect of target-culture learning" (Lee 2009 in Aguirre Quiroga 2016, 9). On the one hand, we have attitudes and skills which belong to the culture-general aspect. This aspect is considered to be important because it provides students with a central starting point making them acknowledge that culture is part of their being, which, in turn affects a multitude of features in basic human interaction. On the other hand, we have culture - specific aspects "which involve acquiring knowledge, behavioral skills, and attitude as related to a given target speech society" (Lee 2009 in Aguirre Quiroga 2016, 9-10). Lee goes on to specify culture-specific aspects in two different domains of target-culture learning: the big 'C' and the small 'c' (Lee 2009 in Aguirre Quiroga 2016, 10). In the textbook *Skillful 2*, the big 'C' type regarded a total of eleven themes: social norms, economy, politics, education, geography, social media, history, art/literature, architectures/music, environment and health. The small 'c' type involved eight themes: customs, values, lifestyle, food, hobbies, gestures, body language and holiday.



Appraisal of the textbook shows that it lets students gather awareness of cultural issues and traditions in contexts where English is the primary language. This in turn makes them able to compare their own societal traditions with those of other countries mentioned in the book (2016, 12).

In Unit 1 “Society”, relevant aspects regarding what is polite behavior in some cultures are presented. Students are then asked to identify alternative acceptable behavior from other cultures in particular situations, and to explain how people in their own culture might respond if someone broke the rules in their presence. Students are invited to provide feedback as a class. Before watching a video entitled “Table Manners”, students are given some time to read a number of questions and then to predict the answers to those questions which are: “Are there any rules about polite behavior in your culture?, What advice would you give someone about meals in your country?, What is a polite way to greet someone in your country?, and What other greetings do you know from around the world?” (*Skillful 2* 2018, 8). While watching the video they determine if their predictions were correct.

Students are encouraged to think of arguments in both directions to develop critical thinking by exploring different viewpoints. Specific new vocabulary is introduced regarding greetings and behavior, and through the use of that vocabulary, students are encouraged to take the discussion farther by exploring and justifying their opinions. Discussions follow, focusing on the largest differences in opinion. The text “What Does Polite Mean To You?” introduces phrases that are not really used for their actual meaning, but rather as polite social phrases. The text explores how people will behave in various situations. Examples of these include from tipping to smiling, and from how people eat to different ways to show politeness across the world. It also points out to students how the use of cell phones has changed what is considered polite behavior in many situations and in different countries around the world.

The Unit ends with the ‘critical thinking’ exercise where students are asked to compare and justify their own views concerning different generations and politeness. It was observed that on many occasions the students are encouraged to explore each other’s views with further questions and then report back to the class. Students come to understand that being able to articulate their own views is important because it allows them to explore and learn different behavioral norms from around the world. Their own opinions benefit from comparison to those of other people. The discussion allows them to explain, expand on, and justify their own views as to whether they think polite behaviors are the same throughout the world or whether they are different. The aim of this unit is to make students realize that they need to be open to other viewpoints, and at the same time, accept the need to change or modify their own views about their own cultural beliefs.

In Unit 2, “Food”, students are asked to look at an infographic about seasons for growing fruit and vegetables in parts of America and then to produce their own infographic for fruit and vegetables grown in their own country during the year. They are invited to present the work to the class. The video that follows, “Arabic Sushi”, is an invitation to share opinions on whether they prefer to eat food from their own culture, from other cultures, or a mix of different cultures. At the end of the video students are asked to reply to the following questions: “Is the food from your country popular around the world? and What international food do you think would mix well with your culture’s food?” (2018, 27). The aim of this activity is to allow students to reach intercultural competence by looking at other cultures in relation to their own. The textbook is careful in including and representing the source culture, telling students to often refer to their own source culture. In the text “Food from Indonesia” that follows, students are asked to identify the changes in the Indonesian diet and whether these changes have also occurred in their own country’s diet. Students are then asked to discuss their opinions in small groups.

In Unit 8, “Stories”, the text “The Written Word”, challenges students to discussing why they think writing is important in different cultures, and how different cultures, over time, have added more letters to their alphabet to represent the new and different sounds used in their language. Attention is also given to the topic of calligraphy presenting students the discussion point of how writing has developed into an art form representing an important part of the culture in a lot of places, including parts of East Asia and the Middle East.

The video in Unit 9, “Environment”, invites students to discuss how animals travel to their country to have their young. Students make a list of these animals and share opinions about where this takes place in their country. Particular attention is given to how the local farming and fishing methods have changed in their country in the past years. Students are invited to think about conservation issues in their country and discuss the different solutions that could be more effective as well as what is being done to solve these problems. The reading text, which follows, leads students to list and discuss the main environmental problems affecting their region. Students are encouraged to create groups and discuss these problems and come up with possible solutions, considering as well the strengths and weaknesses of these solutions. Students will need to consider how recycling will play a key role in reducing the amount of waste produced by their country.

Overall, it may be suggested that the activities mentioned in the textbook, *Skillful 2*, promote students’ knowledge of intercultural elements and it does so by offering large amounts of reading texts and videos which convey important examples of cultures other than the

standard American English or British English. The activities reflect a kaleidoscope of cultures where certain concepts, themes, phrases, and characters are presented in an objective manner.

Cross-cultural elements and topics were presented in the reading passages with the aim of raising awareness of students' familiarity with different cultures. Characteristics of the people of non-English speaking countries were well portrayed and discussed. One important aspect of the textbook is that it combatted stereotypes. The textbook met the need to bridge the gaps between people. It very often placed other cultures in relation with one's own in order to develop an intercultural competence, thus supporting Kramsch's (1993) ideas, which to this day are still relevant. The textbook *Skillful 2* was found to be overall appropriate for developing learners' intercultural knowledge and skills. However, in relation to the research questions, it is observed that only question 1 and 3 are met. It needs to be pointed out that the cultural diversity of English, the reasons for learning English in growing intercultural environments, and the spread of English and its varieties are not explored or included. The analysis highlights how important it is to incorporate intercultural aspects within learning materials to support student's understanding when learning the target language. Without these aspects, students would have more difficulty in acquiring the language they are attempting to learn.

### 3.3.2 Textbook 2: *Language Hub*

A unit rich in cultural representation is Unit 1.2. The title of the unit is "Who Owns English?", and it includes dialogues and discussions that lead to critical thinking activities about hundreds of other forms of English all over the world while stating that we don't necessarily need to speak like native speakers. All of the tasks in the above mentioned unit not only aim at developing learners' awareness of cultural issues, but, also at increasing learners' intercultural skills.

If the unit is examined in detail, the topic 'Top Ten English Speaking Countries' is introduced by asking small groups of students to consider the infographic that shows population numbers and percentage of English speakers in the top English speaking countries in the world. Students are asked what they know about the countries and the language that people in those countries speak, as well as who has the power to decide what is good or bad English. From these reading activities, students are asked to give opinions on statements such as:

- "The grammar cannot be wrong as so many people use it.
- Is it sometimes better when you don't sound like a native speaker? Also, since millions of people sound like that, how can it be wrong?

- Discuss other non-standard forms of English, such as Jamaican English and East Indian English.
- Consider the issue of how English is changing all the time. In London, many people speak a new variety of English called MLE Multicultural London English, which is becoming extremely popular. Who uses MLE?" (*Language Hub* 2019, 6).

Students discuss their ideas agreeing that it is mostly young people in London who use it and MLE differs from standard English in the pronunciation along with some grammatical differences. For example, instead of 'you were', 'you was' is used and also 'he weren't, she weren't' etc.

Some additional sample interaction activities from the above mentioned unit are:

- 'Amazing facts'; "Only 11.38% of India's population speaks English and yet it is the second largest English speaking nation in the world" (2019, 6). Students are asked to give their opinion on the topic.
- 'Studying idioms, strange words and phrases never heard before, as well as people having very strong accents, making it difficult to understand them'.

Students are invited to engage conversations on the following issues:

- 'There are hundreds of other forms of English all over the world - for example Jamaican English, Nigerian English, Indian English, etc. Are they all really different?'
- "Standard English is perfect for international communication. Does your choice depend on what you need English for? Should most learners around the world learn Standard English?"
- Standard English is the form used in books, and newspapers. A kind of cleaned up version of English, but it is not the only form of English, and most native speakers do not speak Standard English, at least not all the time" (2019, 6).

In addition, students are put into pairs and are asked to discuss answers encouraging them to give their own ideas and examples, as well as choosing on a list of effective suggestions for a student wanting to learn a new language. A list of languages and minor languages such as Peruvian, Quechua, Iranian, Farsi, Azerbaijani, Senegalese, Pulaar and so forth, is presented in the unit. Students are made aware of other languages, so it is understood that the English language is not imposing its power at the expense of minority languages. As a final activity the unit has a 'speaking hub'. In this speaking activity, students are encouraged to work in groups and prepare a presentation about learning and using foreign languages. Students can talk about English, their own language or both. The following are the different topics that they can choose from:

- “accents;
- standard and non-standard varieties;
- advice on how to practice the language;
- advice on fluency and accuracy;
- how the English language is changing;
- why it is important to learn foreign languages and their cultures” (2019, 6).

The analysis of a subsequent unit worth mentioning is Unit 2, “Experiences”, where students are asked about life-changing decisions, like moving to a new country, or to study abroad.

In Unit 3, “On the Move”, students are encouraged to consider different types of transport shown in a picture giving a view from Nelson’s Column in Trafalgar Square towards Westminster (England). Students are asked to compare the city’s transport to that in their own city/country. This activity makes students reflect on their own source culture while considering the target culture. An additional activity in the same unit regards a reading comprehension on the “Kutsuplus Transport Scheme” in Helsinki, Finland. Students in pairs discuss the scheme and consider if they think it would be popular in their country and if it could work in improving transport conditions there.

In Unit 5.3, “In Business”, students’ interest is driven by references to remote areas of the world where clean fresh air can be sold. The country selling the fresh air is Canada! People from hot, dry states in the USA, e.g. Nevada, Texas and Colorado are the current customers of the product. Future markets include India, Saudi Arabia and Dubai.

Unit 6.3, “You Got Served”, is the last unit analyzed relevant to our investigation. Students watch the video-script and compare English food with Spanish food. At the end of the activity students share results and identify common international items/opinions.

Overall, the textbook *Language Hub* offers learners flexible practice opportunities when and where they need them, and provide exposure to target language for class preparation and consolidation. There is also engaging video content to show functional language in context, with a sitcom series providing realistic models of learners’ own language production. Worth mentioning also are the communicative speaking tasks at the end of each lessons that increase learners’ confidence and improve their writing skills. Each lesson starts with a CEFR unit objective which the lesson is designed to address. However, findings of the study reveal that only a limited portion of the units in the textbook include intercultural content as related to the research objectives. The content provides issues and tasks aimed at developing students’ understanding of the spread of English and of other varieties of English linked to other world realities, as highlighted in points 2 and 4.

These research points appear to be touched but only on the surface level. Therefore, intercultural representation largely remains at the traditional knowledge level and does not involve learners in deep processes of reflection.

### 3.3.3 Textbook 3: *Life*

From the analysis of the textbook *Life*, it emerges that a number of activities are meant to promote learners' knowledge of intercultural aspects through a large amount of visual elements which portray characters and images belonging to cultures other than standard British or American. This is certainly an important aspect to draw attention to. Some sections in the units encourage interculturally-oriented reflections and discussions. Learners are stimulated to relate features of their own culture to other cultures. In particular, the first unit, "Culture and Identity", presents interesting elements in terms of our research objectives. The unit is rich in cultural representations, it includes images and characters which encourage students' awareness of cultural issues as well as tasks aimed at developing learners' intercultural skills. For instance, one of the first activities based on the reading text "How we see other cultures" suggests that learners reflect about cultural groups by looking at cultural features. Sample activities from the unit are:

- 1) Look at the hats. Which part of the world do you think each one comes from? 2) Read the article and check your ideas. 3) Read the article again. Find three reasons why we form general opinions of other cultural groups. 4) Work in pairs. How do films, news reports and TV shows influence our opinions of other cultural groups? (in *Life* 2018, 10)

Another activity in the same unit presents a picture of a Native American girl. Students are required to look at the picture first and give their opinions about what they think may be important in Native American culture as different or similar from/to their own. This activity links to a cultural quiz about colors and cultures, which highlights how different colors are associated to different cultural aspects with the purpose of raising learners' awareness of cultural diversity. A reading called "A World together" leads to critical thinking activities about what globalization means both in the text and in the wider world. For example, prompts used to spur discussions are the following: "What two types of globalization does the author mention?, How did the author's examples help you understand what globalization is?, Does globalization affect you or someone you know? (2018, 14). This text seems to convey the idea that the English language is

imposing its power at the expense of minority languages that may be at risk of losing their local identities. Furthermore, a speaking activity encourages students to work in pairs and prepare a survey on 'international' students' lives' by using ideas such as music, clothing, food, technology and sports. At the end of the activity, students share results of the survey and identify common international items.

Moving on to the analysis of subsequent units, other examples which may stimulate students to reflect on intercultural issues can be found in Unit 2, "Performing", in which students are asked to think about traditional arts events in their own country while brainstorming what they think/know about traditional events in other countries. The same types of issues can be found in Unit 5, "Well-being", which encourages students to discuss traditional dishes from the students' country as well as how often they eat or make dishes from different countries. A beautiful picture in Unit 11, "Connections", portrays a woman who speaks Koro, a language that has just been discovered by linguists, as the caption explains. Here, learners' interest is driven by references to communities in remote parts of the world that preserve intact their identity, language and culture.

The analysis of the content in terms of research objectives reveals that even the tasks mentioned do not seem to raise students' awareness about the changing role of English in intercultural communicative encounters, the reasons for learning and using English nowadays in growing intercultural contexts, the cultural diversity of the English speaking world, or the different varieties of English. The units definitely cover a wide range of social and global issues, and overall they offer quite a few references to cultural aspects other than British or American. However, the exploration is not brought any farther than to a superficial level. The only reference to other varieties of English, for instance, concerns the difference between American and British English in Unit 7 where British and American English terms are compared. Similarly, in Unit 12, in the final section "How to behave", students are required to work in pairs and talk about their time spent in an English-speaking country, meaning by that, in Britain or Ireland. The reading text which follows is about arranging host families for foreign language students in the UK with advice on how to behave in Britain. Therefore, the visit of language students to countries other than native-speaking English countries is not contemplated in the activity at all.

### 3.3.4 Textbook 4: *New Language Leader*

*New Language Leader* includes 12 Units. The unit which is worth mentioning in terms of our research objectives is Unit 4, "Language", which, in different sections, highlights the global role of English in

today's world. One extract in the unit points out that "the number of people actively engaged in learning English is rapidly heading to 2 billion. English is the lingua franca of computing and technology, of science and medicine, and it is prominent in international business, academic contexts, diplomacy, trade, the entertainment industry, and youth culture" (*New Language Leader* 2014, 38). Moreover, there are attempts to raise students' awareness about cultural identity as connected to languages and local identities as well. Students are asked to reflect on and discuss the following questions: "Does your first (or main) language have many different accents or dialects? If so, how do people feel about them? Is it important to have a variety of different languages in the world?; A language belongs to every person who can speak it; Language is the most important part of cultural identity; A government has a duty to protect traditional languages; English will not be the only language for global communication in the future" (2014, 37-151). However, encouraging this may sound, cultural and intercultural explorations stop at this point. When the activities are further examined, it comes out that the diversity of the English language as the main language of intercultural communication (Baker 2015), is not emphasized in any of these activities. The main focus is still on native speaker English which is the favorite target to achieve. One reading text emphasizes the importance of studying English and becoming fluent enough in the language to be able "to hold intelligent conversations with native speakers" (2014, 37). Another activity promotes an English language course in which "all aspects of the language are covered - reading and listening, grammar and vocabulary development and pronunciation work to perfect your accent" (2014, 37), thus meaning standard native speaker accent. Moreover, a text connected to an online debate presents an argument in favor of the adoption of either American English or British English in the English-speaking world and which one is best to adopt. In the course of the debate, it is argued that British and American English are not the only varieties of English (2014, 37). Other varieties mentioned are Australian English, New Zealand English, Irish, South African, Canadian, all therefore native English varieties. The reference to non-standard varieties of English is absolutely non-existent, apart from one final short line which states that "some form of Indian English will almost definitely become the most spoken version of English soon" (2014, 39). Apart from the above examples, no other contents in the rest of the textbook are meaningful for the present study purposes.



## 4 Discussion

This paper has analyzed aspects of cultural content in EFL textbooks and how the content could influence students' intercultural competence. The intention was to demonstrate that when it comes to EFL, a textbook's design in terms of its cultural content is a very important feature. However, "teaching culture does not only include having sufficient cultural references in textbooks, but also requires the teacher, him or herself, to have a 'fifth skill' in order to provide diversity of cultural and intercultural awareness among students" (Aguirre Quiroga 2016, 9). To teach culture as a 'fifth skill' entails broadening learners' mindset and stimulating them to become more flexible and tolerant towards differences. It encourages them to appreciate "values, ways of doing things and unique qualities of other cultures" (Solgi, Tafazoli 2018, 3).

The results show that the percentage of cultural content in the textbooks analyzed, is inadequate for the purpose of fostering intercultural knowledge and understanding.

The most significant pedagogical implication that can be made is to raise teachers' awareness about the inadequacy of intercultural content in EFL textbooks and thus promote critical thinking on their part about EFL textbooks. At the same time, "teachers should not base their teaching of culture solely on using EFL textbooks" (Aguirre Quiroga 2016, 19). Instead, as teachers are fundamental in aiding students' learning process of culture, they should facilitate comprehension of cultural content and offer a richer environment. "Teachers can function as the ones bridging the gap and making students aware of the connections and relations between their own culture and others" (2016, 19), thus preventing the possibility of stereotyping. It appears essential for teachers "to remain critical towards EFL textbooks, be able to review their content and be very selective about what cultural content to use" (2016, 19).

What seems to emerge from the analysis is that the textbooks examined reflect issues already observed in previous studies. "Apart from a generally recognized trend to include in textbooks multiculturally-oriented content and 'globalized' topics, and in spite of an emerging tendency to reflect on the sociocultural aspects of the spread of English on a global scale" (in Caleffi 2016, 66), ELT textbooks appear to have remained quite traditional in their approach (Seidlhofer 2011). ENL (especially standard British and American English) is still proposed as the target model, despite the variety of grammatical and lexical forms that English displays today (McKay 2012). If, on the one hand, there seems to be recognition that English is "not any longer tied to one (Anglophone) culture" (Vettorel, Lopriore 2013, 487), then on the other hand, the diverse contexts where the language is actually used with its variety of legitimate forms and functions (Matsuda 2012, 171) have not been largely drawn attention to.

From the study, the following questions might arise: What is 'sufficient' cultural content? How can we design textbooks which support the development of learners' intercultural competence? Even keeping this aspect in mind, the authors feel that more studies should be carried out in order to be able to discuss the matter any farther. As for now being this far in the investigation, the study found, that there is a limited coverage of cultural content in the textbooks investigated, and that they do not offer students the appropriate opportunity to progress in intercultural competence. It is believed that if students will be asked to deal with cultural input from similar EFL textbooks such as the ones described above, students' cultural knowledge will not improve in terms of intercultural awareness.

## 5 Conclusion

It is suggested that English teachers can make a difference if they are properly trained and motivated. Practical suggestions on how to implement intercultural communication in the classroom should therefore be addressed to English teachers by means of intercultural-oriented tasks. For instance, an introductory training course on intercultural communication may be an opportunity for language teachers to start familiarizing themselves with the relationship between language and culture in intercultural communication, the role of English as the global lingua franca of intercultural communication, and the attitudes and skills students need to successfully achieve this form of communication. Awareness-raising tasks, which need to be further developed, may be the following (based on Baker 2015, 249-50):

1. Consider the relationship between culture and language with a focus on the English language. What is the relationship between cultures and languages when people from different 'linguacultural' backgrounds are using the same language to communicate?
2. English is the most common lingua franca on a global scale. Do you know examples of other varieties of English? Do you think these varieties of English which are different from traditional native speaker English, can be considered standard English? What variety of English do you think students of English should learn and why?
3. What do you think are the most important things to learn about when studying English? For example, native English grammar and pronunciation, experience of other cultures, knowledge of your own culture, comparing cultures, globalization, etc. Do you think intercultural awareness should be part of English teaching and learning?

It is believed that an enhanced understanding of the “types of knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for successful communication” (Baker 2015, 243) and intercultural communication, will have an impact on what and how teachers teach English in order to properly equip learners for the ‘variable demands’ of intercultural communication. This will entail a recognition of second language learning and use as an intercultural process in which learners are taught about learning and communication rather than fixed linguistic forms and communicative practices (in Baker 2015, 244). This is a crucial turning point that both learners and teachers of English need to come to terms with. Given the diversity of communicative practices users of English are likely to encounter in increasing intercultural settings, learners and users will have to become aware of the impact of intercultural communication and be able to adapt and negotiate their communicative strategies for successful communication. ELT stakeholders, including materials writers, curriculum designers, teacher trainers, and test writers need to recognize the changing realities of English usage and start moving in this direction (Jenkins 2015; Galloway, Rose 2014; Bayyurt, Akcan 2015).

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