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Introduction

“Analysis of cultural content in textbooks remains a relatively underexplored field of study in spite of the potentially important role of textbooks for the development of cultural knowledge and intercultural competence” (Risager & Chapelle, 2013: 4).

An English language textbook – whether it is ESP, EAP, or general English – reflects not only academic and discipline-specific content but also culture, which has different dimensions, including local culture, target culture, and international culture. Even a neutral approach to culture can be taken as a kind of culture. There is a real need to explore the representation of culture in ESP textbooks in order to obtain an understanding of how and which culture is conceptualized. This has different outcomes depending on whether the textbook aims to equip students with intercultural communication or only stresses local culture.

Hyland and Hamp-Lyons (2002: 2) refer to EAP teaching as “equipping students with the communicative skills to participate in particular academic and cultural contexts.” EAP textbooks are the sources of a hidden curriculum as McGrath (2002) assumes. They implement ideologies and may give biased cultural information. The very relationship of language and culture, the spread of globalization, and the need for successful communication have attracted the attention of English language practitioners to the recognition of intercultural issues. It seems to be the responsibility of curriculum developers to provide materials that are meant for guiding the classrooms towards the real path of intercultural communicative competence. SAMT, as a leading research center and publisher in the ESP field, assumes a responsibility to do so.

Byram (1997) considers attitudes, knowledge, and skills as components of intercultural competence. An intercultural competent speaker should understand and respect the target culture, and at the same time lead the others to do the same for his/her own culture. Cultural and intercultural awareness has a beneficial impact on language learners: knowing about the target culture as well as understanding their own culture better. Brown (2012) emphasizes the necessity of paying attention to culture in language teaching materials as it has an impact on the ideologies of language learners and their attitudes towards the target culture. Therefore, the textbook has a crucial role in enhancing the learner’s intercultural awareness, which in turn gives motivation for intercultural communication.

ESP textbooks are often criticized for their emphasis on only a shallow aspect of culture and thus neglecting its other aspects or making some parts of it invisible. Textbooks impose a great impact on teaching and learning content as language and culture are delivered through textbooks. While nowadays it is recognized that language and culture are intimately linked, EAP and ESP are seen completely departed, for some, from culture.

Culture, as a linguistic behavior of a speaking and community, encompasses many features from social relations to family ties, from customs to music and movies, and from daily life to beliefs and values. For all these, language is a semiotically complicated system of communication. In the ESP context of Iran, in which academic English is a product of many different considerations, culture does not seem to be considered as a primary linguistic requirement. However, the significance of culture in textbooks and courses has recently been highlighted. This book aims to focus on the issue of culture, discussing whether or not and to what extent it should be incorporated into the educational curriculum of EAP courses.

This book includes 11 chapters. In chapter one, Dinh and Sharifian propose a novel cultural, linguistic approach to EAP/ESP/GE textbook analysis from a multimodal or semiotic perspective. They bring examples from locally developed English lessons in Iran and Vietnam. The study finds that cultural diversity is relatively limited in local textbooks in Vietnam; however, there is a profound instantiation of the local cultural conceptualizations in both the Iranian and Vietnamese textbooks of English. In chapter two, Abolhassani represents what are called models of cultural analysis for L2 textbooks. Although she concludes that most of what are known as models are in fact checklists and statements, she describes each of them in chronological order and adds some comments. She argues that each language material has looked at culture from a certain perspective, cultural evaluation models have focused on only some cultural elements, and none can be taken as a comprehensive model. In chapter three, Jalilifar provides an account of the role of culture in EAP and for the purpose of this study, he offers a more restricted meaning of culture that characterizes it a discourse community. He concludes that even this restricted concept has hardly been incorporated in designing EAP materials in Iran. He then offers two examples of the disciplinary characteristics which can give insight into the nature of academic English. In chapter four, Tajeddin, Alemi, and Khanlarzadeh aim to investigate how cultural issues are interpreted by policy-makers of SAMT and by a number of authors. They found that although both groups believe in the great role of culture in the process of language acquisition, they might not be able to thoroughly consider it in designing EAP textbooks. In chapter five, Allami and Khoshnoodi Rad probe into the representations of cultural and intercultural content in an internationally marketed English textbook, namely *Oxford English for Careers: Tourism 1*, in comparison with a locally developed ESP textbook published by SAMT. They conclude that there are imbalances in the representation of cultural categories as well as cultural themes in both books. In chapter six, Davari and Aghagolzadeh try to find out teachers' perceptions of culture in EAP textbooks. Their study approves that EAP is still a complex and partially unknown concept especially for content teachers in Iran and concludes that in general the teachers' tendency shows that EAP is an acultural profession or at least it is completely natural to be filled with local culture. In chapter seven, Esfandiari focuses on the interface between culture and EAP textbooks in Asia and tries to present a sense of where it was and where it is going. He also tries to investigate how culture is conceptualized, defined, and problematized in applied linguistics and how it is manifested and applied in EAP textbooks. He concludes that the adoption of a middle ground approach is best suited to EAP purposes. In chapter eight, Rashidi and Meihami attempt to answer the question of how cultural contents and elements of EAP textbooks are distributed across different disciplines. They find out that international cultural contents were the most frequent cultural contents across the EAP textbooks and that little attention has been paid to the L1 cultural content. In chapter nine, Rezaei tries to detect identity options in some ESP textbooks. To do so, he attempts to discuss what elements of Iranian-Islamic and Western identity are included or promoted and what others are excluded or downplayed. Rezaei's research reveals that Iranian-Islamic identities are foregrounded in some parts of the textbooks and Western identity markers along with national identity signs from other countries are also visible. In chapter ten, Mazdayasna argues that the disciplinary culture of the students should be included in EAP courses. She concludes that students face unique challenges related to the interface between disciplinary and cultural specificity in the discourse community in which they are learning to read and write, and this relationship has important implications for connecting language and disciplinary knowledge in EAP. In chapter eleven, Zand-Moghadam and Saeedian investigate whether culture and two of its primary senses are realized in localized and international ESP textbooks. They conclude that the representation of international culture in the two investigated textbooks outnumbered the other two cultural types, namely source and target cultures.

This is representative of the partial appropriateness of both textbooks with regard to intercultural understanding, but the sole representation of one culture type is not sufficient and addressing the other types is also needed to make the readers of a book culturally competent.

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