

THE TREATMENT OF CULTURAL CONTENT IN AN INTEGRATED ENGLISH COURSE 1 FOR CHINESE COLLEGE ENGLISH MAJORS

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ABSTRACT: *This paper presents a cultural analysis of the textbook “An Integrated English Course 1” that is widely used by college English majors in China. Based on the previous studies on culture teaching and materials evaluation, the paper has examined the textbook and found out that it is aimed at introducing western cultures, especially American culture to Chinese students. Although the textbook has a strong orientation towards American culture in the selecting of texts, it takes an intercultural point of view in the designing of some activities and exercises. The paper emphasizes the intercultural approach to textbook writing and EFL teaching.*

KEYWORDS: Culture, Textbook, Treatment, Intercultural View, Language Course

INTRODUCTION

According to *The English Teaching Syllabus for English Majors of Higher Education Institutes* (Steering Committee for Foreign Language Teaching in Higher Education Institutes, 2000), the goal of training English majors in Chinese universities is inter-disciplinary talent with solid English language foundation and broad cultural knowledge as well as the ability to skilfully use English in the work of translation, teaching, management, research, and so on in the areas of foreign affairs, education, trade, culture, science, the military, etc. Towards the achieving of this goal, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press has published a package of state-planned coursebooks of over 200 types covering language skills, linguistics, literature, culture, testing, teaching methodology, etc which are expected to meet the needs of undergraduate education of English majors of the country. Among those coursebooks, *An Integrated English Course* is a four-volume series which is aimed at improving the language level and overall quality of students at the foundation stage. Since language and culture are intertwined, and it is not possible to teach language without culture (Stern, 1999a: 205), it is important to analyze the textbook from the cultural perspective so as to integrate language with culture in the process of EFL teaching. *An Integrated English Course 1* is for first year college students. This paper will analyze the textbook to examine how it treats cultural content so that we can better implement intercultural language teaching to English majors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature of language teaching has revealed that language and culture are closely connected and that language teaching and learning involves culture teaching and learning. Materials play an important role in this aspect. Evaluating textbooks in terms of their cultural content can help teachers to make decisions to treat language and culture appropriately in the classroom.

Language and culture

From the time when culture was recognized as an important part of language teaching and learning, numerous researchers have given numerous definitions to culture. Looking at it historically, Stern (1999a) has identified two stages in terms of defining culture. Before World War I and in the inter-war years it was beginning to be recognized that learning a language needed to understand the country and its people, and such culture teaching included history, geography, and institutions of the country as well as the great accomplishments of the target community in the arts, music, and achievements. After World War II, under the influence of anthropology and sociology it was increasingly recognized that understanding a country needed to understand its people's way of life. To be clear about the "way of life" concept of culture, we will examine Saville-Troike's (1976:45) definition: the culture of a group of people includes all of the system, techniques, and tools which make up their way of life. This culture is categorized into material culture and non-material culture. The former includes things like apartment buildings, brush shelters, cars, canoes, clothes, guns, bows and arrows, and the latter custom, belief, values, means for regulating interaction with other humans and with the supernatural. Some theorists have distinguished the two views of culture by using the capital "C" Culture and the small "c" culture (Moran, 2004:4; Stern, 1999b: 251). The capital "C" Culture refers to the great achievements of a people as reflected in their history, social institutions, works of art, architecture, music, and literature. The small "c" culture refers to customs, traditions, or practices that people carry out as part of their everyday lives.

Language and culture are so closely connected that language educators have attempted to coin new words to reflect their relationship. Moran (2004: 32) adopts the compound word language-and-culture to show the relation of both unification and separation. Language and culture are two different concepts, but they are fused together. To reveal the culture, we must examine the language, and to practice the culture, we also need language. It would be completely impossible to separate language from culture because of the solid embedding of cultural information in language use and interpretation (Saville-Troike, 1976:47). Therefore, cultural content should become an integral part of the language course.

Goals of the language course and goals of culture teaching

From the point of view of communicative language teaching theory, the goal of a language course is communicative competence, which, according to Canale and Swain (1980, cited in Riggenbach and Lazaraton, 1991) involves four elements: (1) grammatical, or linguistic competence; (2) sociocultural competence; (3) discourse competence, and (4) strategic competence. Sociocultural competence refers to knowing the rules of speaking which depend on social, pragmatic, and cultural elements (Olshtain and Cohen, 1991). With more emphasis on the cultural aspect, Cortazzi and Jin (2001) suggested a fifth component—intercultural competence, which has been defined as "the ability to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures" (Meyer, 1991:137, cited in Cortazzi and Jin, 2001).

There is another way of looking at language teaching objectives that is beyond communicative competence. Stern (1999a) has defined language teaching objectives in a multidimensional framework that is composed of four aspects: language proficiency, cognitive goals, affect, and transfer. In this framework cultural competence is regarded as a part of cognitive goals. It is defined as follows:

Cultural competence implies implicit mastery of the norms of society, the unspoken rules of conduct, values, and orientations which make up the cultural fabric of a society. It further implies the ability to recognize culturally significant facts, and a knowledge of the parameters within which conduct is acceptable or unacceptable. (Stern, 1999a:83)

In this sense, culture is an inseparable aspect of language teaching, and therefore there must be the appropriate defining of cultural goals in the language course.

Generally, a language course needs to develop appreciation of the link between language and culture and awareness of how languages and cultures differ (Hedge, 2002: 345). Many theorists have worked out cultural goals in language teaching. Stern (1999a), after examining Seelye's (1984) goals of seven skills, Valette's (1977) goals of five categories, and Hammerly's (1982) list of ten goals, found out a consensus between them which can be summarized as follows:

1. Cognitive goals of culture teaching:
 - a. knowledge about the target culture, awareness of its characteristics and of differences between the target culture and the learner's own culture;
 - b. a research-minded outlook, e.g. willingness to find out, to analyse, synthesize, and generalize;
 - c. an emphasis on understanding the sociocultural implications of language and language use.
2. Affective goals of culture teaching: interest, intellectual curiosity, and empathy.
3. Behavioural goals of culture teaching:
 - a. the ability to interpret culturally relevant behaviour;
 - b. the ability to conduct oneself in culturally appropriate ways.

To achieve those goals, the content of cultural teaching needs to be determined.

The content of culture teaching

Today the idea of culture teaching as a part of the language course is universally shared by language teachers. However, teachers usually have not been provided with a course to systematically study culture teaching—what to teach and how to teach it. Fortunately, some theorists have worked out lists of topics of culture teaching which will provide an operational guidance for selecting cultural content both in textbook writing and in classroom teaching.

Stern (1999a) has categorized cultural content into six aspects for the language course. These aspects are places, individual persons and way of life, people and society in general, history, institutions, and finally art, music, literature, and other major achievements. According to Stern, this list of six topics helps us to keep the areas for a cultural syllabus to manageable proportions (1999a: 219), and make it clear that the content of cultural syllabus cannot be the same as that of a conventional and anthropological or humanistic survey (1999a: 222), because the range and focus of cultural content should be different in the language course and social sciences.

A more detailed one is Brooks's (1986) list of 62 topics which cover the specific aspects of culture teaching in the language classroom. This will be presented in Box 1.

Box 1. Brooks' list of topics of culture teaching in the classroom

Greetings, friendly exchange, farewells	Invitations and dates
The morphology of personal exchange	Traffic
Levels of speech	Owning, repairing, and driving cars
Patterns of politeness	Science
Respect	Gadgets
Intonation patterns	Sports
Contractions and omissions	Radio and television programs
Types of error in speech and their importance	Books
Verbal taboos	Other reading matter
Written and spoken language	Hobbies
Numbers	Learning in school
Folklore	Penmanship
Childhood literature	Letter writing and mailing
Discipline	Family meals
Festivals	Meals away from home
Holidays	Soft drinks and alcohol
Observance of Sunday	Snacks and between-meal eating
Games	Cafes, bars, and restaurants
Music	Yards, lawns, and sidewalks
Errands	Parks and playgrounds
Pets	Flowers and gardens
Telephone	Movies and theatres
Comradeship	Races, circus, rodeo
Personal possessions	Museums, exhibitions, and zoos
Keeping warm and cool	Getting from place to place
Cleanliness	Contrasts in town and country life
Cosmetics	Vacation and resort areas
Tobacco and smoking	Camping and hiking
Medicine and doctors	Savings accounts and thrift
Competitions	Odd jobs and earning power
Appointments	Careers

The list above is especially useful for teachers to select topics for organizing activities that combine culture and language learning.

Culture teaching and materials

Culture teaching cannot be implemented without materials. In a broad sense, materials refer to anything used by teachers or learners to facilitate the learning of a language; in a narrow sense, materials refer to textbooks (Cheng, 2002). Cortazzi and Jin (2001) have recognized seven roles that EFL textbooks play in culture teaching:

A teacher: to instruct students directly about English speaking cultures

A map: to give an overview of a structured program of linguistic and cultural elements

A resource: to provide a set of materials and activities from which the most appropriate or useful items will be chosen

A trainer: to provide explanations and guidance for inexperienced or untrained teachers

An authority: to contain reliable and valid interpretation

A de-skinner: to reduce the role of teachers to that of merely going over the cultural content rather than engaging with it in a cognitive, interactive process of teaching

An ideology: to reflect a worldview or cultural systems, a social construction that may be imposed on teachers and students.

A textbook cannot include everything of cultural content and there must be a careful selection of topics. Why different courses tend to stress some types of content and not others depends on the objectives of the course (Ur, 2000:197). It is expected that a textbook includes at least the target culture. However, this is not true. Cortazzi and Jin (2001) have examined a range of textbooks from different parts of the world and found: a target culture is not always represented; some books include, appropriately, a range of English-speaking cultures; others include non-English-speaking cultures, stressing more international uses of the language. They have revealed that there are three patterns in English textbooks reflecting cultures:

1. Source culture: learners' own culture
2. Target culture: the culture where the target language is learned as a first language
3. International target cultures: a variety of cultures in English- or non-English speaking countries around the world, using English as an international language.

Dunnett et al (1986) have also recognized cultural biases in textbooks and found out two different approaches to communicating cultural messages in textbooks: one-dimensional approach and intercultural (bi- or multi-dimensional) approach. The former has a strong orientation towards the target culture, and the latter pays attention to cultural differences. These orientations are conveyed from the content, activities or exercises in the textbooks.

For teachers with an intercultural view of language teaching, it is important to evaluate the materials being used. It will be helpful to the decision making concerning material selection and teaching method. We can follow the guidelines provided by Dunnett et al (1986):

1. Examine each new textbook carefully to determine whether it takes an intercultural point of view.
2. Try to identify the cultural aspects inherent in the textbook and list them by chapter or units. Are they positive or negative? Mixed?
3. Examine the exercises carefully. Determine if they will assist you in drawing students into intercultural activities.
4. Check to see if the vocabulary items, examples, grammar structures, drills, etc., are placed in some meaningful cultural context.
5. Examine photographs and illustrations, if any, to see if they are culturally related.
6. Carefully examine dialogues, if any, for their cultural content.

7. Go back and re-examine those textbooks which take a strong intercultural point of view for possible cultural bias. Are they objective? Do they stereotype or overgeneralize about U.S. or foreign cultures?

METHODOLOGY

Based on the study of the literature, this paper will analyze the textbook *An Integrated English Course 1* that is widely used by first year college English majors in China, with an intention to determine the cultural goals it intends to achieve and its treatment of cultural content.

Research questions

1. What are the cultural goals of the textbook?
2. What cultural orientation does the textbook reflect?
3. What point of view does the textbook take in communicating cultural messages?

Procedure

We will take the following steps to analyze the textbook:

1. Look at the preface and the statement about textbook writing to see what the writers say about the cultural goals of the book, and then read through the texts for their themes to see the cultural goals displayed through the content.
2. Check the cultural backgrounds of the authors selected in the textbook to determine its cultural orientation.
3. Examine the components of the book, especially the activities and exercises, to recognize its point of view in communicating cultural messages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The goal of a course is realized primarily through its content, and therefore, the texts selection is important. *An Integrated English Course* is a series of four books. In the preface, the writers state the principle of text selection as: emphasis on texts of humanities, types of discourse, and variety of themes. There is further explanation about the selection of texts in the writers' statement about textbook writing. All the texts were selected from first-hand English materials and are concerning a wide range of themes: family life, ethics and morality, adventure, the future world, culture and education, cyber science and technology, social problems, etc. The intention is to broaden the students' horizon and improve their attainments of humanities. In Book 1 there are fourteen units, with two texts each. Text I is the main text, Text II is the expansion and deepening of the theme of Text I. The titles and themes of the texts are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: The titles and themes of the texts in *An Integrated English Course 1*

Unit. Text	Title of the text	Theme
Unit 1. Text I	Never Say Goodbye	Dealing with sadness at the moment of parting
Unit 1. Text II	The Dinner Party	Man's and woman's self-control at critical moment
Unit 2. Text I	The Fun They Had	How Children feel in the future educational system
Unit 2. Text II	The Laugher	The embarrassment of working as a laugher
Unit 3. Text I	Whatever Happened to Manners	The importance of good manners
Unit 3. Text II	An Educator's Moral Responsibility	Educators' responsibility to teach proper values
Unit 4. Text I	Dealing with AIDS	Combating AIDS and friendship
Unit 4. Text II	AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)	Scientific explanation of AIDS
Unit 5. Text I	How to Be True to Yourself	The importance of integrity
Unit 5. Text II	Becoming a Child of Nature: It's a Twofold Task of Parents and Children	Educating children to respect nature
Unit 6. Text I	Is an Only Child a Lonely Child?	The pros and cons of having only one child
Unit 6. Text II	Changing Roles: Stay-at-Home Dads	Father's role in child rearing
Unit 7. Text I	When Lightning Struck	Appreciating acts of kindness among people
Unit 7. Text II	Dad Had Lost Any Purpose in Life	Affection between husband and wife
Unit 8. Text I	My Forever Valentine	Father's love for his daughter
Unit 8. Text II	Make Today Count	Cancer patients' courage to face their illnesses
Unit 9. Text I	Hollywood	Hollywood's yesterday and today
Unit 9. Text II	The Disney Company	Mr. Walt Disney and his Disney company
Unit 10. Text I	A Debt to Dickens	The influence of Dickens
Unit 10. Text II	The Companionship of Books	The value of books
Unit 11. Text I	Salvation	An Afro-American's attitude towards salvation
Unit 11. Text II	The Capture of Kunta Kinte	The African's hatred of white slave traders and their black collaborators
Unit 12. Text I	Gender Bias in Language	Gender bias in the English language
Unit 12. Text II	The Difference Between Sex and Gender	Connotative meanings of vocabulary
Unit 13. Text I	The Light of Depression	Dealing with depression

Unit 13. Text II	Remaining Positive When Facing a Chronic Illness	Dealing with illness
Unit 14. Text I	Five Traits of the Educated Man	The traits of the educated man
Unit 14. Text II	When Does Education Stop?	The importance of challenging the young in education

Table 1 shows that the content in this book falls into several categories: individuals' emotional and physical problems, literature, morality and values, science, family relations, friendship, society, individual achievements, history, language, and education. Learning these topics can help students to achieve the general goals of the series—to broaden the students' horizon and improve their attainments of humanities. The writers have not stated the cultural objectives of the book explicitly, but by examining the themes in Book 1 we can figure out the implied goals. It puts more emphasis on non-material culture and tends to make students obtain an understanding of life attitudes, values, relations between people, and society of western countries.

The cultural orientation of a textbook is closely related with its cultural goals, that is which culture(s) the textbook intends to convey to the students. We will find this information by looking at the cultural backgrounds of the authors selected in the textbook. There are 28 texts in *An Integrated English Course I*. The authors' cultural background information is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Cultural backgrounds of the authors selected in *An Integrated English Course 1*

Origin of culture	Number of authors	Percentage
US	24	85.7%
Britain	3	10.7%
Germany	1	3.6%
Total	28	100%

The writings of American authors make up 85 percent of the texts in *An Integrated English Course I*, which indicates that in selecting content the textbook has a very strong orientation towards American culture. It intends to have the students get an understanding of the American values, life attitudes, society, and language.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, there are two approaches to communicating cultural messages in textbooks, one-dimensional and intercultural approaches. The one-dimensional approach has a strong orientation towards the target culture, and the intercultural approach pays attention to cultural differences. When we look at the other components of *An Integrated English Course I*, we will find that to some degree the activities and exercises reflect an intercultural point of view in dealing with cultural content. The following is the components of each unit of the book.

Table 3: The components of each unit in *An Integrated English Course 1*

Text I	Text II
Pre-reading questions	Text
Text	Notes
Words and expressions	Questions for discussion
Notes	
Text comprehension	
Vocabulary	
Grammar	
Translation	
Exercises for integrated skills	
Phonetics	
Oral activities	
Writing	
Listening	

Most of the activities and exercises are for the purposes of learning linguistic knowledge and practicing language skills with little intercultural information. There are some pre-reading questions, oral activities, and listening materials making attempts to combine language learning with culture learning, and the designing of these activities reflect an intercultural view of dealing with cultural content. The following are some examples.

Example 1.

One pre-reading question for the text *Salvation*: Can you explain the reasons why a seemingly growing number of people, old and young, have taken on one religion or another in our country?

Example 2.

One pre-reading question for *The Light of Depression*: Probably few Chinese people heard of psychotherapy some 30 years ago. But now it's getting popular. What do you think one should do to deal with a psychological problem in his/her life or study?

The cultural contexts of the two texts mentioned above are the US. Such pre-reading questions intend to guide the students to be aware of cultural differences between China and the US.

Example 3.

In oral activities after the text *How to Be True to Yourself*, there is a discussion activity. The instructions go like this:

When Dr. Waitley says, "...integrity is in short supply today — and getting scarcer," he is referring to the American society. But do you think this is also true to some extent of the current Chinese society? Dishonesty in society in general is spreading to schools and colleges, corroding integrity in the academic field. Hold a discussion in group of four or five on such phenomena as cheating and plagiarism, asserting your views on these forms of intellectual dishonesty.

This activity is aimed at directing the students to make a comparison between American society and Chinese society, and at the same time cultivate their proper values and behaviour.

In the listening part, some topics are multi-cultural content. For instance, a listening passage entitled *Gifts and Cultures* introduces the customs of giving gifts in different countries such as Australia, China, some parts of Africa, Korea, Argentina, Switzerland, Italy, and Japan. This passage and the accompanying activities are helpful to the cultivation of the students' cross-cultural awareness and abilities.

Based on the results and discussion above, major findings will be summarized as follows:

The cultural goals of *An Integrated English Course 1* are not explicitly stated but are reflected from the selection of the texts. It places more emphasis on non-material culture with an intention to lead the students to an understanding of the life attitudes, relations between people, values, and society of western countries, especially the US. The textbook has a strong orientation towards American culture in selecting the texts, but to certain degree it uses an intercultural approach to dealing with cultural content, that is, to raise the students' awareness of cultural differences and develop their cross-cultural abilities.

Implications

Based on the findings, some implications can be drawn to textbook writing and EFL teaching. It is important for textbook writers to take an intercultural view in selecting content and designing activities and exercises. The textbook can include authors from various cultural backgrounds. This will provide students with an opportunity to experience other cultures "indirectly through learning materials in the language classroom" (Moran, 2004: 8). And it will also provide an opportunity to compare different cultures, just as Valdes (1986:49) says, "The comparison of other cultures with the language being taught opens great vistas for the teacher and provides a basis for better understanding of persons from other backgrounds, as well as supplying new insights into approaches to teaching a second language." More importantly, there should be an appropriate proportion between British and American authors in the textbook, because the US and UK are the two representatives of English speaking countries in terms of culture and language. Furthermore, there can be more activities and exercises that engage students in combining language learning with culture learning.

The textbook is a medium to realize the goals of culture teaching, however, the teacher plays a very important role in using the textbook. The teacher who holds an intercultural view to language teaching will make appropriate adaptation to the textbook. So it is necessary for the teacher to determine what to do to achieve the goals of culture teaching. The goals summarized by Stern, which was mentioned in the literature review, can be used as guidance. We need to choose different content and methods to achieve the goals of culture teaching in the cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects.

Cultural teaching in the language course differs from that in anthropologic and sociological studies in terms of depth and breadth as well as goals. EFL teachers need to balance cultural content and linguistic content. With students' progress in EFL learning, cultural aspects should be given increasing attention; on the contrary, linguistic content gradually decreases. Linguistic information varies from 100 percent to less and less (Liu, 1999). At the initial stage, materials written based on the communicative syllabus has more advantages, while at later stages culture-based materials are preferred (Zhang, 2007). To college English majors, EFL teaching should

combine culture teaching and language teaching, with a primary focus on the understanding of cultural messages. The study of other aspects, such as vocabulary, text analysis, rhetorical devices, and writing styles, cannot be done separately without considering the context. In a culture-based textbook, the contexts mostly have cultural meanings.

CONCLUSION

This study, based on the literature review of culture teaching in the language course, conducted an analysis of *An Integrated English Course 1* which is widely used by Chinese college English majors to find out how the cultural content is treated in it. The findings have revealed that the textbook intends to make the students get an understanding of western cultures, especially American culture. Although it has a strong orientation towards American culture in selecting the texts, it reflects an intercultural point of view in the designing of activities and exercises, which may help students to be aware of cultural differences. Given those findings, an intercultural view should be the basis of textbook writing and culture teaching in the foreign language course. And in order to achieve the cultural goals, teachers need to get cultural content and linguistic content appropriately proportioned.

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