Cultural Elements in EFL Course Books
İngilizce Ders Kitaplarında Kültürel Ögeler

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Abstract

Language echoes cultural values, norms and many other features of a society, and is regarded as an inseparable part of such characteristics. Despite the fact that values and features of a society may be kept apart from language in language education, this though would be an incomplete process of language instruction. With this study, we aim to highlight inner and outer circle (+expanding circle) cultural and societal characteristics of the target language, in our case, English. For this, we examined state recommended English course books used in institutions of the Turkish Ministry of Education. As a result of our evaluation, we found that the outer circle (+expanding circle) characteristics occupied a significant place in the content of material designed targeting learners of English. And, this was duly attributed to writers who similarly come from an outer circle (+expanding circle) culture. Whether this leads to a positively effective way of teaching is largely debated by scholars in the field.

Keywords: culture, course book, course book evaluation

Özet

Dil kültürel değerleri, normları ve toplumun diğer birçok özelliğini yansıtır ve bu gibi özelliklerin ayrılmaz bir parçası olarak kabul edilir. Dil eğitiminde toplumun değer ve özellikleri dilden ayrı tutulabilir ama böyle yapmak dil eğitim sürecinin eksik kalmasına sebep olur. Bu çalışmayla, hedef dilin, bizim açımızdan İngilizce dilinin, iç daire ve dış daire (+genişlemekte olan daire) kültürel ve sosyal özelliklerine ışık tutmayı amaçladık. Bu amaçla, Türk Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı kurumlarında kullanılan devlet tavsiyeli İngilizce ders kitaplarını inceledik. Değerlendirmemiz sonucunda, İngilizce öğrenenleri hedef alarak oluşturulmuş materyal içeriğinde dış daire (+genişlemekte olan daire) özelliklerinin geniş yer kapladığını bulduk. Ve beklenildiği üzere bu bulgu dış daire (+genişlemekte olan daire) kültürden gelen yazarlara bağlanıldı. Bunun öğretime olumlu etkisinin olup olmadığı alan araştırmacıları tarafından geniş ölçüde münazara edilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kültür, ders kitabı, ders kitabı inceleme

Introduction

English is regarded as a gate of a universal community which believes in the use of exchange of ideas, cooperation, and individual motivation (Kramsch, 2001). Language and culture are a conjoined phenomenon reflecting a society. We can easily keep language teaching apart from cultural and societal features, but ending with an unfinished course of teaching and loss of the proper data for the subject.

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Consciousness of cultural values, beliefs and societal features does not particularly force the learner to follow them. They exist to purify the self in order that it takes a more global and less self-centered form (Bada, 2000; Genc & Bada, 2005). Kramsch (2013, p.71) defines culture as "outdoor gardens with no meaning in themselves unless they are related to and contrasted with indoor apartments and dwellings".

Conveying and clarifying meanings in a language cover systematic and schematic knowledge. Systematic knowledge contains formal properties of language composed of syntactic and semantic facets while schematic knowledge is socially formed. A child develops schematic and systematic knowledge together while acquiring his/her native language. Because of this, foreign language teaching materials containing cultural components of the target-language in order to introduce the systematic data are prone to intervene with this natural inclination (Alptekin, 1993). Course books for instance will convey 'ingrained sets of social and cultural values in a direct or indirect way. This feature is a hidden curriculum making a component of any course program, though not expressed explicitly. A curriculum and its teaching materials cannot be neutral as it has to mirror a perspective of social structure and convey values, implicitly or explicitly (Cunningsworth, 1995). In his study, Ulum (2014) implies that course books should respond to students' needs by developing the students through meeting different cultures. In our age, intercultural facet of communication has brought about significant objectives in EFL education to a greater extent, like confirming the improvement of the learners' intercultural knowledge and advancing their capability to communicate in intercultural environments. Considering the disadvantage of EFL setting regarding intercultural input, course books can be thought as one of the most vital materials employed in these settings (Toprak & Aksoyalp, 2014). Every language is installed in a specific culture and upon learning a language one surely learn about its hidden culture. Yet the issue is dissimilar for English language because it is a lingua franca. Instructors should know the determinants like socio-cultural information, learners' needs, stereotypes, generalizations and intercultural communication when putting 'culture' into the program and employing course books which have cultural content. When employing sources of cultural content like course books, instructors ought to consider these factors and check the material to see if it is suitable for the students and if it undertakes to appoint particular cultural information for the students (Kilickaya, 2004).

Being a lingua franca, English has influenced great numbers of people in many cultures in various useful ways (Kachru, 1990). Probably, the most universal categorization of Englishes, particularly in the language teaching field, has been to classify between English as a native language (ENL), English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL). Another common categorization has been introduced by Kachru (1985) which covers 'three circles' model. To clarify the issue, he suggests that the contemporary sociolinguistic portrait of English may be seen as three concentric circles: inner, outer, expanding. The Inner Circle is attributed to the conventional cultural and linguistic grounds of English (ENL). The Outer Circle refers to the institutionalized non-native varieties (ESL) in the lands that have faced long durations of colonization. The Expanding Circle contains the lands where the performance varieties of the language are employed particularly in EFL contexts.

With all these in mind, this study aims to examine state recommended course books of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) approved by the Ministry of Turkish National Education to see to what extent they involve cultural characteristics from the inner and outer circle (categorized as expanding circle by Kachru).

Research questions

This study focuses on the inner and outer circle cultural elements contained in the Turkish- authored EFL course books employed by state high school students and aims to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. To what extent do Turkish-authored EFL course books include inner/outer circle cultural elements?

2. What are the characteristics of inner/outer circle cultural elements employed in Turkish-authored EFL course books?

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected from nine Turkish-authored course books in total. The course books were selected from a list of EFL text books authorized by the Ministry of Turkish National Education. The main reason for selecting this material is due to the fact that the books were highly recommended by the ministry and even were freely distributed by the same institution to high schools. Every book was examined focusing on cultural elements which would bear characteristics of inner or outer circle culture. In the books all topics with reading passages, dialogues and exercises were perused and as a result employed cultural inner/outer circle elements were classified as social, economical, political, geographical, entertainment or touristic.

Instruments

As was stated above, the nine EFL course books selected for the study were widely used in Turkish state high schools. The books are *Yes You Can* series: A1.1, A1.2, A2.1, A2.2, A2.3, B1.1, B1.2, B2.1, B2.2 levels according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which is an international standard for describing language competence.

Findings and Results

As a first step, for each emerging theme, a frequency test was run utilizing SPSS program. At a second stage, a chi-square test was run in order to identify any potential significant difference in dispersion of overall themes for each item. At a third stage, examples for each cultural element were given in sentences regarding inner/outer circle cultural characteristics.

Social Factors

This group of social factors consists of 14 themes categorized into inner and outer circles of English with each emerging theme (time-of-mention=ToM) and its related percentages. In Table 1, we observe frequencies of cultural elements employed in Turkish-authored course books in terms of social factors.

Table 1. Inner and Outer Themes of Social Factors Employed in Turkish-authored Course Books

As can be observed from Table 1, regarding the social factors, except for very few themes like stereotypes (0%) and architecture (0.2%) outer circle cultural themes are highly dominant over their inner circle equivalents. The themes emerged with differing percentages. The theme, *personality* in the outer circle group emerged as

Themes	Inner		Outer	
	ToM	%	ToM	%
Personality	13	2.7	144	29.6
History	2	0.4	55	11.3
Traditions	24	4.2	52	10.7
Language	27	5.5	46	9.4
Art/literature	15	3.1	19	3.9
Education	12	2.5	12	2.5
Organizations	2	0.4	11	2.3
Beliefs	3	0.6	9	1.18
Customs	2	0.4	9	1.8
Institutions	3	0.6	7	1.4
Technology	2	0.4	5	1.0
Clothing	-	-	5	1.0
Architecture	3	0.6	1	0.2
Stereotypes	4	0.8	-	-
Chi-Square (Asymp. Sig)	0.000		0.000	

the strongest (29.6%) with a dominance over its inner circle equivalent (2.7%). Besides, the theme *history* is another theme in which outer circle group emerged as the second strongest group (11.3%) with a significant occurrence outnumbering its inner circle equivalent (0.4%). Furthermore, the theme *traditions* in the outer circle group emerged as the third strongest theme (10.7%) significantly outnumbering the occurrence of its counterpart in the inner circle (4.9%). *Language* with 9.4% in the outer circle group also outnumbered its correspondent (5.5%) in the inner circle group. With 3.9%, the theme *art* in the outer circle significantly outnumbered its inner circle correspondent (3.1%) as well. Having a look at Table 1, the theme

education in both the inner and outer circle had the same frequency of occurrence (2.5%). Additionally, with 2.3%, the theme *organizations* in the outer circle group was employed significantly more than its inner circle correspondent (0.4%) while the theme *belief* in the outer circle group (1.8%) emerged with a strong frequency in comparison to its inner circle equivalent (0.6%). Furthermore, the results obtained for the theme *customs* suggest that the outer circle group (1.8%) had a significant occurrence compared to its inner circle correspondent (0.4%) while the theme *institutions* (1.4%) in the outer circle group occurred significantly more than its inner circle counterpart (0.6%). Finally, the theme *technology* in the outer circle group (1.0%) arose with a significant percentage in comparison with its inner circle counterpart (0.4%) while the theme *clothing* in the outer circle group (1.0%) notably outnumbered its inner circle equivalent (0%). Sample sentences reflecting these themes are presented below:

- Who is more successful? Al Pacino or Leonardo Di Caprio? (Yes You Can, A.2.1., p.58, inner circle personality)
- Atatürk's hometown is Salonika. (Yes You Can, A.2.1., p.26, outer circle personality)
- After World War II, Unicef has aided more than one million refugees. (Yes You Can, B.1.1., p.36, inner circle history)
- After the Greek Army withdrew from the Afyonkarahisar line, the soldiers brought a few Greek captives to Mustafa Kemal's tent at night. (Yes You Can, A.2.3., p.91, outer circle history)
- Young people can do numerous activities in different parts of Canada. Festivals are very popular in St Johns, because people love festivals, whether it is spring, summer, fall or winter. (Yes You Can, B.2.1., p.42, inner circle traditions)
- At the meeting since I knew that hierarchy is important to the Chinese I spoke directly to the director, a woman, while I shook her hand. It is highly inappropriate for a man to touch a woman in public. (Yes You Can, B2.2., p.110, outer circle traditions)

Economical Factors

In this group, 2 themes were observed to occur both in inner and outer circles of English. Pertaining themes and their emergence frequencies are presented.

Table 2. Inner and Outer Themes of Economical Factors Employed in Turkish-authored Course Books

Themes	Inner		Outer	
	ToM	%	ToM	%
Transportation	5	41.7	6	50
Jobs	-	-	1	8.3
Chi-Square (Asymp. Sig)	0.174		0.174	

From Table 2, we can see that outer circle cultural themes were clearly the dominating cultural elements compared to the inner circle correspondents. For instance, the theme *transportation* in the outer circle group emerged as the strongest (50%) with a dominance over its inner circle counterpart (41.7%) while the theme *jobs* in the outer circle group (8.3%) significantly outnumbered its inner circle thematic correspondent (0%). Sample sentences representing these themes are cited below:

- The aim of this report is to give a brief overview of transport facilities in London, and to make some suggestions for improvements. (Yes You Can, B.2.2., p.105, inner circle transportation)
- The picture of transportation vehicle. (Yes You Can, B.1.2., p.27, outer circle transportation)
- He is Deng and he is an alligator wrestler. (Yes You Can, A.2.1., p.31, outer circle job)

Political Factors

Only one theme that is *government* was observed to occur in the outer circle of this group. Related the theme and percentage of emergence are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Inner and Outer Themes of Political Factors Employed in Turkish-authored Course Books

Themes	Inner		Outer	
	ToM	%	ToM	%
Government	-	-	6	100

The theme government in this group was employed only in the outer circle (100%). No occurrence of this theme was detected in the inner circle. To cite some sample sentences from the course books, we present the following sentences:

- Atatürk is the founder of the Young Turkish Republic. He founds the Republic of Turkey. (Yes You Can, A.2.1., p.37, outer circle government)
- And he becomes the first president of the Turkish Republic. (Yes You Can, A.2.1., p.37, outer circle government)

Geographical Factors

Two themes emerged in both the inner and outer circle of this group. Pertaining themes and percentages are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Inner and Outer Themes of Geographical Factors Employed in Turkish-authored Course Books

Themes	Inner		Outer	
	ToM	%	ToM	%
Country	50	22.7	152	69.1
Climate	6	2.7	12	5.5
Chi-Square (Asymp. Sig)	0.000		0.000	

From the table we can observe that the theme *country* was employed significantly (69.1%) more than its inner circle counterpart (22.7%). Similarly, the theme *climate in* the outer circle group (5.5%) *highly dominated its* inner circle equivalent (2.7%). The sample sentences below exemplify these themes:

- United Kingdom is an Island. (Yes You Can, B.1.1., p.23, inner circle country)
- The most powerful earthquake hit Japan on Friday March 11, 2011 at 2.46 p.m local time. (Yes You Can, A.2.2., p.28, outer circle country)
- The weather is incredibly foggy and rainy in Britain. (Yes You Can, B.1.1., p.24, inner circle climate)
- The weather. It was wet and windy/Madagascar. (Yes You Can, A.2.2., p.36, outer circle climate)

Entertainment Factors

Eight themes occurred in this group of entertainment factors. The themes and their related percentages of occurrence are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Inner and Outer Themes of Entertainment Factors Employed in Turkish-authored Course Books

Themes	Inner		Outer	
	ToM	%	ToM	%
Movies	18	26.9	2	3
Music	11	16.4	1	1.5
Cinema	7	10.4	2	3
Cartoons	5	7.5	1	1.5

Series	5	7.5	-	-
Sports	5	7.5	4	6
Dance	2	3	3	4.5
Tv	1	1.5	-	-
Chi-Square (Asymp. Sig)	0.000		0.000	

From Table 5, we can see that the theme *movies* in the inner circle (26.9%) was observed to highly outnumber its outer circle counterpart (3%). Besides, the theme *music* in the inner circle group (16.4%) emerged as the second strongest theme in the inner circle with dominance over its outer circle equivalent (1.5%). Additionally, the theme *cinema* in the inner circle group emerged as the third strongest theme (10.4%) to outnumber its counterpart (3%) in the outer circle. The theme *cartoons* in the inner circle group (7.5%) was significantly employed with much higher frequency than its counterpart in the outer circle (1.5%) as well. Furthermore, with 7.5%, the theme *series* in the inner circle emerged solely; no occurrence of this theme was observed in the outer circle. Moreover, the theme *sports* in the inner circle (7.5%) though not significantly, was employed slightly with more frequency than its correspondent in the outer circle (6%). The theme *dance* (4.53%) was observed to occur with slight more frequency in the outer circle compared to its counterpart (3%) in the inner circle. Finally, the theme *TV in the inner circle was observed to emerge with mere 1.5% while none of such occurrence was observed in the outer circle.* The sample sentences below represent themes of the entertainment factors:

- Based on the best-selling young-adult trilogy by Suzanne Collins, 'The Hunger Games' takes place in the future. (Yes You Can, B.1.2., p.13, inner circle movies)
- Sudha Chandran was born in Kerala, in 1964. She became one of the most well-known dancers and movie stars in India. (Yes You Can, B.1.1., p.72, outer circle movies)
- We Are The Champions. (Yes You Can, B.2.1., p.33, inner circle music)
- Tarkan signs his album in the music shop. (Yes You Can, A.2.3., p.21, outer circle music)
- Hollywood cinema products. (Yes You Can, A.2.2., p.84, inner circle cinema)
- Mexican-Spanish cinema products. (Yes You Can, A.2.1., p.57, outer circle cinema)

Touristic Factors

This group consists of 2 themes: hotels and touristic places. The themes and their related percentages of occurrence are tabulated in Table 6.

Table 6. Inner and Outer Themes of Touristic Factors Employed in Turkish-authored Course Books

Themes	Inner		Outer	
	ToM	%	ToM	%
Touristic Places	57	23.8	177	73.8
Hotels	2	0.8	4	1.7
Chi-Square (Asymp. Sig)	0.000		0.000	

The results obtained for the theme *touristic places* in the outer circle group (73.8%) suggest a more significant coverage compared to inner circle elements (23.8%). With a slight occurrence (1.7%) in the outer circle group, the theme *hotels* emerged with a rather slight frequency (0.8%) in the inner circle. Related sample sentences from examined course books are presented below:

- It was a scuba-diving holiday on Australia's Great Barrier Reef. (Yes You Can, B.2.2., p.88, inner circle touristic places)
- Africa was my dream destination. I wanted to learn about wildlife. (Yes You Can, B.2.2., p.89, outer circle touristic places)
- The Library Hotel, Manhattan, New York. (Yes You Can, A.2.1., p.101, inner circle hotels)
- Giraffe Manor is a unique hotel in Nairobi, Kenya. (Yes You Can, A.2.1., p.100, outer circle hotels)

Overall Inner and Outer Circle Factors

All inner and outer circle factors consisted of six groups: social, economical, political, geographical, entertainment, touristic. Table 7 illustrates these factors as well as their frequencies of emergence.

Table 7. Inner and Outer Cultural Elements: Six Categories

Factors	Inner		Outer	
	ToM	%	ToM	%
Social	196	17.4	372	32.9
Touristic	50	4.4	181	16
Geographical	58	5.1	168	14.9
Entertainment	55	4.9	13	1.2

Economical	5	0.4	7	0.6
Political	-	-	6	0.5
Chi-Square (Asymp. Sig)	0.000		0.000	

From Table 7, we can clearly see a striking tendency towards employing outer circle cultural elements. For instance, while inner circle social elements occupied 17.4% we can see that these elements in the outer circle were employed with 32.9%. Themes related to touristic factors in the outer circle emerged by an overwhelming 16% frequency compared to a mere 4.4% in the inner circle. Geographical themes in the outer circle similarly significantly outnumbered the inner circle counterparts; while the outer circle themes were 14.9%, the inner circle were only 5.1%. Entertainment themes however occupied a slightly different position; in that the inner circle themes (4.9%) outnumbered their correspondents in the outer circle where emergence of such themes were only 1.2%. Economical and political themes were the least occurring themes in both inner and outer circles.

Total Inner and Outer Frequencies of Cultural Elements

From our analysis above, we can observe that the outer circle themes significantly outnumbered their inner circle counterparts. A summary of this analysis can be presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Overall Inner and Outer Cultural Elements

	Inner		**Outer**	
Turkish Authored Course Books	ToM	%	ToM	%
	382	33.8	747	66.2

From Table 8, we can clearly observe the dominance of outer circle elements in the examined EFL course books authored by Turkish writers. While such elements were employed by 66.2%, elements of inner circle occupied only half (33.8%) of the outer coverage in the EFL text books. This finding is interesting in that it shows the tendency of outer circle authors carrying their indigenous cultural elements to the text books they produce.

Discussion and Conclusion

A number of course book evaluation studies were conducted to understand whether specific language course books contain cultural characteristics (Taş, 2010; Nemati, 2009; Roshan, 2014; Celik & Erbay, 2013; Rajabi & Ketabi, 2012). However, a detailed study focusing on the inner and outer circle cultural elements with regard to social, touristic, geographical, entertainment, economical and political factors as well as the themes emerged out of our study were not dealt with in such studies. From this perspective, this study aims to highlight the extent of inner/outer circle cultural and societal elements contained in Turkish-authored course books which are

recommended and freely distributed by the Ministry of Turkish National Education to high schools. The picture drawn by nine EFL course books illustrates that:

- Outer circle cultural elements were significantly employed in Turkish-authored EFL course books with two folds frequency compared to inner circle elements: 66.2% for outer circle, and 33.8% for inner circle; and
- Inner and outer circle cultural elements emerged in six categories: social, economical, political, geographical, entertainment and touristic. Each of these categories having its own sub categories were previously dealt with in the study.

The results obtained from this descriptive study may prove to be of some help for course book authors, curriculum and program designers and developers, instructors, educational administrators and educational policy makers.

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