

The Presentation of Sources of Culture in English Textbooks in Thai Context

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Abstract

This study focused on the analysis of the presentation of sources of culture in a series of English Textbooks used in Thailand and their presentation in the receptive skills and productive skills of language learning. It was revealed that source culture or Thai culture and international culture or culture of the foreign countries where English is used as a second or foreign language were presented in each series of textbooks in a much smaller proportion when compared to the target culture or the culture of America or Britain that accounted for almost half of the total units analysed. It was also shown that more than half of the units analysed were presented in receptive skills that show the target culture and less than half in productive skills that show the source culture. The results of this study provide implications for authors, publishers, and educational institutions on how sources of culture should be treated in English textbooks to better prepare Thai students for a wider range of international communicative settings.

Keywords: English textbooks, sources of culture, receptive and productive skills

1. Introduction

1.1 *EIL, Knowledge of Culture, and English Textbooks*

Today, English is an international language (EIL) used for global communication and a lingua franca for cross-cultural communication with both native English speakers and non-native English speakers (Bada & Ulum, 2017; Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2003, McKay, 2002; Ulum, 2016; Ulum & Erdoğan, 2016; Ulum & Köksal, 2019; Ulum & Köksal, 2019; Yamada, 2010). Crystal (2008) mentioned that as of 2003 the non-native English speakers already outnumbered the native English speakers by a ratio of three to one. It is expected that this disproportion will continue to increase due to ongoing migration and demand for global English in every sector of our society. Therefore, the aim of learning English is not only to communicate with native English speakers, but also with non-native English speakers.

Having this in mind, the purpose of learning English has shifted from focusing on grammar and discourse to gaining a wider range of cultural knowledge to share ideas and express one's culture for mutual understanding and building relationship (Byram, 1997; Crystal, 2003; Kramersch, 1998). English language learners must be taught the importance of connecting the international community by knowing appropriate ways of relating with people from different cultural upbringings (Sinicrope, Norris & Watanabe, 2012). In like manner, as language and culture are inseparable (Brown, 2001; Kramersch, 1998; Liddicoat et al., 2003), Byram (1997) pointed out that language learners are also culture learners. Thus, students should gain knowledge of culture that will make them aware of their own and others' culture, as well as value and share cultural differences

In Thailand, to make Thai students better prepared speakers of English in international communicative settings, the Ministry of Education (2008) set policies that English should be taught with an emphasis on raising students' awareness of their national culture and others', appreciating similarities and differences of both language and culture, and using them in various settings in the community and global society. Moreover, as Thailand is one of the founding countries of ASEAN and English is not only for official purposes but also for relational communication, Kirkpatrick (2010) suggested a new curriculum reflecting ASEAN community cultures should be promoted while the learning and teaching of English should focus on gaining more cultural knowledge of

other ASEAN countries, promoting unity, and respecting cultural diversity.

Therefore, it is necessary to reassess the role of culture reflected in English pedagogy and most importantly in English textbooks. Contents, topics, and discourses loaded in English textbooks are usually based on cultural models (McKay, 2003). Henceforth, it is not possible to teach language without embedding its cultural base (Alptekin, 1993). In fact, in some cases, English textbooks are criticized for having distorted contents (Richards, 2001), and are used as a means to perpetuate the western “British or American” influence, interest and power in the world (Matsuda, 2002; Pennycook, 1994; Fairclough, 1989; Philipson, 1992). For that reason, Brown (2001), Cortazzi and Jin (1999), and McKay (2002) suggested the analysis of English textbooks before using them to avoid bias or one-sided presentation of cultural information as well as marginalization of local and others’ culture.

However, in Thailand, problems are reported that Thai English teachers lack cultural knowledge and skills of assessing textbooks; they are overloaded with teaching lessons, and they do not have an opportunity to choose their own English textbooks (Noom-ura, 2013; Wiriyachitra, 2002). As a result, Thai teachers select or use English textbooks for their students as prescribed without conducting a thorough analysis especially on cultural presentation integrated in their English textbooks.

1.2 Sources of Culture in English Textbooks

According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), Crystal (2003), and McKay (2002), sources of culture can be traced according to source culture, target culture, and international culture.

Source culture refers to the cultural information of learners’ own culture. It is believed that English textbooks based on learners’ own culture can help English language learners to reflect on their own culture and use it as a point of reference for cross-cultural communication (Byram, 1997, McKay, 2002, Yamada, 2010). For this reason, students should be taught to reflect on their national culture and value, thus they can appreciate the cultural diversity of the world around them (Breen 2001; Baker, 2008; Graddol, 2006) and perhaps can eventually turn their intercultural encounters to intercultural relationship (Byram, 1997). However, unfortunately in Thailand, English textbooks that are based on Thai learners are still limited (Nomnian, 2013; Ratanaphruks, 2012).

Target culture refers to the cultural information of countries where English is spoken as a native language such as America, Canada, and Britain. Traditionally, cultures of these countries are commonly presented in English textbooks, especially in Thailand where English is a compulsory subject and considered the most important language for Thais to learn and master. In spite of the fact that target culture is the popular and widely employed in English language pedagogy, English textbooks are not without negative comments of marketing purposes (Richards, 2001), western culture bias, and government-back enterprises (Pennycook, 1994; Philipson, 1992). Moreover, in some cases, the learning of target culture may result in stereotyping, alienation, and prejudices against the world that are not explored (Alptekin, 1993; Matsuda, 2002).

International culture refers to cultural information of countries where English is a second language or a foreign language such as the Philippines, India, and China. International cultural content is vital for students to learn because it helps them to gain cultural knowledge of the world and develop international understanding (Bada & Ulum, 2017; Crystal, 2003; Matsuda, 2002; McKay, 2002; Ulum, 2016; Ulum & Erdoğan, 2016; Ulum & Köksal, 2019s; Ulum & Köksal, 2019b). This is especially the case when students whose first language is not English have a chance to use English in an international context (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). Alptekin (1993) also suggested that international cultural contents should be incorporated into English course materials as it provides cultural schematic knowledge of the diverse society and help learners to possess positive attitudes towards other cultures and cultural differences.

1.3 Language Skills and Sources of Culture in English Textbooks

Brown (2001) mentioned language skills that are directed through listening and reading are called receptive skills while the language skills that are generated by speaking and writing are known as productive skills. Crystal (2003) referred to them as comprehension skills and production skills respectively. Listening and reading are termed receptive skills because when learners listen and read something they receive the language and extract the meaning. Productive skills are involved when learners produce the language through speaking and writing (Harmer, 2007).

As mentioned earlier, since language and culture are closely related and language normally transmits culture, it can be said that when learners are listening to and reading about something, they are receiving and decoding cultural knowledge, which may develop their skills of comprehension or build their cultural schemata (Böcü &

Razi, 2016; Brown, 2001; Hamiloğlu & Mehdi, 2010; Harmer, 2007). In addition, learners of a second language can only speak and write (productive skills) about cultural topics acquired from listening and reading (receptive skills). It can be seen that when receptive skills are acquired and used in interaction, devising merely a correct pronunciation or sound is inadequate, picking a right word to speak or write and what is culturally appropriate also mean a lot specially in cross-cultural communication setting (Chastain, 1998).

In the context of preparing Thai learners for international communication encounters, it is believed that English language learning should focus more on improving comprehension skills (Crystal, 2010, Krashen, 1982). For example in Chile, McKay (2003) reported that the Ministry of Education reformed their curriculum to reflect the worldwide communication by putting an emphasis on receptive skills rather than productive skills. As a result, 40 per cent of the study program was dedicated to developing the receptive skills of reading comprehension and only 20 per cent to developing the productive skills of speaking and writing. However, in Thailand, although a few studies had been carried out on the cultural presentation in English textbooks (Kaewsakul & Teo, 2016; Labtic & Teo, 2019; Nomnian, 2013), none of them focused on the presentation of the sources of culture in the skills of English language learning, namely receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). Hence, this study, attempts to fill this research gap.

1.4 Research Questions

This study focused on the analysis of sources of culture presented in English textbooks used in Thailand especially to explore the following research questions:

1. What sources of culture are presented in a series of *Access English Textbooks*?
2. How sources of culture are presented in the receptive skills and productive skills of English language learning?

The insights gained from this study may help raise an awareness of educators, authors, and publishers in Thailand and those with similar interest of the importance of analyzing the presentation of sources of culture in English textbooks. They may also serve as a reference on how sources of culture should be integrated in English classes and teaching materials especially textbooks. Such integration may help English language learners obtain knowledge of cultural diversity, appreciate their national culture, and prepare them for a wider range of international communicative settings.

2. Methodology

2.1 Textbooks

A series of the *Access English Textbooks* was chosen for this study because it is one amongst several textbooks endorsed by the Office of the Basic Education Commission in Thailand that is widely used by the lower secondary schools in Region 16 (Satun and Songkhla provinces). It is authored by Virginia Evans and Jenny Dooley from United Kingdom based on Thai Basic Education Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008) and published by Aksorn Chareon Tat Co., Ltd., a renowned publisher in Thailand. The *Access English Textbooks* are a series of three levels for lower secondary students (Matayomsuksa 1-3), aged 13 to 15 and each level contains a student's book, a workbook, and a teacher's book, totaling a series of nine textbooks. However, in this study, only student's books and workbooks, totaling six textbooks were analyzed since students always use them in their regular classes and independent studies.

2.2 Analysis

Content analysis, a systematic method of making a replicable and valid inference on units investigated, was used in the study (Neuendorf, 2002). This can be done in four steps: coding, categorizing, comparing, and concluding (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2001). Due to the subjectivity of doing analysis by oneself (Weber, 1990), double-checking, discussion, and cross-examination were done between researchers before arriving at the final counting of frequency to avoid subjectivity and misinterpretation.

Since the purpose of the study was to analyze the presentation of sources of culture in *Access English Textbooks*, it is necessary to first identify the unit of analysis. In this study, the unit of analysis focused on tasks related to Brown's (2001) receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). Tasks that deal with enhancing students' vocabularies, pronunciation, and grammar were not included in the analysis. Table 1 delineates the total number of units of analysis identified in *Access English Textbooks*.

Table 1. Units of Analysis

Tasks	Textbook 1		Textbook 2		Textbook 3		Total		Total
	WCP	NCP	WCP	NCP	WCP	NCP	WCP	NCP	
Receptive Skills (Listening and Reading)	112	45	139	61	146	63	397	169	566
Productive Skills (Speaking and Writing)	87	29	125	41	92	39	304	109	413
Total	199	74	264	102	238	102	701	278	979

Note: WCP means with cultural presentation

NCP means no cultural presentation

Then, the identified 979 units were further analyzed for the frequency of presentation of source culture, target culture, and international culture. To be specific, sources of culture were analyzed by identifying the source country of reference or by examining cultural information or topics such as places, nations, people, celebrations of a specific country, or any possible ways in which the country of origin can be traced. However, two problems occurred during the analysis. First, out of 979 units identified, 278 units did not contain cultural information; therefore, they were excluded from the study. As a consequence, only 701 units with cultural information were analyzed further for the presentation of sources of culture. Second, it was also found in the analysis that not all units had specific cultural reference to a particular source country. Thus, unspecified source of culture was added in the analysis as shown in Table 2 below. (See appendix for a sample analysis of the presentation of sources of culture.)

Table 2. Sources of Culture

Sources of Culture	Source Country Reference
1. Source Culture	Thailand
2. Target Culture	Countries where English is used as a mother tongue such as America, Britain, Australia, Canada, Ireland, and New Zealand
3. International Culture	Countries where English is used as a second or foreign language such as South Korea, Mexico, Germany, Kenya, the Philippines, and Israel
4. Unspecified Source of Culture	No specific reference of the source country

3. Results and Discussions

The result of the analysis of the 701 units containing cultural information shows that the *Access English* Textbooks disproportionately presented the four sources of culture. In other words, source culture, target culture, international culture, and unspecified source of culture were unequally distributed in receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing).

3.1 Presentation of Sources of Culture in *Access English* Textbooks

Figure 1 below delineates the frequency of the four sources of culture found in the *Access English* Textbooks, namely source culture, target culture, international culture and unspecified source of culture.

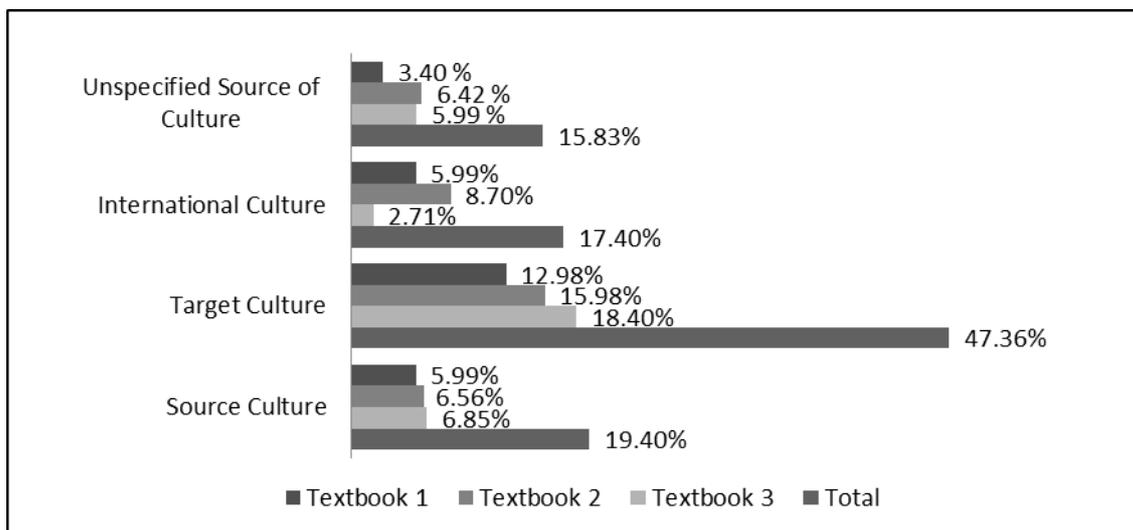


Figure 1. Sources of Culture in *Access English Textbooks*

As shown in Figure 1, of the total frequency of the four sources of culture, target culture occurred the most frequently in *Access English Textbooks* (47.36%) while unspecified source of culture accounted for the lowest frequency (15.83%). Remarkably, next to target culture but with much lower frequency of occurrence was source culture (19.40%). This is followed by international culture with a proportion of 17.40%. Another interesting finding is that target culture was mostly presented in Textbook 3 (18.40%) and it accounted for the lowest frequency in Textbook 1 (12.98%). On the other hand, source culture occurred the most in Textbook 3 (6.85%) while it was presented with the lowest frequency in Textbook 1 (5.99%). In addition, the international culture was presented the most (8.70%) in Textbook 2 and the least (2.71%) in Textbook 3. To sum up, target culture accounted for almost half (47.36%) of the total units analyzed; following with a slight difference were source culture (19.40%) and international culture (17.40%); and the lowest was the unspecified source of culture (15.83%). It can be said that *Access English Textbooks* predominantly presented the target culture while source culture and international culture tend not to mostly occur in every unit of the textbooks.

What was revealed from the results above is Thailand and other foreign countries were presented in each series of *Access English textbooks* but a lot lesser in proportion when compared to the target culture that accounted for almost half of the total units analyzed. Therefore, it can be concluded that when all three series of *Access English Textbooks* were considered, they were dominated by target culture or cultural information that has reference to countries where English is used as a mother tongue such as America, Britain, and Canada. Although the *Access English Textbooks* were designed based on Thai Basic Education Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008) and published by a renowned publisher in Thailand (Aksorn Chareon Tat Co., Ltd.), the source country or the nationality of the authors are British. Therefore, the cultural background of the authors may have come into play and the notion of authorship as mentioned by Richards (2001) may have been involved. That is, possible predispositions may have been made by the authors to premeditate or intentionally present the lessons and topics in *Access English Textbooks* to serve as a means for endorsing the interest in as well as the influence of Anglo-American power (Bada & Ulum, 2017; Fairclough, 1989; Ulum, 2016; Ulum & Erdoğan, 2016; Ulum & Köksal, 2019a; Ulum & Köksal, 2019b; Matsuda, 2002; Pennycook; 1994;; Philipson, 1992). For instance, on page 15 of *Access English Textbook 3* the presentation of a tourist attraction “Tower of London” and the account of “The Yeoman Warders” somehow can be viewed as an indication of the British interest in promoting their tourism industry and history.

3.2 Presentation of Sources of Culture in Receptive Skills and Productive Skills

Figure 2 further shows the distribution of the four sources of culture accounted for in *Access English Textbooks*, namely source culture, target culture, international culture and unspecified source culture in the receptive skills and productive skills.

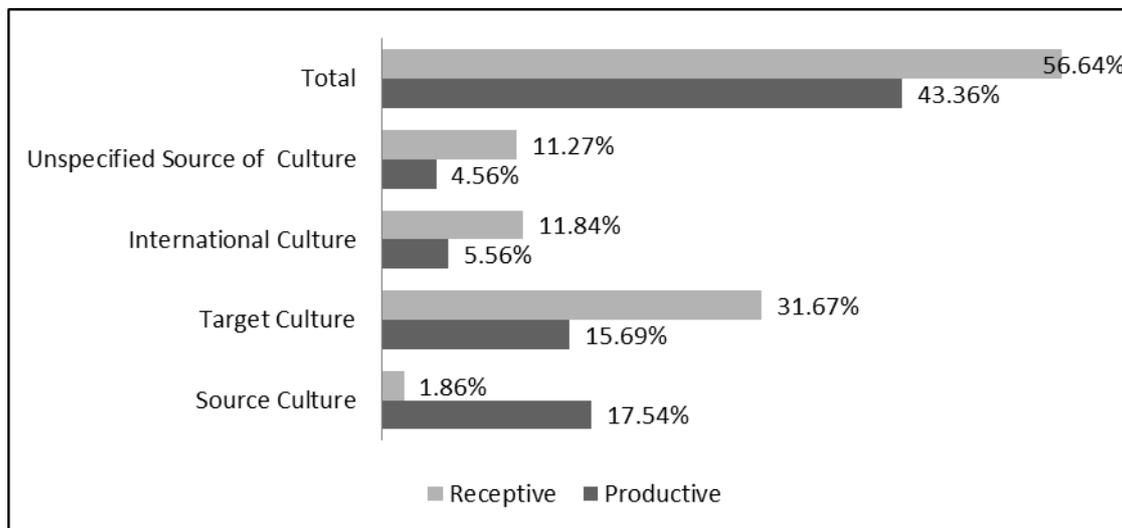


Figure 2. Distribution of Sources of Culture in Receptive Skills and Productive Skills in Access English Textbooks

As revealed in Figure 2, more than half of the units analyzed with cultural presentation in *Access English Textbooks* were devoted to receptive skills (56.64%) and less than half to productive skills (43.36%). In terms of the distribution of sources of culture in the skills of language learning, the target culture was presented the most in receptive skills (31.67%) followed by source culture that occurred more frequently in productive skills (17.54%). Moreover, it is interesting to point out that the source culture was presented the lowest in the receptive skills (1.86%), while the international culture (11.84%) and unspecified source of culture (11.27%) were presented almost at equal proportion next to target culture in receptive skills. In short, of all the total units analyzed, the receptive skills incline to endorse the learning of the target culture more than the international culture and source culture, while the productive skills tend to facilitate the learning of source culture more than the target culture and international culture.

Based on the finding above, it is clear that *Access English Textbooks* were dominated by receptive skills that promote the learning of the target culture or the culture of Americans or the British while the productive skills were dominated by the source culture or the Thai culture. Perhaps the main reason that target culture was presented the most in the receptive skills is that target culture is the culture that Thai students are not familiar with. For example, page 95 of *Access English Textbook 3* presented different idioms and sayings about food in English native culture (e.g. too many cooks spoil the broth; don't cry over the spoiled milk; and as cool as cucumber). By learning these idioms, Thai students may receive not only knowledge of the target language but also cultural knowledge of the English speaking nationals so they may be prepared or acculturated when communicating with them (Brown, 2001; Byram, 1997; Harmer, 2007). On the other hand, Thai culture was presented in the productive skills because it is the culture that Thai students have naturally acquired and they only need to reflect or share it (Byram, 1997, McKay, 2002) to someone whom they speak or write to cross-culturally. For example, on page 47 of *Access English Textbook 2* after students learn about different superstitious beliefs in Britain they were tasked to write a short article about their own Thai superstitious belief. In Britain, it is very bad luck to break a mirror because it represents our soul. Therefore, when we break a mirror, we break our soul. While in Thailand, it is believed that a ghost would take the life of a baby if you call him or her lovely and if a pregnant woman goes to a funeral, her baby will be followed by the spirit of a dead person. Thus, learning the source culture or Thai culture through productive skills is good for helping Thai students to be aware of their own culture, reflect on it, as well as rehearse it while communicating or expressing it by means of speaking or writing.

4. Conclusion

This study analyzed the presentation of the four sources of culture in a series of *Access English Textbooks*, namely source culture, target culture, international culture, and unspecified source of culture as well as the presentation of sources of culture in the receptive skills and productive skills. Based on the results of the analysis, it is evident that the target culture was dominantly presented in *Access English Textbooks*. Traditionally, it is believed that promoting target culture in English language learning can be motivating because of the popularity

of the western culture such as films, fashions, music, and more. However, the results this study can be probably interpreted that the series of *Access English Textbooks* is culturally biased to native English speakers' culture and to some degree it is undermining the Thai or local culture and that of other foreign countries. It can also be viewed as a means of endorsing the culture of the native English speakers so they can perpetuate their power and influence in Thailand especially in teaching both language and culture in English classroom and creating advantage of commercialized English materials. Therefore, it can be said that the spread of English into every aspect of our society has laid the way for superpower countries such as America and Britain to advance their political and economic interest in developing countries for their advantage. Consequently, given the status of English as an international language and the aim of learning it is not only to communicate with native English speakers, Thai learners should not be mostly gaining knowledge of the target culture or the culture of the British or Americans, but also to a wider range of cultural information of both local and international cultures so their worldview is widened and not subjugated by the Anglophone cultures, and they become more prepared speakers of English in any context of international communicative opportunities.

Furthermore, as revealed by the result of this study that although there was a slight difference in proportion of skills in language presented in a series of *Access English Textbooks*, evidently receptive skills accounted for a larger proportion of the units analyzed than the productive skills. It can be said that a series of *Access English Textbooks* gave a higher priority to the receptive skills than to the productive skills for Thai students in a lower secondary level (Matayumsuka 1-3). This supports theoretical ideas that the growing amount of both language and cultural information available in English which Thai students are not accustomed to. In addition, it makes sense that *Access English Textbooks* introduced the learning of receptive skills more than the productive skills to Thai learners so they can early improve their comprehension skills or build their knowledge about language and culture and be early prepared for any international communication encounters. However, it is should be pointed out that the dominant presentation of target culture or the culture of America or Britain in receptive skills more than international culture or that of other foreign countries can be considered that *Access English Textbooks* aim not only to develop the receptive skills of Thai students, but also to some degree transmit cultural information or lessons of westernization by limiting on what students can receive and decode from the listening and reading tasks of receptive skills. Therefore, it is suggested that textbooks integrate a wider reference to cultural information beyond native English countries to widen the worldview of Thai students and increase their knowledge of the cultural diversity in the world.

5. Recommendation for Further Studies

It might be worth examining the attitude of teachers and students in Thailand towards the presentation of sources of culture: source culture, target culture, and international culture in the English textbooks and their perception of the presentation of sources of cultures in the skills of language learning. The result may provide knowledge and guidelines for authors and publishers to consider what source of culture or whose culture should be included in designing textbooks to help Thai students be more competent in using English in various context as well as to avoid marginalization of local and others' culture in connection to teaching English as an international language.

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Appendix

A sample analysis of the presentation of sources of culture (Source: *Access 1*, 2012, p. 82)

UNIT 8c It was fantastic!

Reading

1 Close your eyes and listen to the music. Picture a scene. Where are you? What are you doing? Who else is with you? What can you see, smell, feel?

2 Read the text. How did each person celebrate their birthday?

3 Label the pictures with words from the text.

Listening

4 Bob and Ann are talking about a birthday party. Listen and fill in the missing words.

Date: 0) ► Friday 22nd January
 Time: 1)
 Number of people: 2)
 Food/Drinks:
 3 large pizzas
 10 burgers
 1 packet of chocolate 3)
 2 4) of lemonade
 Activities: party 5)
 dancing

Speaking

5 Think of your birthday last year. Answer the questions.

1 How did you celebrate your birthday last year?
 2 What did you do?
 3 What did you eat?
 4 Did you enjoy it?

Writing (an article)

6 Portfolio: Use your answers from Ex. 5 to write a short article about your birthday last year (40-60 words).

Britain

In Britain, we usually have a party to celebrate our birthdays. My birthday party last year was great. My friends brought me gifts. We decorated the house with balloons. My mum made me a birthday cake. We had a table full of food with crisps, sandwiches, small cakes, chocolate biscuits, ice cream and sausages on sticks. I just love them! I played party games with my friends. It was fantastic.
 Jane (13)

China

Birthday celebrations are very special in China. I had a great time on my birthday. All my friends and relatives came to our house to celebrate. We ate very long noodles. They mean we will have a long life. They were in the soup and we tried not to cut them because it's unlucky! We also ate red eggs. Red is a special colour for us. We believe it brings good luck. We decorated the house with red paper. I also got money in red envelopes. We all had a lot of fun.
 Lee (12)

Annotations:

- Students read (receptive skill) two passages about birthday celebrations. The first passage is about the British celebrating birthdays by eating crisps, sandwiches, and small cakes. Since it talks about the British culture, this is categorized as target culture. The second one is about the Chinese celebrating birthdays by eating long noodle to have long life. Since it talks about the Chinese culture, this is categorized as international culture.
- Students listen (receptive skill) to Bob and Ann talking about their birthday party. Since there is no source of reference presented in this unit, this is categorized as unspecified source of culture.
- Students write (productive skill) a short story about their own birthday experience. Since they write an article based on their own culture in Thailand, this is categorized as source culture.
- Students speak (productive skill) about their birthday experience answering the guidelines questions. Since they speak based on his or her own culture in Thailand, this is categorized as source culture.

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