# Analyzing the Cultural Elements in EFL Textbooks: Categories and Ways of Representation

## By

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## Abstract

It has long been assumed that language and culture are interrelated: language echoes cultural values, norms of behaviour, attitudes and many other features of a particular sociocultural community. An important aspect of learning/ teaching a language is learning/ teaching its culture. The main goal of current foreign language education is to develop students into interculturally competent citizens and make them aware of various differences which lie between their native culture and the target one. As textbooks incorporate the cultural information, special attention should be paid to their cultural content. Cultural content can be reflected through textual material, exercises, illustrations which should aim at fostering knowledge of essential elements of foreign language (FL) culture and bring to their comparison with the essential elements of the native culture. This article compares the cultural contents of four English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks which are employed in the language programs of Kazakhstani higher school in terms of their inclusion of various categories of cultural elements and the ways of representing such elements. The purpose of the study is to identify in what way the EFL textbooks incorporate cultural elements and how the latter are represented in them which might influence, to a greater extent, language students' understanding of the studied culture. Content analysis methodology has been used to determine qualitative data. The obtained data suggest that in all the four EFL textbooks elements describing material (surface) culture prevail, leaving aside elements pertaining to the 'axiological' (deep) culture which deals with values, norms, and attitudes. It was also found that 'a display' constitutes the most loaded category of representing cultural elements in the EFL textbooks which can be explained by the fact that this type of representation makes the target language (TL) cultural elements more concrete and comprehensible.

**Key words:** culture, EFL textbooks, cultural elements, intercultural competence, teaching/learning

# 1. Introduction

Globalization and internationalization have made it necessary to acquire intercultural knowledge and competence to be able to function in new cultures which are often different from one's own. This requires an answer in the FL classroom. Given the intercultural dimension of the globalized world, it has become essential in the language pedagogy to ensure the development of students' knowledge of the TL community as well as their skills to communicate appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Language and culture are interrelated, and teaching a language without culture may result in turning students into what Bennett (1993) calls "fluent fools". A fluent fool is someone who speaks a language well but who struggles to realize an adequate communication outside the context of the classroom, as he/she does not understand the social and cultural content of the language. As underscored by Gómez Rodriguez (2015a): "The necessity to learn a foreign language goes far beyond learning grammar forms veiled in communicative functions" (p.168).

In other words, the new perspective of the FL education in the era of communication with intercultural facet has affected both the teaching and the learning processes and also their indispensable part –textbooks. Culture cannot be ignored in the elaboration of FL textbooks which can be thought as one of the most essential tools employed in the FL setting being disadvantaged in regards to intercultural input (Toprak & Aksoyalp, 2014).

As the main carriers of cultural information in the FL context textbooks are expected to promote the means to address the studied foreign culture and foster student intercultural competence, which is defined as the quality of an individual to reach the level of a mediator of cultures without losing one's own identity (Galskova et al., 2017).

In the light of the previous assertions, this article sets out to examine the cultural content of the EFL textbooks employed in the FL context of Kazakhstani higher school. The analysis explores categories of cultural elements these textbooks contain and the ways how these cultural elements are represented in them. The analysis was supported by theoretical views related to the definition of culture, the distinction between the categories of cultural elements and the ways of their representation in EFL textbooks as well as various researches devoted to the exploration of the cultural component in EFL textbooks. Thus, the present study has a focus on the number and the extent of the TL cultural elements and their representations in the EFL textbooks.

# 2. Theoretical background

## 2.1 What is culture?

Culture is a complex concept to define (Choudhury, 2013), and that can be due to its multiple meanings shifting from arts and literature to the way of life and norms of behaviour (Mahmoud, 2015). Kramsch (1998) describes culture as a "membership in a discourse community that shares a common space and history and common imaginings" (p. 10). Spencer-Oatey (2008) outlines culture as a set of assumptions, values, beliefs, policies, procedures that are recognized by a sociocultural community and that influence behaviours of its members. Gonen&Saglan (2012) describes culture as being crucial to become a globalized citizen revealing that "learning a language without culture is a recipe for becoming a fluent fool" (p.26). Mahmoud (2015) defines culture as "knowledge, art, traditions, history, religion, customs, norms and values" (p. 66). As can be inferred from these definitions, culture is a complex concept whose multifaceted nature makes it difficult to arrive at an all-encompassing definition.

Nonetheless, researchers lean on the argument that some distinctive features of culture can be distinguished. For instance, culture is "largely automatic" which means that once learned it turns into automatic and subconscious (Hofstede,1991; Lund, 2006). The understanding that culture can be learned/ taught implies greater tolerance for cultural differences, which lays the basis nowadays for effective intercultural communication. Second, as underlined by Ferraro (1998), since we learn our own culture, it is possible to learn how to function in other cultures and acquire skills of communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Culture is passed down from one generation to another and differs across time, place, and generation. Thus, Gómez Rodríguez (2015a) underscores that culture is a dynamic phenomenon which means that it transforms over time, and people can affect and change it under cultural circumstances related to social or political injustice, violation of human rights, etc. Furthermore, culture is not only homogeneous, but heterogeneous, since within a particular community there are also subcultures with their own values and beliefs that differ from the dominant group. Another feature of culture which is crucial for language pedagogy is the notion that it involves surface and deep layers contrasted by easily observable and invisible elements. Visible elements which represent a country through the names of tourist places, geographical sites, famous people, food, national symbols constitute the most part of the FL curriculum and FL textbooks leaving aside controversial issues of deep culture like prejudice, beliefs, views of life.  This can result in the formation of student superficial vision of the TL culture and in the emerging of hazardous stereotypes based on exaggeration and prejudgment. The knowledge of only visible elements and  the ignoring of underlying values, attitudes, beliefs making the core of the deep culture may cause misunderstandings and confusion in situations of intercultural communication.

## 2.2 Culture and language: relationship

The relationship between language and culture has been identified as intricate, interdependent and inextricable (Mitchell & Myles, 2004; Choudhury, M., 2013). In research literature there can be found a number of metaphors employed to describe the link between these two concepts. For instance, language has been considered to be "the mirror of culture" since language reflects culture (Toprak & Aksoyalp, 2015, p. 94).

Jiang (2000) observes that the relationship between language and culture can be conveyed through the metaphor – "the iceberg".  In this sense, language and a small part of culture lie on the surface, and the greater part, which is hidden and not readily seen, make the submerged aspects of culture having very often a multifaceted nature.  Another metaphor used by Jiang (2000) in describing the link between language and culture is that of "the living organism", in which language is flesh, and culture is blood. "Without culture, language would be dead; without language, culture would have no shape" (Jiang, 2000, p. 328).

One more metaphor reveals language as "the baggage" of cultural knowledge, and language in this case is seen as "a form of culture that embodies historically the national life in all its diversity and dialectical contradictions" (Gerfanova&Mikhailova, 2018, p.219). The Conception of Modern Foreign Language Education of Kazakhstan (2006), which is an important methodological document defining the levels, the content and the main strategies of foreign language education of the Republic, stresses the relationship between the two concepts by stating that language reflects sociocultural reality of a particular community. Language in its close connection to culture lays the basis for international and intercultural understanding.

Culture and language are so interconnected that the effective language use, both in one's mother tongue and the one being studied, is considered to be impossible without the underlying cultural knowledge. As Dema (2012) observes, since language emerges from social interactions, language learners can truly learn the language when acquiring knowledge about its culture. Thus, learning/ teaching about the culture of the target language has become one of the core objectives in the FL education. The following section will concentrate on the links between culture and foreign language teaching.

## 2.3 Culture and Foreign Language Teaching

The rise of communicative approach to teaching foreign languages since 1980s has given way to a shift of focus from traditional grammar-translation method to a communicative understanding of language teaching. Grammar-translation method ignored cultural component and treated it as inferior to the mastery of grammatical, lexical, and phonological accuracy. The method supplied students with good knowledge of grammar and ability to translate sentences or even long texts, but was not directed to developing communication skills. In the new era of intercultural communication foreign language proficiency has started to be associated not only with the skills to act in linguistically, sociolinguistically and pragmatically appropriate ways; more important has become the knowledge of the sociocultural rules which are specific for a foreign language community and the ability "to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures" (Meyer, 1991, p.138). Thus, the teaching of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has been recognized as a priority in educational outcomes.

Byram (1997) refers the term of intercultural communicative competence to "the ability to decentre and take up the other's perspective on their own culture, anticipating and where possible, resolving dysfunctions in communication and behavior" (p.42). The concept is also viewed upon as "ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, [the] ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individualities" (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002, p. 10).

The current foreign language pedagogy which focuses on fostering ICC acknowledges the necessity to help language learners to overcome ethnocentrism, or the experience of one's own culture as "central to reality" (Bennet, 1993) and recognize other cultures. This aim sets the teaching process on the path of developing language learners' empathy and cultural awareness linked to exploring not only the "other" new culture but the native one as well.

## ICC consists of three components:
1. Knowledge of culture which includes both elements of its surface and deep layers;
2. Skills of interpreting and relating, through which an individual is able to interpret, explain, and relate cultural meanings of the TL culture to his/her own culture;
3. Attitudes of openness and readiness which will allow an individual to develop a more tolerant and positive view on those cultural meanings and practices which are unknown for him/her and different from those of his/her native culture.

The three components of ICC, as Byram (1997) observes, help learners to build critical cultural awareness through which they can examine and evaluate similarities and differences lying between the TL culture and the native one. Gómez Rodríguez (2015b) asserts that this model of ICC "can endow learners with the ability to analyze the complex and heterogeneous elements of deep culture such as collective and individual variations of attitudes to life, ideologies, and values" (p.48).

Thus, FL classroom and FL textbooks should help learners become aware of significant cultural elements, beliefs and assumptions of the TL community, understand what is considered acceptable and what is treated as unacceptable by native speakers in various social situations.

The fact that the context of EFL teaching in Kazakhstan is rather text-book driven, the EFL textbooks employed in the language programs of the Republic come under the scrutiny. The next section will consider culture and FL textbooks.

### 2.3 Culture in FL textbooks

FL textbook has passed a long development path. Constantly influenced by the methodological directions of FL education, which dominate at one stage or another, and determine its main goal and objectives, it has undergone significant changes in relation to its content and basic functions.

A retrospective analysis of FL textbook indicates that until the 1960-s, it was focused on the formation of foreign language knowledge. The period from the 1960-s to the 1970-s is characterized by the beginning of active work on the creation of textbooks of the "new generation", which concentrated on helping learners master a foreign language as a means of oral and written communication. The next stage dating from the beginning of the 1970-s until the end of the 1980-s, FL textbooks started to have a communicative-oriented nature and were aimed at the formation of foreign language skills in various types of speech activity. Communicatively-oriented textbooks also set out to familiarize students with the TL culture, while information about TL culture was concentrated, to a greater extent, around the facts of geography. Since the beginning of the 1990-s, due to the shift of FL education to intercultural communication, FL textbooks began to focus on the formation of the ability to use the target language in situations of indirect and direct communication at the intercultural level. The abovementioned historical stages of FL textbook are presented in table 1.

**Table 1.** *History of FL textbook.*

| Period | General characteristics |
|---|---|
| until the 1960-s | The FL textbook was oriented to a foreign language as a system and focused on the development of FL knowledge |
| early 1960-s till 1970-s | The FL textbook aimed at developing learners' mastery of a foreign language as a means of oral and written communication |
| the beginning of the 1970-s till the end of the 1980-s | The FL textbook concentrated on the development of learners' skills in various types of speech activity and provided them with cultural information limited to geography |
| the beginning of the 1990-s till present | The FL textbook is oriented to language as a means of intercultural communication and is aimed at developing student cultural awareness, skills of communication in intercultural settings, fostering attitudes of curiosity, readiness and openness to new cultures |

Thus, the new objective of current FL education, that is the developing of student ICC, necessitates to adjunct knowledge of culture to the curriculum, instructional methods and techniques, as well as the materials employed in the FL classroom. Culture is a significant

dimension of intercultural competence, and consequently, special attention should be paid to the cultural component in the FL context.

A plethora of researches are dedicated to the investigation of the cultural component in FL textbooks, and many of them highlight their significance. For instance, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) refer to the textbook as a teacher, a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority being reliable, valid and compiled by experts. Furthermore, the textbook can be a de-skiller in the sense that teachers become wholly dependent on it, and an ideology as it reflects a particular cultural system which indirectly constructs student views of the TL culture.

Toprak and Aksoyalp (2014) claim that FL textbooks provide language learners with a route into the target language learning. The same viewpoint is expressed by Böcü & Razı (Böcü & Razı, 2016 ) who underline that EFL textbooks have become "a significant source in presenting cultural information to FL learners systematically, especially when it is not possible to provide them with real-life environments" (p. 222). Lund (2006) points out that "textbooks can provide valuable input when it comes to exposing students to new cultural expressions and to the diversity of culture" (p.47).

Following the abovementioned observations, the classroom seems to be the only place for language learners to experience encounters with the TL culture, and the textbook which is used plays a very significant role in exposing students to new cultural elements and phenomena. On this account, Ihm (1996) observes that textbooks create cultural contacts for learners and provide them with authentic material, include examples how intercultural issues can be addressed.

The issue of investigating the cultural component in FL textbooks is one of the demanding problems of current FL education. Researchers dedicate their attention to various aspects of incorporation of culture in FL textbooks. For instance, Toprak and Aksoyalp (2014) examined 17 English coursebooks written by international publishers to explore the extent and number of cultural representations presented in them and trace the distribution of these cultural representations across different English-speaking countries. Gómez Rodríguez (2015a) analyzed topics in EFL textbooks classifying them into two categories: surface culture and deep culture. Ulum and Bada (2016) attempted to identify to what extent EFL course books included inner/ outer cultural elements. Abbasian and Biria (2017) analyzed EFL textbooks to determine how much national, international and target culturally familiar content was incorporated in them. A common finding can be traced in the mentioned researches: the analyzed textbooks were found to be insufficient in relation to the incorporation of the cultural component.

Since textbooks have adopted a significant role in fostering language learners' cultural knowledge and developing ICC, a careful examination should be given to their cultural content. The present study sets out to explore the number of target cultural elements, their categories and ways of representation in the EFL textbooks employed in the FL classroom of Kazakhstan at a university level. It is hoped that the findings would provide understanding how to help learners become aware of cultural differences existing in the current globalized world, particularly in a textbook-driven context.

# 3. English Textbook Analysis

## *3.1 Criteria for the Selection of Textbooks*

Many researchers underline the necessity to analyze textbooks used in the FL classroom. For instance, Gómez Rodríguez (2010) claims that examination of textbooks helps

teachers realize to what extent they can rely on them in their teaching practice. Rahmawati (2018) underscores that such analysis is essential in the FL context as it can ensure effective attainment of teaching objectives, and at the same time "it can be economically viable to teachers and students" (p.10). Similarly, Hanifa (2018) states that textbook analysis is essential to be conducted in attempt to understand its content, its strengths and weaknesses, which could help adapt the used textbook to the course aims, students' needs and teachers' beliefs.

The analysis of the textbook provides a better understanding of its suitability for a particular teaching context, whether it meets the requirements of the program as well as whether it fits methods the teacher uses to attain the teaching objectives.

The present study analyzes four EFL textbooks employed in higher school of Kazakhstan. The analysis aims at identifying the number of cultural elements incorporated in them, their categories and ways of representation. Three EFL textbooks have been published by internationally popular publishers. The remaining one is compiled by Kazakhstani authors. It should be noted here that EFL textbooks by Kazakhstani authors are mainly designed for learners of secondary school level. As for the textbooks for the university level, their number is much limited. The visible advantage of the EFL textbook compiled by the Kazakhstani authors lies in the fact that it contains sufficient material about student native culture which is compared and contrasted to the TL culture. As underscored by Alsaif (2016), students need to see their native culture in FL textbooks, as this enables them "to talk and elaborate about their own culture (something most native English teachers like to hear about), we provide room and equal opportunities for all parties inside classrooms to participate and talk about their own culture whether it is Eastern or Western culture" (p.227).

The textbooks selected for analysis are used in the FL program of Kazakhstani higher school to train future teachers of English. All the textbooks are compiled for intermediate level students and are based on communicative approach to language teaching.

Textbook 1 consists of twelve units and includes such sections as Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing. Apart from these sections, each unit contains a special section presenting brief information about various aspects of TL culture which can serve a good basis for further speaking and discussing as well as for comparing aspects of new culture with students' native one.

Textbook 2 includes twelve units and contains sections aiming at developing student writing, speaking, reading and listening skills, as well as the pronunciation skills and the skills of vocabulary usage. Besides, each unit comprises the Useful phrases and Vocabulary Extra sections which provide students with the opportunity to practise functional language in various communicative situations.

Textbook 3 contains seven units which have such sections as Grammar, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Writing, Practical English, Revise and Check. The Practical English section contains speaking clichés and allows students to practise them.

Textbook 4 has a similar structure consisting of 11 units and including Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening sections. The authors of the textbook pay a special attention to idiomatic expressions in the target language presenting them in a separate section which aims at encouraging students to practise such units in their speaking and writing activities.

The names of the textbooks are not revealed as the study does not aim at creating prejudices against them but rather at encouraging EFL teachers to analyze EFL textbooks they employ and reflect on whether the cultural component incorporated in them is sufficient to enhance language learners' cultural awareness and foster their intercultural communicative competence.

### 3.2 Research Questions

This study focuses on the three categories of cultural elements - those describing 1) material culture (or surface culture), 2) spiritual culture (deep culture), 3) and speech behavior of native speakers – contained in the analyzed EFL textbooks.

As a secondary objective it will consider what ways of representations of cultural elements are used in these textbooks. With these aims we have established the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the number and the categories of cultural elements included in the EFL textbooks?

RQ 2: Which of the ways of representing cultural elements prevail in the EFL textbooks?

These two questions will give information regarding two key aspects:  firstly, we will be able to determine what category of cultural elements is prevailing; secondly, the ways of representing cultural elements can show the type of learning implemented and the degree of student ability to understand the TL culture.

### 3.3 Analysis Procedure

The data were analyzed both quantitively and qualitatively.

A quantitative content analysis was used to investigate the number of cultural elements presented in the EFL textbooks as well as the ways of their representation. This type of analysis includes examining, interpreting and verifying the contents of written data. Berelson (1952) conceives quantitative content analysis as "a research technique for the systematic, objective, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p. 18). Cohen et al. (2007) identify essential stages in conducting a quantitative content analysis: 1) breaking down text into units of analysis; 2) conducting a statistical analysis of the units; 3) presenting the obtained statistical data in an economic way.

The first stage of EFL textbook analysis in the context of the present study presupposed a careful examination of the textual component contained in them. The analysis excluded grammar sections and vocabulary lists.

The next stage of the analysis identified ways of representation of the selected cultural elements.

## 4. Findings

In this section, the results of the study have been presented in tables and figures with further interpretation of the data presented in them.

### 4.1 Cultural elements and their categories in EFL textbooks

There was employed a systematic method for identifying types of cultural elements that was developed by prominent Kazakhstani researcher Akhmetzhanova (2017). The researcher elaborated a classification of linguocultural elements consisting of three types:

a) Cultural elements describing material culture. Cultural elements belonging to this group bear an explicit nature and comprise the surface level of culture. Examples of surface cultural elements include names of national dishes, specific holidays, music instruments, types of clothing, etc. This group of cultural elements accumulates fixed and static information, and the knowledge of such is not sufficient for learners to better understand the specificity of the TL culture.

b) Axiological cultural elements relating to the deep layer of culture and embodying unconscious values, beliefs, and attitudes of native speakers.  This type of cultural elements is the most difficult for learners to identify and understand, because they are invisible and very often have a multifaceted nature.

3) Cultural elements relating to speech behaviour of native speakers. This type of cultural elements embodies specifics of communicative culture of the TL community and includes speech clichés, forms of address, etc. which reflect the characteristics of the speech behavior of native speakers in everyday communication.

The first research question was concerned with the number and the category of cultural elements which the analyzed EFL textbooks include. The analysis showed that the textbooks included not many cultural elements of the abovementioned types.

Figure 1 demonstrates the results related to the number of a certain category of cultural elements in the EFL textbooks.
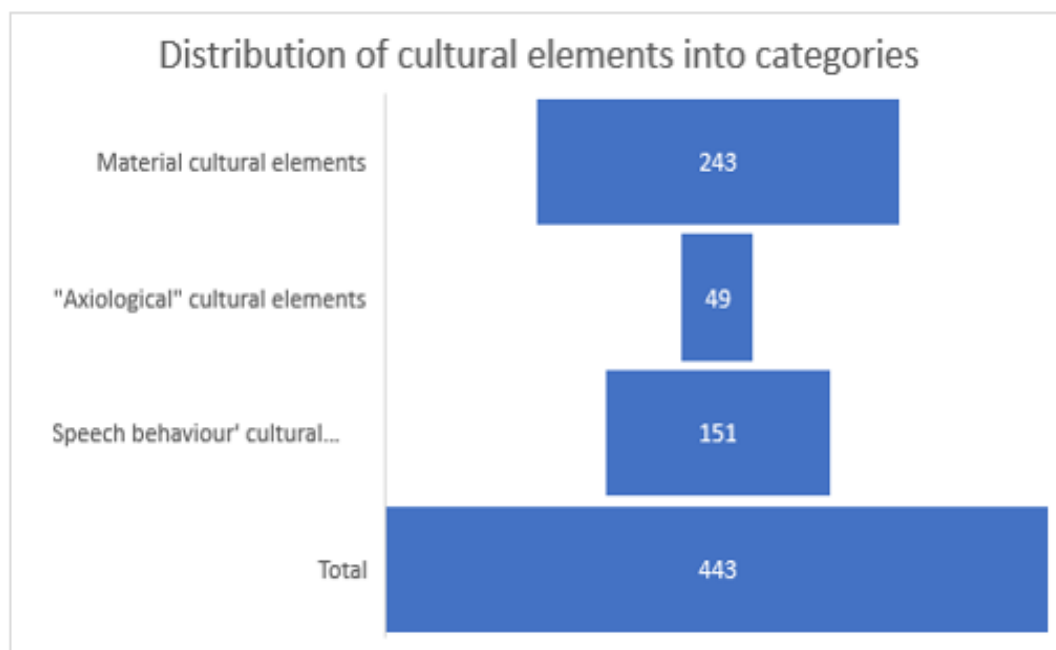


**Figure 1.** *Results showing the distribution of cultural elements into categories*

Table 2 gives a more detailed account of distribution of cultural elements into categories within the EFL textbooks selected for the analysis.

**Table 2.** *Categories of cultural elements in the textbooks.*

| | Total number of cultural elements in a textbook | Cultural elements describing material culture | Axiological cultural elements | Cultural elements relating to speech behavior of native speakers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Textbook 1 | 105 | 49 | 18 | 38 |
| Textbook 2 | 86 | 37 | 10 | 39 |
| Textbook 3 | 104 | 61 | 9 | 34 |
| Textbook 4 | 148 | 96 | 12 | 40 |

As Table 1 suggests the most loaded category holding 243 cultural elements was the one describing material TL culture. This group of cultural elements prevails separately in all the four EFL textbooks. The category of "material" cultural elements is followed by a group of cultural elements relating to speech behavior of native speaker which included 151 elements. And the least frequent category made up of only 49 elements refers to the group of "axiological" cultural elements, i.e. those belonging to the deep culture.

Based on the obtained results of this part of analysis, a general conclusion can be drawn.

The prevailing number of cultural elements lies within the category of "material" cultural elements which means that all the four EFL textbooks concentrate to a largest extent on the material, or surface, level culture. The smallest category is presented by the "axiological" cultural elements reflecting beliefs, attitudes, values of the TL community and constituting the deep culture. Consequently, it may result in the emerging of prejudgment and exaggeration in relation to representatives of the TL culture which hinder accepting "the otherness" and diversity.

Still, the analyzed textbooks can be seen as a valuable source of information depicting the specificities of communicative behavior of a TL community. Through learning such elements language learners come to the understanding that communicative behavior across culture differs and that to be efficient in intercultural communication one should be able to recognize these differences.

### 4.2 Representation of cultural elements in EFL textbooks

Similar to the methods employed in Chapelle (2009), ways of representing cultural elements selected form the analyzed EFL textbooks were defined and placed under different categories:

a)   Simple mention
b)   Depiction
c)   Display
d)   Simple mention + display
e)   Depiction + display.

The last two categories were identified and added in the process of analysis.
The ways of representation of cultural elements are described below in Table 3:

**Table 3.** *Ways of representation of cultural elements in FL textbooks.*

| Ways of representation | Description |
|---|---|
| Simple mention | A cultural element represents the name of a person, thing or place without any further information about its nature |
| Depiction | A cultural element is represented through description with information about its nature |
| Display | A cultural element is represented through a visual input (a picture, photo, map, etc.) showing anything related to the TL culture |
| Simple mention+ display | A cultural element is represented through a combination of simple mention and display, when the name of a person, thing, place, etc. is accompanied by a visual input. |
| Depiction + display | A cultural element is represented through a combination of depiction and display, when its description is accompanied by a visual input. |

The second research question sought to explore ways of representation of cultural elements included in the EFL textbooks. Cultural elements reflecting speech behavior of TL community were excluded from this analysis. Figure 2 and Table 2 present the results related to the proportion of cultural elements in relation to their representation in the analyzed textbooks.
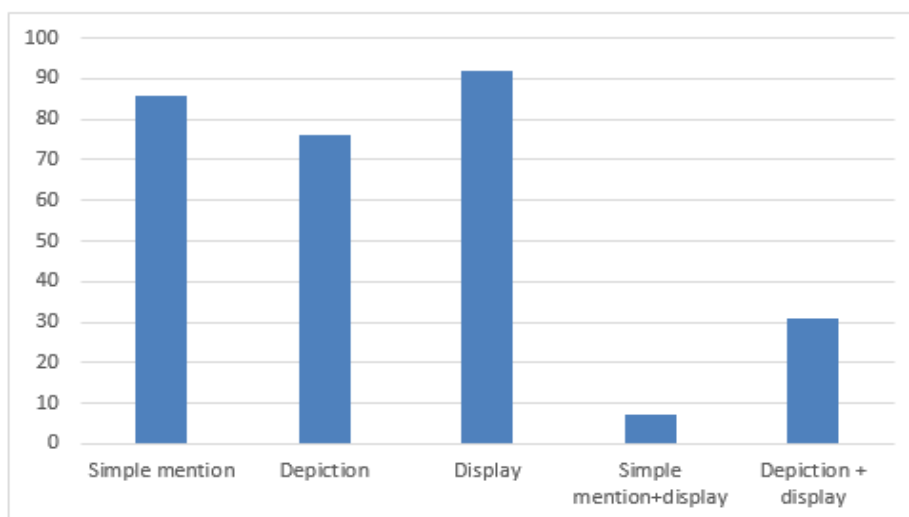


**Figure 2.** *Results showing the distribution of "material" (surface layer) and "axiological" (deep layer) cultural elements into ways of their representation.*

**Table 2.** *Ways of representation of cultural elements within the EFL textbooks.*

| Ways of representation | Textbook 1 | Textbook 2 | Textbook 3 | Textbook 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Simple mention | 24 | 23 | 19 | 20 |
| Depiction | 25 | 15 | 17 | 19 |
| Display | 26 | 31 | 11 | 24 |
| Simple mention+ display | 3 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Depiction + display | 19 | 9 | 3 | 0 |

The findings indicated that cultural elements represented in the EFL textbooks by way of 'display' constituted the largest group with 92 elements. This category was followed by 'a simple mention' comprising 86 elements.  The third group numbering 76 cultural elements was made by 'a depiction'. The next group comprising 31 cultural elements was represented by the combined way of depiction and display.  And 7 cultural elements represented by one of the combined ways – 'simple mention and display' made up the smallest group.

Thus, the obtained results of this part of the analysis show that 'a display' was the most loaded category in the representation of cultural elements contained in the EFL textbooks. This can be linked with the fact that 'displays' provide learners with an opportunity to get exposed to TL culture through various types of visual material. For instance, a learner can see all the famous sights of London staying in the classroom. Furthermore, the frequent use of 'displays' may be explained by the fact that visual representation of cultural information can make learning TL culture more comprehensible and encouraging, since visuals help language learners memorize cultural elements in a more effective way.

'A simple mention' made the second, most frequently used, way of representation of cultural elements. The reason for this is seen in the fact that 'a simple mention' might be the easiest way to motivate students to get involved in the learning of TL culture. Still, it cannot be considered the most efficient way of depicting TL culture, as 'a simple mention' does not give any explanation to a particular cultural object or phenomenon, and students might simply leave it behind without further exploration into its nature.

The third frequent category was made by 'depiction' which gives information about the nature of cultural elements and their use. In regards to the combined ways of representing cultural elements these are the least frequently referred to by the authors of the textbooks.

# 6. Limitation of the study

This small-scale study with four EFL textbooks taken as samples does not aim at generalizing its findings. The scope of analysis is confined to the written textual component of the textbooks and does not consider non-textual one - audio texts and activities - which can be further separately studied.

# 7. Conclusions and implications

Teaching culture has become an essential part of language teaching. With the advent of intercultural approach there has been traced a shift in the teaching paradigm, and consequently, it brought changes to the way how TL culture is presented and transmitted in the FL classroom.

Since the world is becoming a globalized village, it is essential to develop learners' intercultural competence, i.e. knowledge and skills which will help them effectively communicate in intercultural settings. In this respect, textbooks should aim at involving language learners into the study of the TL culture and equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills. At this point, incorporating the cultural component into EFL textbooks can be seen as a sound approach to help language learners become interculturally competent, to enhance their cultural awareness and promote their openness, readiness and curiosity towards the target culture.

The present study aimed at examining the number of cultural elements, their categories and ways of representation in the EFL textbooks employed in the language programs of Kazakhstani higher school.  To these purposes content analysis was conducted on the four ELT textbooks.

The findings with regard to the first objective revealed that the cultural elements are much limited to reflecting 'the surface' culture of the TL community. Intercultural competence presupposes cultural knowledge and cultural awareness, which indicates that students should develop knowledge and awareness of 'deep' culture elements. Lack of such knowledge can result in the development of student biased attitude to the culture being studied. If textbooks are much concentrated on the material culture and contain insufficient number of cultural elements underlying beliefs and assumptions of native speakers, they can lead to the formation of a 'surface' view in regards to the TL culture. In this sense, language learners will not be involved in deeper analytical analysis of the culture being studied. Moreover, in case with training future teachers of English a special attention should be paid to the fostering their in-depth cultural knowledge, as "they will have to be prepared to not only teach language forms, communicative functions, and visible topics of culture, but invisible or deep aspects of culture. In this way, once they become in-service teachers, they will contribute to enhancing other learners' critical thinking and critical ICC, which is becoming a relevant competence in the ongoing process of globalization" (Gómez Rodríguez, 2015b, p. 57).

The findings related to the second research question revealed that 'displays' as a type of representation of cultural elements in the EFL textbooks made the most loaded category. This category was followed by 'a simple mention' and 'a depiction' Though the authors of the analyzed EFL textbooks very seldom refer to the combined ways of representation of target cultural elements, it can be supposed that 'simple mention + display' and 'depiction + display' might be effective in the learning of the TL culture. This can be explained by the fact that visuals make the target culture more concrete and, thus, more comprehensible, and when a cultural element used in the textual material of a textbook is accompanied with a photo, it will be better memorized by students. In this respect, Oates (2010) points out that "Pictures are more perceptually rich than words, and this visual distinctiveness lends them an advantage in memory" (p. 449).

Findings of the present study can have important implications for EFL teachers and designers of textbooks and syllabi. An intercultural curriculum can be seen as the one in which language learners are encouraged to collect facts about TL culture. Textbook analysis would provide language instructors with understanding whether the EFL textbook employed in the FL classroom provides a rich cultural content and to identify whether this cultural content can be considered sufficient for the developing of students' knowledge of TL culture and their skills of communicating effectively on the intercultural level. Teachers, thus, can use other supplemental materials to provide language learners with the necessary cultural and intercultural information.

Further researches can aim at analyzing the cultural content of Teacher's books, audio and video materials in regards to whether they can develop the appropriate level of language learners' knowledge of TL culture and their skills of intercultural communication.

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