

Cultural Contents in English Language Textbooks Locally Published for Secondary Schools in Thai Contexts

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Abstract

The relationship between language and culture are interwoven. Therefore, English learning materials are undeniably associated with cultures. The present study examined the portion of cultural contents presented in English textbooks which were locally published in Thailand in terms of their resource references: home cultures, native cultures (British/American cultures), and international cultures (i.e., Chinese, Japanese, or African cultures). Three English textbooks analyzed were widely used in the Thai upper- secondary school contexts. The study found that those three English textbooks put more emphasis on international cultures and native cultures. Unfortunately, home cultures were rarely found in those textbooks even though it has been highlighted that the familiar cultural contents could enhance the learners' engagements in language learning. In addition, it was found that the cultural contents in sociological and aesthetic senses were dominant in those English textbooks. The results of this study implied that home cultures should gain more emphasis in English learning materials so that Thai learners could be proud of their own cultural heritages, understand other cultural differences, and ultimately learn to have a healthy intercultural competence.

Keywords: Culture in ELT; Intercultural communication; English language textbooks

Introduction

In the realm of foreign language education, many researchers highlighted the reciprocal relationships between foreign language learning and culture. Jiang (2000) depicted a metaphorical concept of communication as swimming; language is a swimming skill, and culture is considered as water. He argued that to swim or to communicate effectively, these three elements must not be separated and well balanced in their degrees. He underlined it in this way: "Without water language, communication would remain to a very limited degree (in very shallow water); without culture, there would be no communication at all." (p. 329).

Kramersch (1993, 2007, and 2009) also emphasized in many of her studies that if a language is seen as social practices, it is necessary to learn a target language culture and use it to help in communication. It's likely that in a foreign language class, learners frequently encounter a different meaning system of some cultural features which are defined in a different concept (Alptekin, 1993). This causes learners to fail to understand or even to achieve it because of their lack of target cultural backgrounds. For example, the English pronoun for a 'dog' is 'he' or 'she,' and this might be found in a general English text. This could cause confusion to some learners who are not familiar with American

cultural contexts in which dogs are seen as friends. In contrast, in some other contexts such as in the Middle East, dogs might be seen as homeless, dangerous or dirty animals (McKay, 2000).

Moran (2001) went thus far to argue that not only target cultural experiences in foreign language classes played significant roles for learners, but also their own cultural knowledge significantly affected learners to engage, participate, exchange, and negotiate their own ideas with others in classes. Kramsch (1993) called this kind of skill as intercultural competence or a third culture. She argued that intercultural competence would help language learners to fully understand, transfer information, and recognize the cultural differences between target culture and their own culture. Not only that, the intercultural competence would help learners deal with communication appropriately with the norms of the contexts.

Given this interwoven relationship between a language and cultures, it is common in English language classes especially using English language textbooks commercially published from English speaking countries that target English cultures are inherently inserted. However, some researchers especially in the field of teaching English as an International Language (EIL) (i.e., Borkhorst- Heng& McKay, 2008; McKay, 2005; Cortazzi& Jin, 2002), raised a concern and question whose and how cultures should be taught in English classes in building intercultural skills without threatening learners' home cultures and identities. Cortazzi & Jin (2002) and Hinkel (1999), therefore, argued that due to movement of globalization which can be found everywhere, the cultural features in English textbooks and materials should reflect the authenticity of global villages so as to build intercultural skills among English learners.

Being mindful of the significance of intercultural competence, the researcher chose three English language textbooks locally published by different well- known publishers in Thailand to be analyzed to examine whether the portions of cultural contents are well balanced. The textbooks were selected because they were widely used by English language teachers. Likewise, Hinkel (1999) pointed the crucial roles of textbooks in language learning and teaching in several ways. A textbook can be a teacher to teach directly about target cultures, or a map to provide overview of cultural elements to be learned. Moreover, English language textbooks might be a resource to provide learning materials or activities to practice English skills. In contrast, English language textbooks might be a de-skinner that could obstruct teachers from creating and designing new ways of learning or it could even be an authority controlling teachers and learners' worldviews towards their own culture and other cultures.

In order to examine to what extent the English language textbooks locally published in Thailand promote intercultural competence, these two research questions help frame the study: (1) What are the portions of cultural features included in the English language textbooks locally published in Thailand based on their resource references?; (2) What dimensions/ senses of cultures are mostly used in those English language textbooks?

The Conceptual Framework

The current research followed the theoretical notions of Cortazzi (2000) to define cultural resources references of cultural features in the English language textbooks analyzed. He divided cultural contents that should be involved in English language learning into three categories: (1) the home cultures of learners that influence their communication; (2) the target cultures of native speakers of English language such as American and British cultures, and (3) international cultures which are covering full range of cultures encountered internationally such as Japanese cultures, Indian cultures, Chinese cultures, or African cultures. In addition, culture-free contents that are not certainly focused on any cultures are excluded in the analysis.

Furthermore, the researcher employed the notions of Adaskou, Britten, and Fahsi (1990) to distinguish dimensions of cultures involved in those English language textbooks. The cultural features including texts, images, or activities were analyzed and defined in these four dimensions: the aesthetic sense, the sociological sense, the semantic sense, and the pragmatic sense.

Adaskou et al. (1990) explained that the aesthetic sense covered the media, cinema, literature which often has been used in language teaching. The sociological sense dealt with the organization in a society, a family, home living, interpersonal relations, material conditions, work and leisure activities, customs, and institutions. The semantic sense focused on perceptions, thought processes, and conceptual systems in a particular way of living, i.e., distinctive culturally ways of food, clothes, or institutions, time and space relations, emotional states, colors, or words. The pragmatic (sociolinguistic sense) sense was such as speech acts, paralinguistic and social skills to use appropriate choices of language, interpersonal relations to conform with the norms of a particular context such as ways of greeting, topics in having small talks, answering a phone call, writing invitation letter, writing complaints or compliments.

Previous related literature

Studies regarding cultural contents analysis on English textbooks have been conducted in the contexts of several countries. For instance, in Iranian contexts, the studies of Cheng and Beigi (2012) and Behnam and Mozaheb (2013) examined the association of Muslim cultures in English textbooks written by Iranian authors and used in Iranian contexts at high school level. The findings of both studies were similar in that the concepts of the English textbooks were inclusively related with Muslim Iranian cultures. To illustrate, Islamic wearing principles were supported in all those textbooks examined, and traditional roles of male and female were also inserted.

Similar to Iranian contexts, Elgar (2011) examined English textbook series used in Bruneian contexts. The English language textbook "Gateway to English" which was published under the cooperation of the Ministry of Education of Bruneian and Macmillan publisher between 2003 and 2005 were analyzed. The researcher revealed that the contents in English language textbooks were exactly designed in Brunei-based life styles such as transport, wildlife, history, and legends. Nonetheless, the researcher argued that other non-Bruneian cultures were overlooked or represented in superficial ways.

Unlikely, the findings of textbook analysis in Turkish contexts revealed the tendency of cultural balance such as in studies of Kirkgoz and Agcam (2011) and Celik and Erbay (2013). Both of their studies investigated sources of cultural contents included in English textbooks published by the Ministry of National Education of Turkey (MoNE). Based on the course book analysis of those studies, the researchers summarized that the series presented a well-balanced view of diverse cultures involving student's home culture, English target cultures, and international cultures.

In Thai educational contexts, there have been few studies which focused on English language textbooks analysis with regard to the cultural features represented. Nomnian (2013) analyzed six English language textbooks namely World Wonder 1 and My World Series 2- 6 used in a Thai secondary school in Kanchanaburi Province. The researcher found that Thai cultural features included five main aspects which were (1) products represented in topics of rice, sepak takraw, and tuk-tuk, (2) practices involved in topics of Thai cooking and eating, and Thai boxing, (3) persons mentioned as Siamese King and Vanessa- Mae, (4) perspectives represented on Thai people, traffic conditions, weather, food, and Thai language, and (5) places such as Phi Phi island, Phuket, Bangkok, Chiangmai. The researchers argued that Thai cultural aspects in English textbooks offered a potential implications in which to bring learners' home culture in encouraging Thai language learners to learn the English language. However, the study didn't mention whether target English cultures and international cultures were included in those textbooks in a well-balanced manner because its focus of the study was only in Thai cultural aspects.

Contrasted with Nomnian (2013), Greil (2004) and Murray (2004) revealed that in English language textbooks used in Thailand, Thai cultural features were not really emphasized. In Greil's study (2004), the researcher revealed that the textbooks analyzed included various cultures to a certain extent which could promote the ideas of cultural diversity and pluralism. However, the Thai cultural features which Thai learners are familiar were not emphasized in those textbooks. Similarly, Murray (2004) argued that based on what was designed in English language textbook published by Oxford University Press made it difficult for Thai language learners to recognize and understand the cultural differences.

Data collection and analysis

The current research follows the theoretical notions of documentary research that is "a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents- both printed and electronic (computer based and Internet- transmitted) material" (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). This systematic procedure includes finding, selecting, appraising, and synthesizing data contained in documents. In the current research, three English language textbooks locally published in Thailand from three commercial publishers were selected to analyze the cultural contents in terms of their resource references and their cultural dimensions/ senses frequently used.

In analyzing the data, the researcher followed the theoretical notions of the content analysis method by "coding or categorizing sentences, statements or phrases, and making links and comparisons" (Basit, 2010, p. 21). In the beginning of the analysis process, notes and headings of cultural resources references in the textbooks were written in the coding

sheets. Later, the listing of cultural features found in the textbooks was analyzed again in terms of their senses or dimensions of cultures according to the notions of Adaskou, et al. (1990).

Results

1. What are the portions of cultural features with regard to their resource references included in the English language textbooks locally published in Thai contexts?

Regarding the current research conceptual framework borrowed from Cortazzi (2000), notions of cultural resource references (home cultures, target language cultures, and international cultures), the culture-free statements in the textbooks which were not focused on any particular cultures were excluded from the analysis. The culture-free statements were such as texts associated with IT, psychology, scientific findings, research findings, etc.

The overall analysis indicated that English target cultures and international cultures were mainly focused in the textbooks, whereas home cultures of Thai language learners were overlooked as shown in Table 1. The analysis could be implied that there were some attempts to promote intercultural understanding through the learning of English target cultures and international cultures. However, all of the three English textbooks which were published in Thailand did not include any single piece of Thai cultural features.

Table 1: Summary of portions of cultural features in the English language textbooks

Book	Home Cultures	Target English Cultures	International Cultures	Culture-free
Upload	0%	27.08%	18.75%	33.33%
New World	0%	17.78%	15.55%	66.67%
Flash on English	0%	25.64%	17.95%	56.41%

The English language textbook called Upload written by Manuel Dos Santos and published in 2018 by Aksorn Charoen Tat Act put emphasis on English target cultures rather than any other cultural references at 27%. International cultures were also emphasized in the textbook at about 19%. However, Thai cultures were not included in the textbooks at all.

Similar to the author of Upload, Manuel Dos Santos also designed an English book called New World (2016) published by Thai Wattana Phanitch collaborated with Mc Graw Hill Education. The analysis revealed that target cultures of English and international cultures were involved in a well-balanced manner. Nonetheless, home or Thai cultures seemed to be ignored.

In Flash on English textbook written by Luke Prodromou & Penelope Prodromou (2013) published by Aempan Publishing, target cultures and international cultures were focused taking the portions of 25% and 18% respectively. Similar to the other two

textbooks mentioned earlier, home/ Thai cultures were not mentioned in the textbook at all.

2. What cultural senses/ dimensions are mostly used in cultural representations in the English language textbooks locally published in Thai contexts?

Focusing on the target English cultures (Table 2), the sociological sense and aesthetic sense were mostly used in the three English language textbooks respectively, whereas semantic and pragmatic sense of cultures were not popular to include in the textbooks.

The sociological sense of cultures presented in the English textbooks was such as leisure and traveling in English speaking countries, independent ways of life of American and European people, and customs or traditions in UK like Tottenham Arts festival and Up Heyy Aa. Moreover, the acknowledged persons of US and Britain were often illustrated: Abraham Lincoln, Shakespeare, or even super stars who played dominant roles in the global society.

Table 2: The Senses of Cultures Used in Target English Culture representations

	Upload	New World	Flash on English
Sociological sense	10 (77%)	4 (50%)	8 (80%)
Aesthetic sense	3 (23%)	3 (38%)	2 (20%)
Semantic sense	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Pragmatic sense	0 (0%)	1 (13%)	0 (0%)

In terms of the aesthetic sense, target English cultures were frequently represented in the fields of entertainment and arts, media, fashion, and literature: Hollywood stars and celebrities' wearing styles and appearances, popular fashion and brands, and life stories of famous writers (i.e., English novelist Sue Townsend and an American author Elizabeth).

Within international culture coverage, the sociological sense was highlighted, and a small portion covered the aesthetic sense of the cultural features (Table 3). In terms of semantic and pragmatic senses in international culture representations, they were not included at all.

Table 3: The Senses of Cultures Used in International Culture representations

	Upload	New World	Flash on English
Aesthetic sense	1 (12%)	1 (14%)	0 (0%)
Sociological sense	8 (89%)	6 (86%)	7 (100%)
Semantic sense	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Pragmatic sense	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The sociological sense of cultures included in the international cultures were mostly focused on society and organizations, leisure and traveling, and life working and careers in the global communities in several country contexts such as Japan, India, and African contexts.

According to the analysis of cultural senses focused in the textbooks, these findings were parallel with what Adaskou, et al. (1990) found. They explained that aesthetic and sociological sense were popular to include in English language textbooks. These two dimensions of cultures were necessary for language learners to foster international understanding, reduce stereotypes and prejudices, and encourage learners to be aware of their own culture and other cultural differences. However, the last two dimensions of culture (semantic and pragmatic sense) were also important, but the textbooks analyzed seemed to overlook them. Adaskou, et al. (1990) highlighted that semantic and pragmatic senses could affect learners' communicative competence so that they know what and how they should behave or what type of talk is appropriate with a particular occasion or context. To conclude, to designate authentic cultural contents in English language class, they should be in the form of a mix of cultural senses.

Discussion and Conclusion

In Thai educational contexts, the scope of cultural features of English language textbooks was identified in Basic Core Curriculum 2008 (BEC) in a foreign language learning area. The Ministry of Education divided foreign language learning objectives into four strands; communication, culture, connection, and community (4 Cs), and they were claimed to designate and prepare students to confront demands of globalization. Focusing on the second strand of culture, in English core curriculum it is specified that Thai learners in upper- secondary school level should be able to understand the relationships between target English language and English native cultures and use them appropriately and pragmatically. Moreover, learners should be able to understand and identify the differences and similarities of English target language and English native cultures with Thai language and cultures so that they can use language suitably.

Given the national English learning outcomes expected, the finding analysis of the textbooks which were published by three well-known commercial publishers and all were certified their qualities by the Ministry of Education seemed to mismatch with the analysis findings. Particularly, in the second strand of culture that expected Thai learners to compare their own cultures with the target English cultures; yet the analysis found that among the three English textbooks, none of Thai cultures were represented. However, the three English textbooks included the target English cultures and international cultures to promote Thai learners' cultural understanding towards other cultural differences. Unfortunately Thai learners' home cultures were ignored in the textbook analyzed. This analysis contrasted with the process of intercultural competence building in language learners. That is to say, to communicate the target English language effectively, language learners should be encouraged not only to learn and appreciate other cultural differences but also to exchange and negotiate their own cultural values with the interlocutors. Similarly, Kramersch (1993) argued that "learners can use the system for their own purposes, to create a culture of the third kind in which they can express their own

meanings without being hostage to the meaning of either their own or the target speech communities” (pp. 13-14).

Based on the textbook analysis, the researcher argued that Thai cultures should be included in English language textbooks. However, EFL teachers should define what the authenticity of Thai cultures is and the diversity among Thai. In other words, Thai cultures should not be associated only with Buddhism, royal family, and ways of life of people in Bangkok (Baker, 2008) but also other cultural minorities who exist in other regions of Thailand. For example, several tribes live in the Northern part of Thailand, arts and literature of people in the Northeast, or cultures of Muslims in three southern border provinces of Thailand. Therefore, Thai learners will be prepared to understand the complexities of *Thainess* and also to promote a tolerance towards other cultural differences.

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