

Antagonism between western and Islamic cultures in Iranian English textbooks

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ABSTRACT: Due to its worldwide usage, the necessity of teaching the English language is undeniable even in Islamic and religious countries like Iran. However, in order to avoid ‘cultural invasion’, the Iranian government decided to ban teaching English in the official curriculum of primary schools and asked a team of experts chosen by the Organization for Educational Research and Planning to design localized English textbooks for students in K12. Thus, in response to curriculum changes and the vital role of textbooks in language education, a plethora of Iranian scholars quantitatively investigated the locally designed textbooks in language education focusing on objectives, content, culture, gender representation, and improvement of students’ language skills. However, the previous literature does not consider the role of visual content in transmitting the target language culture. Thus, in this study, we investigated the cultural references and cultural dimensions of visual content representation in two series of English language textbooks called ‘English for Schools’ (Prospect 1-3 and Vision 1-3). Due to the nature of the study, we applied qualitative visual content analysis for grouping and categorizing data. The analysis of the visual content of the textbooks revealed that the utmost portion of all six books has been devoted to the source culture of Iran, and the focus on aesthetic dimension had been exaggerated. Also, great attention has been paid to the semantic dimension, especially the Islamic ideology. The findings revealed the hegemony of Islamic cultures and ideology in English textbooks which is opposed to the vital role of teaching culture as the fifth language skill in language education.

Key words: Western culture, Islamic ideology, Islamic culture, Iranian English textbook, culture representation.

Antagonismo entre las culturas occidental e islámicas en libros de texto de inglés iraníes

RESUMEN: Debido a su uso en todo el mundo, la necesidad de enseñar la lengua inglesa es innegable incluso en países islámicos y religiosos como Irán. Sin embargo, para evitar la “invasión cultural”, el gobierno iraní decidió prohibir la enseñanza del inglés en el plan de estudios oficial de las escuelas primarias y pidió a un equipo de expertos elegidos por la Organización para la Investigación y la Planificación Educativa que diseñara libros de texto de inglés localizados para los alumnos de K12. Así, en respuesta a los cambios en el plan de estudios y al papel vital de los libros de texto en la enseñanza de idiomas, una gran cantidad de estudiosos iraníes investigaron cuantitativamente los libros de texto diseñados localmente en la enseñanza de idiomas, centrándose en los objetivos, el contenido, la cultura, la representación de género y

la mejora de las habilidades lingüísticas de los estudiantes. Sin embargo, la literatura anterior no tiene en cuenta el papel del contenido visual en la transmisión de la cultura de la lengua meta. Por lo tanto, en este estudio, investigamos las referencias culturales y las dimensiones culturales de la representación del contenido visual en dos series de libros de texto en inglés llamados “Inglés para escuelas” (Prospect 1-3 y Vision 1-3). Debido a la naturaleza del estudio, aplicamos un análisis de contenido visual cualitativo para agrupar y categorizar los datos. El análisis del contenido visual de los libros de texto reveló que la mayor parte de los seis libros se ha dedicado a la cultura de origen de Irán, y se había exagerado el enfoque en la dimensión estética. Además, se ha prestado gran atención a la dimensión semántica, especialmente a la ideología islámica. Los resultados revelaron la hegemonía de las culturas y la ideología islámicas en los libros de texto de inglés, lo que se opone al papel vital de la enseñanza de la cultura como quinta competencia lingüística en la enseñanza de idiomas.

Palabras clave Cultura occidental, ideología islámica, cultura islámica, libro de texto iraní en inglés, representación de la cultura.

1. INTRODUCTION: ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN IRAN

Iran (formerly known as Persia), with an almost 83 million population in 2020, is a multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual country located in Western Asia (also called the Middle East). English (as an International language) and Arabic (the language of the Quran) are the two compulsory foreign languages in the Iranian education system. Political attitudes and foreign affairs issues such as having no official diplomatic relations with the US, English language being referred to as an ‘enemy language’ have resulted in the Ministry of Education officially banning teaching English in the official curriculum of government and non-government primary schools as of 2018 (Strauss, 2018). Furthermore, educational policymakers planned to promote other foreign languages like Russian, Chinese, German, Spanish, and French in preference over English.

This new law was based on Iran’s Supreme Leader’s, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, concerns over speaking English that leads to ‘cultural invasion’ due to early exposure to the English language. Meanwhile, the Supreme Leader believes that this new law is not against foreign language learning, but it is against developing a ‘foreign culture.’

Despite the recent governmental decision about foreign language education, English still is the most popular foreign language in Iran. Many middle- and upper-middle-class families enroll their children from an earlier age in extra-curricular English courses in private language schools with more fashionable policies and pedagogies to language learning to provide a better professional and academic future for their children.

However, the situation is quite different in public schools. The K-12 education is supervised by the Ministry of Education and included in the first mandatory six years (primary school from ages 7-12) and second six years (high school from 13-18). The literacy rate in Iran is 97% for both girls and boys, which is the highest rate of literacy in the Middle East. In order to get admission to higher education, each student should attend a national entrance examination called ‘Konkour’ after high school. English and Arabic are among the key modules for all fields of study (e.g., medical and engineering) in ‘Konkour.’ Among five

'Konkoors' in Iran, one of them is called 'Specialized Language Konkooor', which deals with those students who want to continue their studies in one of the foreign language university programs in English (focused on literature, translation studies, and language teaching), German, French, Russian, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Italian (focused on target language literature). The medium of instruction in the mentioned programs is the target language.

In Iranian public schools, formal English education has been conducted through two locally written series of textbooks titled 'English Book 1-4', 'Graded English' and 'Right Path to English' which have been used to teach for more than 27 years since the Islamic revolution in 1979. A newly designed and revised English textbook attempts to prevent the potential damages of Western cultures to Iranian national identity and Islamic ideology. However, this series of English textbooks failed to promote a universal understanding of the English language, and also failed to act as a medium to familiarize students with English spoken/written arts, science, and literature, and develop students' oral skills (Farrokhi & Saadi, 2013; Rahimi & Hassani, 2012; Yarmohammadi, 2002). Moreover, many scholars argued that these textbooks did not cover the cultural aspects of language education (Aliakbari, 2004; Khajavy & Abbasian, 2011; Yarmohammadi, 2002), and are not based on the common core features of the EFL/ESL textbooks (Ansary & Babaii, 2002; Jahangard, 2007). This failure made the Ministry of Education shift the national EFL curriculum from traditional approaches to communicative one. One of the main changes in this regard was to design and develop new English language textbooks.

In 2013-2014, the Iranian Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the Organization of Educational Research and Planning, introduced a series of English language textbooks called 'English for Schools' (Prospect 1-3 and Vision 1-3). The Prospect is designed for year 7 to 9 students (published in 2014-2015), and the Vision is for year 10 to 12 students (published between 2016 to 2018). After around 40 years since the emergence of the communicative approach in the 1970s, English for Schools is compiled by a group of Iranian language experts that aimed to develop Iranian English students' communicative competence. The series starts with the English alphabet, and lessons are developed in a way that engages students' all four skills (listening, speaking, reading comprehension, and writing) and integrate themes and functions in each unit.

Although in the Introduction section of the series, the authors claimed that the localized English textbooks tried to improve students' communicative skills, this appears to conflict with the evaluation criteria of 'Konkooor' which is based on vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension, and on a format which inherently restricts teachers' ability to teach through Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Further investigation reveals that this series follows traditional teacher-centered approaches (Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) and Grammar-Translation Method (GTM)) to language education, focusing on memorization of vocabularies and grammar.

2. TEACHING CULTURE IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION THROUGH TEXTBOOKS

Although providing a specific definition of 'culture' would be an arduous task, culture can be defined in people's language, literature, religion, foods, values, opinions, morals, attitudes, beliefs, social behaviors and norms, arts, and worldview, to name a few, which

make that people and country ‘unique.’ Language is considered as an axiom in defining a culture which is not a culture by itself, but it echoes cultural patterns. Thus, the relationship between language and culture has become a trend from the early scholars’ investigations (Quine, 1980; Sapir, 1962; Wittgenstein, 1980) to recent ones (Garcia et al., 2017; Grosjean, 2019; Kroon & Swanenberg, 2019; Nieto, 2018; Silverstein, 2016).

Many scholars (See Brown, 1994; Jiang, 2000) believe that language and culture are intricately interwoven and separating them is impossible. Wei (2005) also stated that language acts as a carrier of culture. In this vein and with a focus on language education, many researchers affirmed that language teaching is culture teaching (Gao, 2006) and language teachers are culture teachers (Wang, 2008). The necessity of teaching culture is more emphasized more acutely through the paradigm shift from linguistic competence to communicative competence in language education. Rajabi and Ketabi (2012) believed that teaching culture should be at the heart of language education which stimulates communicative competence that leads to successful language learning.

Apart from extreme attitudes in the communicative period of language education which focused on acculturation and exaggerated the role of the native speaker as the mere elements of success (Bex, 1994), many scholars pinpointed intercultural competence as a requirement for English as a worldwide lingua franca and an International Language (Aleptkin, 2002; Kachru, 1986; McKay, 2004). Also, in English language education, due to the international position of the English language and the status of a globalized world, Tomalin (2008) highlighted culture as the fifth language skill, in addition to listening, speaking, reading comprehension, and writing. He also added that language education should include teaching target language a) cultural knowledge, b) cultural values, c) cultural behaviour, and d) cultural skills, which emphasizes the significant role of culture in language education. The fifth language skill makes the learner competent in the target language society to cope with people’s beliefs, values, and norms (Abbasian & Biria, 2017).

Thus, in order to function successfully in socio-cultural contexts (Halliday, 1975) and real-life situations, learners should utilize social rules of language use which need awareness of the target language social context. However, the fundamental issues in teaching culture in language education are “how should culture be taught?” (Fleet, 2006. p. 5), how can culture be incorporated “into foreign language classrooms in terms of fostering learners’ cultural awareness and communicating insights into the target language?” (Wang, 2008, p. 3), and what kinds of content should be included in teaching materials?

As one of the primary sources of knowledge, the textbook plays a key role in language education. Thus, one of the leading research areas in teaching material evaluation is investigating the place of culture in instructional materials (e.g., textbooks). One fundamental way to make a sound decision about the effectiveness of the materials is through textbook evaluation (Masuhara et al., 2008). Also, as no textbook can be perfect, textbook evaluation can be a help in specifying the suitability of the textbooks. A mounting body of research has been conducted worldwide to understand the role of culture in language textbooks (Jalalian Daghig & Rahim, 2020; Keles & Yazan, 2020; Lee & Li, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2019; Rashidi & Meihami, 2016; Song, 2019; Tajeddin & Pakzadian, 2020; Toledo-Sandoval, 2020).

The textbooks can act as the authentic source of cultural elements in addition to linguistic and topical contents and are assumed as significant mediators in conveying intercultural information to target language learners (Shin et al., 2011). Thus, it can be said that one of

the primary purposes of English language textbooks is to enable English language learners to function well in English communities in both linguistic and cultural acts. One of the enablers of effective communication in the target language is familiarity with the sociopragmatic aspect of language (Abbasian & Biria, 2017). Therefore, it would be important for these teaching materials to meet language learners' needs by providing them with suitable textual, audio, and visual content based on national and international cultural elements that prevent communication misunderstandings. However, one of the main controversies of including or excluding culture is about incorporating target, local, or international cultural materials in the textbooks. Moreover, many non-English speaking countries (e.g., Iran) tried to design and develop their own local textbooks to fulfill the local cultural and pedagogical needs.

A plethora of Iranian scholars investigated the current locally designed textbooks in language education focusing on objectives (Malahi & Afraz, 2019; Rahpeyma & Khoshnood, 2015), content (Alimorad, 2015; Khanshir & Mohammadifard, 2015), task types (Papi, 2015), gender representation (Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020), students and teachers' attitudes and perspectives (Aghazadeh, 2015; Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2015; Arabloo, 2015), and on improving students' language skills (Asakereh et al., 2019; Malahi & Afraz, 2019).

Focusing on culture, Abbasian and Biria's (2017) content analysis of the Prospect 1-3 textual content showed that the series is aimed to familiarize language learners with their own culture through artificial and manipulated context. Also, little attention has been paid to international culture, and no attention to target culture in the textual content. In line with these findings, Khajavi and Abbasian's (2011) attempt to investigate cultural patterns of the Iranian English textbooks revealed the incompatibility of textual content to get students familiar with national and international cultural points.

In another study, Gholami Pasand and Ghasemi (2018) explored the representation of the cultural points in Prospects 1-3 and tried to find out the role of textbooks in developing Iranian learners' intercultural competence through content analysis. This study's results revealed the narrow range of cultural representation in terms of topics and very limited role of intercultural elements in the textual contents.

In a recent quantitative study, Gheitasi et al. (2020) investigated the most frequent cultural references and cultural sense represented in the Vision series. The findings of this study on textual context indicated that Persian (L1) culture is considered as the source culture. Furthermore, regarding the represented cultural sense, the aesthetic sense of culture is the most frequent sense followed by semantic, sociological, and sociopragmatic senses, respectively.

We observed that the cultural evaluation of the EFL textbooks to see to what extent they fulfill the learners' expectations and needs is a must, especially in contexts like Iran where due to lack of social interactions with English speakers and having no exposure to target language cultural and social life, textbooks act as the sole source of knowledge. Moreover, we assume that due to some restrictions (e.g., politics and ideology), many controversial topics are avoided by scholars who evaluated the Iranian English textbooks. In other words, designing textbooks is a challenge for each country as textbooks are "sociocultural materials, institutionally sanctioned and ideologically embedded" due to the "politics of identity" (Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015, p.1), which might affect the trustworthiness of previous evaluations. Another critical issue that encourages us to do this evaluation is the lack of qualitative cultural assessment of visual elements of Iranian English textbooks since their publication. Thus, in this study, we aimed to investigate the representation of English

language culture in two series of Iranian locally written English language textbooks through photos. We have formulated the following research questions:

RQ1: What cultures (source/target/international) are represented in the visual content of the Iranian English textbooks, and to what extent?

RQ2: How is cultural dimension portrayed visual contexts in the Iranian English textbooks? Aesthetic, sociological, semantic, or sociolinguistic (pragmatic)?

To meet the end of the study, we applied two frameworks of Adaskou et al. (1990) and Cortazzi and Jin (1999). Adaskou and his colleagues (1990) categorized culture in four categories of aesthetic (e.g., literature, cinema, media, and music), sociological (e.g., family, home life, customs, and interpersonal relations), semantic (e.g., time, colors, and emotional states), and sociolinguistic (pragmatic) (e.g., social and paralinguistic skills, politeness, and obligations) senses.

According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), the representation of target language culture in EFL textbooks can be categorized into a) 'Target cultural materials' which are mostly hinged on the United States and/or the United Kingdom and they are criticized "for their cultural monopolization and profitability" (Abbasian & Biria, 2017, p. 53). b) 'Local cultural materials', which is a specific-country textbook focused on language learner's culture aimed to introduce national culture and identity instead of equipping language learners to be sociopragmatically competent. c) 'International cultural materials' which follow worldwide cultures rooted in both English and non-English speaking countries.

3. METHOD

3.1. Qualitative Visual Content Analysis

To meet the end of the study, we have applied a qualitative visual content analysis, the steps of which are shown in Figure 1. The visual content, all images in the corpus, was assumed as the source of data in this study due to its richness in providing cultural information. Recently, the importance of visual content and its interpretation has been identified in research methodology (Bohnsack, 2008; Gotschi et al., 2008; Hao et al., 2016; Taylor, 2002). Banks (2007) believed that it would be easy to access visual contents, and "they might reveal some insight that was not accessible by any other means" (p. 4); therefore, the writers use visual contents in their books. Hao et al. (2016) highlighted the role of studies on visual culture as a controversial and fashionable interdisciplinary domain. They also point out the connection between content analysis and the interpretation of visual content. Content analysis alludes to putting a valid and replicable interpretation on meaningful content (Krippendorff, 2004), which is not necessarily should be textual content and can appear in the forms of visual, digital, or physical content (Altheide, 1996; Merriam, 2009).

Moreover, due to the nature of the study and to have clear instructions for grouping and categorizing data (Cohen et al., 2018), we decided to use content analysis to analyze cultural representation through images. The qualitative visual content analysis as a means helps us to interpret the meanings hidden in images. The qualitative content analysis goes beyond quantitative content analysis, which focuses only on quantifiable data and fails to

reveal implicit information (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Rose (2001) confirmed visual content classification into certain groups based on the same specified features. In order to group and categorize data and provide descriptions of visual images incorporated in the corpus, the coding categories were based on “local information and cultural expression” (Hao et al., 2016, p.205), the first author who has taught English in Iran for more than eight years invited another teacher in Iran who is MA holder in English Language Teaching and has seven years of experience as an English teacher in the Ministry of Education categorizing images based on a manual matrix of cultural aesthetic, sociological, semantic, and sociolinguistic (pragmatic) senses (Adaskou et al., 1990) and target, local, and international cultural materials (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). At this stage, we followed Rose’s (2001) suggestions on having a ‘critical pedagogy’ of interpreting visual contents through a) taking images seriously, b) considering the social conditions, and c) considering how to look at the images. After categorizing the data based on the mentioned principles and in order to maintain consistency and validity, the first author discussed the findings with the second author, who is rooted in the target culture in order to employ multiple coding and interrater checking. In the end, the coded data was compared to obtain consistency and interrater reliability.

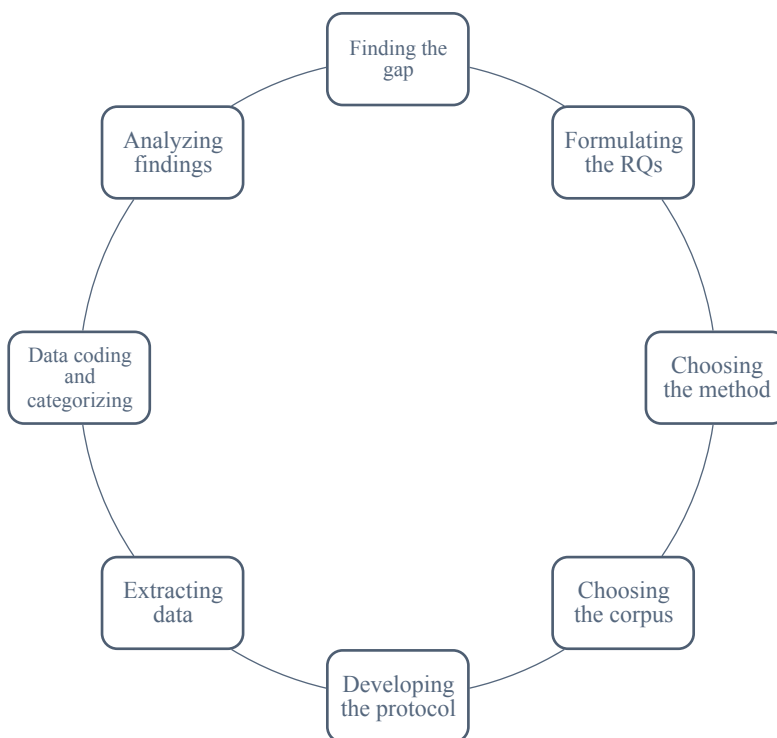


Figure 1. The Qualitative Visual Content Analysis Method Cycle

3.2. The Corpus

The corpus of this study included all visual contents of Prospect 1-3 and Vision 1-3 textbook series that is the source of English language at the Iranian public junior (Prospect series) and senior high school (Vision series) system. All the investigated books are the latest edition published in the 2020-2021 academic year. Prospect 1 (8th edition) includes 88 pages, eight lessons, four review sections, and a photo dictionary at the end of the book. Prospect 2 (7th edition) consists of 96 pages, seven lessons, three review sections, and a photo dictionary at the end of the book. Prospect 3 (6th edition) includes 136 pages, six lessons, three review sections, and a photo dictionary at the end of the book. Vision 1 (5th edition) consists of 128 pages, Vision 2 (4th edition) includes 112 pages, and Vision 3 (3rd edition) consists of 104 pages, and all of the books in this series consist of three lessons and a review section at the end of each lesson.

4. FINDINGS

The study's first aim is to find out the represented cultures (source/target/international) in the Iranian English textbooks. The analysis of the visual content of the textbooks revealed that the utmost portion of all six books has been devoted to the source culture of Iran (i.e., Persian or Iranian). In contrast, the international culture has obtained scant attention, and the target culture has almost received no attention in the visual content of these Iranian English textbooks.

During the course of investigating how cultural dimension is portrayed in visual contexts in the Iranian English textbooks (i.e., aesthetic, sociological, semantic, or sociolinguistic (pragmatic)), the visual content analysis showed that the focus on aesthetic dimension had been exaggerated. Also, great attention has been paid to the semantic dimension, especially the Islamic ideology. However, the absence of sociological and sociolinguistic dimensions is remarkable in the visual content of the Iranian English textbooks.

4.1. Prospect Series (Books 1-3)

In the Prospect series, the aesthetic dimension received the highest level of attention in reference to the source, the target, and the international cultures. Concerning the source cultural content, in the Prospect series, as presented in Tables 1-3 (Appendix), the aesthetic sense or dimension appeared in the forms of Iranian nationality (e.g., the flag of Iran and Persian language), Iranian art (e.g., local clothes and crafts), Iranian poets (Hafez's book), Iranian scientists (e.g., Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Dr. Majid Samii), Iranian athletes (e.g., Siamand Rahman and Noshad Alamian), Iranian festivals (e.g., Fajir International Film Festival and Roshd Art & Culture International Festival for Educational Film), Iranian food (e.g., kebab and Sangak bread), tourist places (Eram Garden in Shiraz, Milad Tower in Tehran, Chehel Sotoun Palace in Isfahan, Damavand Mountain, and Persepolis in Marvdasht), geography (e.g., map of Iran), sports (Iran men's national football team, Iran women's national futsal team, and Azadi Sport Complex), and media (e.g., images referring to IRIB – Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting and a war movie).

Moreover, from the international culture perspective, the aesthetic dimension is represented through international scientists (e.g., Dr. Louis Pasteur), sports (e.g., football, basketball, and track and field), geography (e.g., map of the world, Asia, Europe, Africa, and many countries around the world), tourism (e.g., a mosque in Turkey, and the Great Wall of China), and sports (Bayern Munich Football Club jersey). Surprisingly, a rare representation of aesthetic sense has appeared through geography (e.g., maps of North America and Australia), nationality (e.g., the flag of Australia and Ireland), and tourism (e.g., London double-decker bus).

From the semantic sense point of view, Islamic ideology grabs the primary attention. The Islamic ideology is vastly represented in the forms of the Quran, Ayatollah Khomeini and Khamenei's photos, hijab, mosque, and Imam Reza Holy Shrine in Mashhad. However, some symbols like chafieh (a special scarf of the Basij Resistance Force) and helmet (a symbol of martyrs) show the presence of the Islamic doctrine in Iranian English textbooks. In this vein, the images of some special ceremonies such as the anniversary protest for the Islamic Revolution (22nd of Bahman) and the commemoration day of the 13th of Aban (Pupil Day) support the significance of the Islamic ideology by the material developers of this series.

The non-Islamic aspects of semantic sense in source culture have also appeared in the forms of national identity (e.g., Haft-Seen, Yalda Night, and national anthem), Iranian calendar, and public law enforcement (e.g., police). However, notably the semantic sense in international culture is presented in images of a calendar and church, and in target culture through the images of an American soldier in the US-Iraq war and the US police officer.

As mentioned above, in this series, little attention has paid to sociological and sociolinguistic (pragmatic) senses (Tables 1-3 in Appendix). Social values (e.g., interpersonal relations and family), ethical values (e.g., donation, charity, helping others, caring of parents and elderly people, respecting other people, and voluntary works), and situations (e.g., classroom, library, school, airport, and office) are the only representations of sociological sense. In the international culture, several situations of a hotel, bank, library, metro, restaurant, zoo, tennis court, train station, money exchange, and drug store are presented. Also, the material condition is represented in the form of unknown foreign notes and currency in international culture, and 'Lego' and the US Dollar (currency) for the target culture.

Also, the rare presence of sociolinguistic (pragmatic) sense is represented in greetings (e.g., shaking hands) and politeness (e.g., getting permission before speaking). Surprisingly, no evidence of this sense is presented in either international or target cultures in this series.

4.2. Vision Series (Books 1-3)

Similar to the Prospect series, the attention of Vision series' material developers was on the aesthetic dimension more than other dimensions, especially in reference to the source culture. However, the international culture has received a little more attention in this series (see Tables 4-6 in Appendix). Many of the aesthetic sense or dimension in this series is quite similar to the Prospect series and appeared in the forms of Iranian nationality (e.g., Persian language and passport), Iranian arts (e.g., local clothes, crafts, calligraphy, pottery, and tilework), Iranian poets (Parvin Etesami's Divan, Ferdowsi's tomb and sculpture, and Hafez's tomb), Iranian scientists (e.g., Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Razi), Iranian festivals (e.g., Fajr International Film Festival ticket), tourist places (Eram Garden in Shiraz, Milad Tower in Tehran, Damavand Mountain, Gahar Lake in Doroud, ancient wind towers in Yazd, and

mountain climber sculpture in Darband), geography (e.g., map of Iran), and sports (Iran men's national volleyball team, Iran women's national ping-pong, and futsal teams). However, in this category, the great attention has been paid to the flag of Iran and Persian language, map of Iran, and tourism of Iran, same as the Prospect series. However, new themes such as Iranian wildlife (e.g., Iranian cheetah, Persian leopard, and zebra) and daily life (e.g., food store) have emerged in this series. Moreover, in contrast to the Prospect series, the load of images of Iranian arts and tourist places is more highlighted in this series. Also, some themes such as Iranian athletes, food, and media have been removed from the visual content of this series.

One of the most significant improvements of the Vision series is the representation of the aesthetic dimension in reference to the international culture through tourist places in the first book – Vision 1. The appearance of international known places like the Taj Mahal in India, The Nile River in Africa, the Leaning Tower of Pisa and the Colosseum in Italy, Eiffel Tower in Paris, and the Egyptian Pyramids, and less known places like Iguazu Falls in South America and the Cathedral Mosque of Cordoba in Spain are represented in the book. Moreover, geography (e.g., map of continents and countries) is a typical representation of aesthetic sense in international culture. The only newly emerged theme is ceremonies which show bullfighting in Spain. Surprisingly, no visual content shows the aesthetic sense in the target culture in this series.

In line with the ideology behind the development of Iranian English textbooks, Islamic ideology is the central theme in the semantic sense. The Islamic ideology is massively represented in the forms of Quran, Kaaba in Mecca (K.S.A), Ayatollah Khomeini and Khamenei's photos, hijab, mosque, Imam Reza Holy Shrine in Mashhad. Except from those mentioned typical symbols of Islamic ideology (e.g., mosque), the faces of Iranian nuclear energy martyrs are also presented in the textbook.

The non-Islamic aspects of semantic sense in source culture have also appeared in the forms of the Iranian calendar and Iranian military vehicles, and no evidence of national identity is represented. Another missing visual content is the absence of semantic sense in the international culture throughout the series. However, the only emergent theme in the target culture is named 'globalization' which is represented in the form of the facsimile KFC or McDonald's chips.

In this series, same as in the Prospect, little attention has been paid to sociological and sociolinguistic (pragmatic) senses. However, it should be noted that the scope of situations is decreased in the series (i.e., only limited to the classroom, school, park, and home), the role of social values (e.g., interpersonal relations, family, hugging by two men, and friendship) and ethical values (e.g., donating blood, charity to other students, helping disable people, caring of elderly people, respecting parents, and talking to others). Unfortunately, we have observed no situations in the international culture. However, the ethical values have appeared only in Vision 1 and in the forms of helping the injured animals and saving the trees in the international culture. Also, the same theme and with the similar value of helping the injured animals appeared in the target culture in which people are helping an injured kangaroo in Australian bushfires. Finally, the presence of sociolinguistic (pragmatic) sense is only represented in two forms of signs (No swimming, No fishing, No smoking, No parking, traffic signs, turn off your mobile phone, parking, and keep off the grass) and languages (i.e., sign language) in the international culture. This critical sense is absent in both source and target culture and is very limited to the mentioned themes in the international culture.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This qualitative study aimed to investigate the represented cultures (source/target/international) in the Iranian English textbooks which are newly published and currently used in Iranian public schools. Also, we examined how cultural dimension portrayed visual contexts in the Iranian English textbooks (i.e., aesthetic, sociological, semantic, or sociolinguistic (pragmatic)).

The qualitative visual content analysis revealed that the vast concentration of visual content on the source culture (i.e., Iranian or Persian culture) is significant factor that contrasts with the objectives of communicative language teaching. This finding is in line with Gheitasi et al.'s (2020) quantitative evaluation of cultural representation in the Vision English textbook series and Rashidi and Meihami's (2016) evaluation of the Prospect series that confirmed the most cultural content in favor of Persian (L1) culture. In the same vein, Abbasian and Biria (2017) highlighted that the primary purpose of the Prospect series is to get students familiar with the source culture, which is in contrast with scholars who necessitated the students' understanding of cultural elements of the target language, which enable them to communicate effectively (McKay, 2004; Kachru, 1986), and those who considered culture as the fifth skill in language learning (Tomalin, 2008). Asakereh et al. (2019) also point out that both "Prospect and Vision series are heavily culture-bound" (p. 1030), and they cannot develop students' meta-cultural competence and cultural awareness.

In general, the quality of visual content in the Prospect series (1-3) and Vision 3 is really low, which shows that the material developers have not considered that "a picture is worth a thousand words". However, the quality of visual content has been dramatically improved in Vision 1 and 2. A load of aesthetic sense is more than other sense which highlights the purely decorative role of images and pictures (see Hill, 2003; Romney, 2012; Romney & Bell, 2012) rather than the educational role in these series. Whether decorative or educational, the visual content plays a significant role in the ELT textbook (Tomlinson, 2011) as a means of influencing students' interests and attitudes (Qoriah, 2020), recalling the information (Yaman, 2010), and enhancing students' communicative competence (Donaghy & Xerri, 2017) which is the main objective of this series based on the book's claim. However, the low quality might be a barrier to student engagement and motivation. Also, the focus of the visual content is on the classroom and school situation, which is not a representation of communications in the real world of the target language. This finding is also approved by Gheitasi et al.'s (2020) report that indicates the outsized role of aesthetic sense in the Vision series. In contrast, Rashidi and Meihami (2016)'s study on textual content reported the primary focus of the Prospect series is on sociological sense. Asakereh et al. (2019) also confirmed that the current textbooks had lack of authentic contexts outside the classroom context.

With reference to the aesthetic sense in the source culture, great attention has been paid to the flag of Iran and Persian language, map of Iran, and tourism of Iran. However, the material developers totally ignored the two main themes of cinema and music (also reported in Gheitasi et al., 2020), which are the two axes in arts. The material developers have not included any cinema and music artists in Iran. Many Iranian artists have received prestigious awards in international events. For example, Asghar Farhadi, a film director, has won the 'Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film' in 2012 and 2017. Also,

Mohammad Reza Shajarian, a singer, has won eight international awards and nominated for Grammy Award in Best World Music in 2004 and 2006. We can discuss that this oversight is rooted in the Islamic ideology behind the book, which is not keen on showing the Western cultural elements in the series. However, cinema and music are rooted in the culture and lifestyle of the Iranian people.

From the semantic sense perspective, which received much attention like aesthetic one, the representation of Islamic ideology is more prevalent than usual, which shows that the material developers are more interested in showing the values of the source culture rather than preparing students for the Western and target culture of English. This degree of attention is also reported in Gheitasi et al. (2020). Regarding the sociolinguistic (pragmatic) sense, which is accounted as a vital element in developing students' communicative competence, the material developers, to some extent, have not paid enough attention, which might be due to "some taboos or appropriate dressing and behavior" (Gheitasi et al., 2020, p. 165) which are in contrast with Islamic doctrine.

The sociolinguistic and sociological senses have received little or no attention, especially in international and target cultures. Regarding the Western culture, the developers used more Australian-related visual content in contrast to other countries like the US, the UK, and Canada. Again, another factor that deals with the main aims of communicative competence is the students' familiarity with the daily sociocultural norms and values (Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014) which is to some extent ignored in these series. Another issue which is adequately highlighted by Gheitasi et al. (2020) is the intercultural understanding which can be conveyed through sociolinguistic sense (e.g., how to address others).

Some scholars (e.g., Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015) believe that most of the published English textbooks are loaded by target culture ideologies, values, and standards, and their main aim is to showcase Western cultures in general through a hidden agenda (Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014; Taki, 2008). We believe that the current English textbooks in public schools are loaded by Islamic ideology which is in contrast with Western norms and values, and the successful English textbooks should be deculturalized or possess an even load of cultures which is directing the language from foreign language to *lingua franca* (Alptekin, 2005; Jenkins, 2005; Seidlhofer, 2001). The current locally published textbooks do not provide students with a clear picture of language usage in real word interactions in multicultural and multilingual contexts. If the purpose of the English subject is to enable students to use their communicative competence in the target context, this amount of exposure to Islamic values is not conducive to learning in balanced authentic contexts. In other words, the material developers try to expose students to Islamic culture which is already available in the immediate context of the students. So, there is no logic behind so much referencing to the source culture in the representation of semantic sense, especially Islamic ideology and values.

Nationalists the world over must make decisions regarding the balance between globalization, secularism, fundamentalism, pluralism, racial tolerance and acceptance, exposure and experience of technology and quality language learning design. In some countries the democratic right of the individual to choose that which they wish to experience can be endangered. Maximized constructivist opportunities in language learning are part of the choices curriculum and textbook designers must make whilst preserving their cultural identity and independence to their own comfortable level of consensus on such inclusions.

We conclude that the quality of and balance visual content in these textbooks could take advantage of extending the focus of English language learning to more diverse authentic target and source culture narrowed classroom contexts, devoid where possible of political and ideological embeddedness. Crucial knowledge of sociolinguistic and strategic competence such as target and international culture tenor could be improved by expanding visual coverage to a wider range of English language cultural contexts. Inclusions of images embedded with highly charged political and ideological content contributes to an antagonism between North American and Islamic cultures in Iranian English textbooks but not to quality images which enhance English language learning.

Finally, the world is awash with the digital cross fertilization of ideas and contexts, should not they be utilized in preference to a reliance on textbook program equipped by preselected content which originate from restricted political and ideological dogma? Furthermore, are textbooks which do not utilize links to such resources maximizing learning outcomes in diverse communicative contexts? Is the cultural authenticity, free of a perceived contamination which is advocated and imposed by government maximizing the achievement of language learners?

6. REFERENCES

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7. APPENDIX

Table 1. The representation of cultural references and dimensions in Prospect 1

	Aesthetic sense	Sociological sense	Semantic sense	Sociolinguistic (pragmatic) sense
Source culture	Iranian nationality: Flag of Iran; Persian language	Social values: Interpersonal relations; Family	Islamic ideology: Ayatollah Khomeini's photo; Ayatollah Khomeini's photo; Quran; Hijab; Mosque; <i>Chafteh</i> ; Imam Reza holly shrine in Mashhad	Greetings: Shaking hand Politeness: Getting permission before speaking
	Iranian art: Local clothes (folklore)	Situation: Classroom; Library; School; Office		
	Food: Kebab; <i>Sangak</i> bread			
	Tourism: Eram Garden in Shiraz; Milad Tower in Tehran		Public law enforcement: Police	
	Geography: Map of Iran		Iranian calendar	
	Sports: Iran men's national football team			
International culture	Sports: Football; Basketball	Situation: Hotel; Bank	Calendar	
Target culture		Material conditions: Lego		

Table 2. The representation of cultural references and dimensions in Prospect 2

Aesthetic sense	Sociological sense	Semantic sense	Sociolinguistic (pragmatic) sense
<p>Iranian scientists: Ibn Sina (Avicenna); Dr. Mohammad Gharib; Dr. Majid Samii</p> <p>Iranian athlete: Siamand Rahman; Noshad Alamian</p> <p>Iranian nationality: Flag of Iran; Persian language</p> <p>Iranian arts: Museum</p> <p>Tourism: Chehel Sotoun Palace in Isfahan; Damavand Mountain; Persepolis in Marvdasht; Gon- bad-e Qabus; Old ba- zaar; Village</p> <p>Geography: Map of Iran</p> <p>Sports: Iran women's national futsal team; <i>Azadi</i> Sport Complex</p>	<p>Social values: Interpersonal rela- tions</p> <p>Situations: Classroom; School; Airport</p>	<p>Islamic ideology: Ayatollah Khomeini's photo; Quran; Hijab; Mosque; A photo of a <i>rohani</i>; Imam Reza holly shrine in Mashhad</p>	

Source
culture

	Scientists: Dr. Louis Pasteur	Situations: Library; Metro; Restaurant; Zoo; Bank; Tennis court; Train station; Drug store	Non-Islamic ideology: Church
	Geography: Map of world, Asia, Europe, Africa, China, South America, Italy, Iraq, India, Egypt, Japan, and Indonesia		
	Sports: Basketball; Jogging; Football; Riding bicycle; Horse riding; Ping-pong; Tennis; Chess; Badminton		
International culture			
	Geography: Map of North America and Australia		
Target culture			

Table 3. The representation of cultural references and dimensions in Prospect 3

Aesthetic sense	Sociological sense	Semantic sense	Sociolinguistic (pragmatic) sense
Iranian poets: Hafez's book	Social values: Interpersonal relations; Family	Islamic ideology: Ayatollah Khomeini's photo; Quran; Ayatollah Khamenei's photo; Hijab; Mosque; Protest for regime; Martyr's symbol; Pupil day (Aban 13) protest; Islamic revolution anniversary protest; Imam Reza holly shrine in Mashhad	
Iranian nationality: Flag of Iran; Persian language	Ethical values: Donation; Charity; Helping others; Caring of parents and elderly people; Respecting other people; Voluntary works		
Iranian arts: Crafts; Local clothes (folklore)			
Iranian festivals: <i>Fajir</i> International Film Festival; <i>Roshd</i> Art & Culture International Festival for Educational Films		National identity: Haft seen; Yalda Night; Nature Day; National anthem	
Iranian food: <i>Sangak</i> bread	Situations: Classroom; School; Lab; Airport; Bank; Bus station; Bakery; Cinema		
Tourism: - Shiraz		Public law enforcement: Police	
Geography: - Map of Iran			
Sports: - Iran men's national football team			
Source culture	Media: Referring to a war movie; Referring to IRIB (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting)		

	<p>Nationality: Flag of Japan, Germany, Spain, Brazil, Syria, Turkey, Finland, Sweden, Korea, Argentina, Belgium, Portugal, Russia, France, Switzerland, Norway, Croatia, and few unknow flags</p>	<p>Material conditions: Unknow foreign notes (currency)</p>	
		<p>Situation: Money exchange</p>	
	<p>Tourism: A mosque in Turkey; The Great Wall of China</p>		
	<p>Sports: Bayern Munich Football Club jersey</p>		
<p>Interna- tional culture</p>			

	<p>Nationality: Flag of Australia and Ireland</p>	<p>Material conditions: The US Dollar (currency)</p>	<p>Public law enforcement and war: An American soldier in Iraq war; The US police officer</p>
	<p>Tourism: London double- decker bus</p>		
<p>Target culture</p>			

Table 4. The representation of cultural references and dimensions in Vision 1

Aesthetic sense	Sociological sense	Semantic sense	Sociolinguistic (pragmatic) sense
<p>Iranian scientists: Ibn Sina (Avicenna); Razi - Khaje Nasir al-Din Tusi</p> <p>Iranian wildlife: Iranian cheetah; Persian leopards; Persian zebra</p> <p>Iranian poets: Parvin Etesami's Divan</p> <p>Iranian nationality: Iranian passport; Persian language</p> <p>Tourism: <i>Eram</i> Garden in Shiraz; <i>Damavand</i> Mountain; <i>Milad</i> Tower in Tehran; <i>Gahar</i> Lake in Doroud; <i>Azadi</i> Tower in Tehran; Persepolis in Marvdasht; <i>Si-o-se Pol</i> in Isfahan; <i>Shah Cheragh</i> Mosque in Shiraz; Ancient wind towers in Yazd</p> <p>Source culture</p> <p>Geography: Map of Iran</p>	<p>Situations: Classroom; Park</p>	<p>Islamic ideology: Ayatollah Khomeini's photo; Allah symbol; Hijab; Mosque; Pilgrims; Nuclear energy martyrs; Kaaba in Mecca, KSA; Imam Reza holly shrine in Mashhad</p> <p>Iranian calendar</p>	

	<p>Tourism: Taj Mahal in India; Iguazu Falls in South America; The Nile River in Africa; A castle in Japan; The Leaning Tower of Pisa in Italy; The Colosseum in Rome; Eiffel Tower in Paris; The Egyptian Pyramids; Mosque-Cathedral of Cordoba in Spain</p> <p>Ceremonies: Bullfighting in Spain</p> <p>Geography: Map of Africa and world</p>	<p>Ethical values: Helping the injured animals; Saving the tress</p>	<p>Signs: No swimming sign</p>
International culture		<p>Ethical values: Helping the injured animals (Australia bushfires)</p>	

Table 5. The representation of cultural references and dimensions in Vision 2

	Aesthetic sense	Sociological sense	Semantic sense	Sociolinguistic (pragmatic) sense
	<p>Iranian arts: Museum; Calligraphy; Carpet; Pottery; Tilework; Crafts; Rug; Painting; Craftsman and craftswoman with local clothes</p> <p>Iranian festivals: Fajr Film Festival ticket</p> <p>Tourism: Mountain climber sculpture in Darband; Old bazaar</p> <p>Sports: Iran men's national volleyball team</p> <p>Daily life: Food store</p>	<p>Social values: Interpersonal relations; Friendship</p> <p>Situations: Classroom; School</p>	<p>Islamic ideology: Ayatollah Khomeini's photo; Allah symbol; Hijab</p>	
Source culture	<p>Geography: Map of Asia and world</p>		<p>Signs: Traffic signs; No fishing; No smoking; No parking; Turn off your mobile phone sign; Keep off the grass sign; Parking sign</p>	
International culture			<p>Languages: Sign language</p>	
Target culture				

Table 6. The representation of cultural references and dimensions in Vision 3

	Aesthetic sense	Sociological sense	Semantic sense	Sociolinguistic (pragmatic) sense
	<p>Iranian scientists: Dr. Mohammad Gharib</p> <p>Iranian poets: Ferdowsi’s tomb and sculpture; Hafez’s tomb</p> <p>Iranian nationality: Flag of Iran; Persian language</p> <p>Iranian arts: Calligraphy</p> <p>Tourism: <i>Milad</i> Tower in Tehran; Wind towers in Yazd</p> <p>Geography: Map of Iran</p> <p>Sports: Iran women’s national ping-pong team; Iran women’s national futsal team</p>	<p>Social values: Family; Interpersonal relations; Hugging by two men</p> <p>Ethical values: Donating blood; Respecting parents; Talking to each other; Charity to other students; Helping others; Helping disabled; Caring of elderly people</p> <p>Situations: Classroom; Home</p>	<p>Islamic ideology: Ayatollah Khomeini’s photo; Allah symbol; Hijab</p> <p>Iranian power: Military vehicles</p>	
International culture				
Target culture			<p>Globalization: The facsimile KFC/McDonald’s chips</p>	