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A review of some current literature on cultural contents in ELT textbooks

Malin Jansson
Ämneslärarprogrammet



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Supervisor: Anne Dragemark Oscarson
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Abstract

This review explores current literature on the representation of culture in ELT textbooks. The importance of applying an intercultural approach (IC) on the basis of the principles of English as an international language (EIL), to English language pedagogy and materials, has over the last few decades become a prominent topic of discussion within the language teaching research community. Since textbooks often comprise a major part in language teaching, it is interesting to investigate whether their cultural contents match current research on IC and EIL. The aim of this review is to explore whether there is a gap between current ELT research on EIL and IC, and applications thereof, in modern ELT textbooks. Within this aim, two research questions are posed: (1) Is bias regarding region/country, character nationality and language variety present in the cultural content of ELT textbooks? (2) Is bias regarding race, gender and socioeconomic status present in the cultural content of ELT textbooks? In attempting to answer these questions, the present report will provide the reader with an introduction and a background section where some central terms and themes related to the topic are outlined. To this follows a review of seven studies investigating cultural bias in ELT textbooks, and their conformity to current research on IC and EIL. In the discussion, their findings are compared with the research outlined in the background. Furthermore, suggestions on further research regarding enhancement of IC and EIL in ELT materials and pedagogy will be provided.

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1 Introduction

The connection between language and culture, and therefore the inevitable importance of teaching culture in the language learning context, is widely acknowledged in the field of language teaching literature (Kramsch, 1993). However, the approach to the question of how to address culture in the language learning context has gradually changed over the years, from a traditional approach that often focuses on nation-centred, native-speaker norms, to an intercultural approach focusing on a critical perspective in relation to one's own culture and to cultures from all over the world. The importance of intercultural competence (IC) has become increasingly addressed by researchers in the field of language teaching (e.g., Kramsch, 1993; McKay 2003; Baker, 2015). It is addressed the Common European framework of reference for languages (CEFR)¹ and in other curricula over the world (e.g., in Hong Kong (Yuen, 2011), and Korea (Song, 2013).

Moreover, in the particular context of English language teaching (ELT), the changing status of the English language, towards English as an international language (EIL) and English as Lingua Franca (ELF) that has been developing over the last few decades (Watterson, 2011), adds on to the importance of broadening the understanding of the concept of culture in ELT.

It has been suggested that teacher education does not offer sufficient training when it comes to teaching culture (Young, Sachdev & Seedhouse, 2009). Within that training comes evaluating and choosing appropriate teaching materials. Since textbooks often constitute a fairly big part of the teaching materials used in language education (Kilickaya, 2004), it is relevant to find out how their cultural contents match current research.

Thus, considering the growing demand on developing IC in language learners, the changes in the status of English, and the challenges that teachers meet when choosing and evaluating textbooks, the rationale behind providing a literature review of studies on ELT textbook analyses is to help English language teachers in the field to spot and reflect on their potential strengths and shortcomings regarding contents and approach in relation to research and curricular objectives.

This review opts to give an overview and a discussion of recent empirical research analysing the cultural contents in ELT textbooks. The aim is to investigate whether there is a gap between language learning research concerning EIL principles and the IC approach to

¹ <https://rm.coe.int/1680459f97>

culture in language teaching on the one hand, and the role of cultural contents in the ELT textbooks in use, on the other.

Considering that ‘culture’ comprises a vast and diverse field of research, the cultural contents of focus in this paper refers two themes: (1) countries or regions, and representation of different English varieties, and (2) race, gender, and socioeconomic status. These issues can be seen as equally important to explore from a critical viewpoint of power relations between cultural groups in language teaching. Hence, within the aim for this review, two research questions are hoped to be answered: (1) is bias regarding region/country, character nationality and language variety present in the cultural contents of ELT textbooks? (2) is bias regarding race, gender and socioeconomic status present in the cultural contents of ELT textbooks?

2 Theoretical background

This section of the paper will give a brief theoretical background to topics important to the nature of cultural contents of ELT textbooks. First, a definition of the English language speaker-model, developed by Kachru (1985), will be provided, since many of the studies reviewed in this paper have used it to refer to native-speaking and non-native-speaking countries and regions. Second, the relationship between culture and language, the definitions of ‘English as an international language’ (EIL) and ‘intercultural competence’ (IC), and their pedagogical implications for ELT, will be explained. Moreover, an overview of the traditional approach to ELT, and the global spread of the English language in relation to linguistic and cultural power structures, and its effects on global ELT, will be outlined.

2.1 Inner- outer- and expanding-circle countries

Many of the studies reviewed used Kachru’s (1985) model of inner-, outer-, and expanding-circle countries when distinguishing between native speakers and non-native speakers of English. Inner-circle countries include those that speak “native” varieties of English, which means that the English spoken has been spread via settlements, as is the case in e.g., the US, the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Outer-circle countries include those that use English for official purposes in a post-colonial context, like in e.g., India, Nigeria and Singapore. Expanding-circle countries are those whose citizens learn English as a foreign language, like in e.g., Spain, Greece, and Thailand (Kachru, 1985). These divisions are problematic in some

respects. It has for example been debated and shown problematic just how a ‘native speaker’ or a native variety of English should be defined. Another matter of discussion is that within each inner-circle variety there is also a variety of dialects and which are not being taken into account (McKenzie, 2010). Kachru’s divisions are nevertheless beneficial for the purpose of this paper since they help to illustrate linguistic and cultural imbalances from a perspective of a common perception of ‘nativeness’ and language ownership.

2.2 The notion of ‘culture’ and its relation to language and language teaching

‘Culture’ is difficult to explain concisely, since it is a diverse concept that has been defined slightly differently by various scholars in different contexts. In the Merriam Webster online dictionary, the word culture is defined in a number of contexts, but there are three examples that comprise the view of culture in a way that would possibly agree to the way it is used in the context of language learning:

- the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; *also* :the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time
- the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization
- the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic”

(Merriam-Webster's, 2017)

These definitions correspond well to Shiraev and Levy’s (2017) definition of culture as “a set of attitudes [such as beliefs, values, general knowledge, opinions], behaviors [norms, roles, customs, traditions], and symbols [things or ideas infused with meaning from the people that relate to them] shared by a large group of people and usually communicated from one generation to another” (p. 4). However, one need to keep in mind that “no society is culturally homogenous” (Shiraev & Levy, 2017, p. 4).

Kramsch (1993) explains the relationship between culture and language by establishing that language both expresses and creates cultural reality. With reference to how language *expresses* cultural reality, Kramsch says: “Words express facts, ideas or events that are

communicable because they refer to a stock of knowledge about the world that other people share. Words also reflect their authors' attitudes and beliefs, their points of view, that are also those of others" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 3). Simultaneously, people *create* experience through language, through the way that it is used, i.e. the way we give meaning to it. We can infuse meaning in our words through e.g. accent, style, or tone of voice, and hence, cultural reality is embodied in the language itself (Kramsch, 1993).

2.3 English as an international language

The studies reviewed in this paper all address the changing status of English in the ELT context, and most of them use the term EIL when referring to that change. The purpose for the choice of EIL contextualisation in the studies reviewed seems to be based on the same general debate in ELT research, which concerns the changing status of English and its impact on ELT approaches and practices. Overall, they link EIL to the process of globalisation, the changing status of the English language, the importance of intercultural competence, and how or if that affects how culture is treated in ELT textbooks.

In this paper, EIL is based on Watterson's (2011) adaptation of McArthur's (2004) definition. Watterson (2011) summarises EIL as language usage with focus on international functionality, where the English language and one's cultural identity are not linked, and where the focal point is not on native-speaker use, but on the use of English as an international lingua franca (i.e. that it is used between groups of non-native speakers).

Thus, the native speaker is "no longer given the primary role in determining the future of the language" (Watterson, 2011, p.47). Moreover, the term EIL in particular (rather than other, similar terms, such as World English or Global English), is strongly associated to the field of ELT (Watterson, 2011).

2.4 The traditional approach

After having established how culture and language are linked together and having explained the meaning and the relevance of EIL principles, the question arises of how culture is treated in the modern ELT context.

Traditionally, culture has been treated in relation to nationality (Tornberg, 2009, p. 65). In this context, the 'target language' is often considered to correspond to the 'target culture', which mirrors the behaviours, attitudes, and dispositions of a cultural group, defined by its nationality (Sayer & Meadows, 2012). A related aspect of the traditional way of

addressing culture in language teaching is that the native speaker is considered the norm, both with respect to linguistic competence and to the culture of the native speaker's country of origin (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002).

This represents a simplistic view of the treatment of culture in language teaching, which is contradictory to the principles of EIL and has been under much critique over the last few decades. Cook (2008) problematizes the native-speaker model in language teaching, arguing that such a model may “constrain [the students] to the activities of monolinguals rather than the richness of multilingual use” (p. 173), and that it could have a frustrating impact on them because of the inevitable discovery that they will never fully match the native speaker. Therefore, Cook (2008) argues, the students need to be provided with models of successful foreign-language users to whom they can relate, since “[t]he students’ target needs to relate to the roles that they will assume when using the second language” (p. 172). Since identification and motivation are intertwined (Dörnyei, 2003), the opportunity to identify with other non-native English users is relevant for the language learning process from a motivational perspective.

Moreover, a variety of factors like country, religion, class, sex, and field of business influence language use (Cook, 2008). This suggests that languages and cultures are intertwined in complex ways, as Kramersch (1993) puts it: “in modern, historically complex, open societies it is much more difficult to define the boundaries of any particular social group and the linguistic and cultural identities of its members” (p. 66).

Hence, although there is a connection between the language spoken by a social group and the identity of that group, “[i]n today’s multilingual context, culture is no longer shared membership in one singular community of likeminded individuals who all share the same history, memories and dreams of the future. Culture has become deterritorialized” (Kramersch, 2014, p. 250). Therefore, in a global and multicultural society, a growing acknowledgement for the necessity of an intercultural approach to language teaching has emerged (see e.g. Perry & Southwell, 2011; Kramersch, 1993; 1995; 2014; Byram, 1997; Baker, 2015; Chlopek, 2008).

2.5 The intercultural approach

Perry & Southwell (2011) encapsulate some definitions and conceptualisations of IC that have differed between scholars over the years by concluding that all of them acknowledge that “intercultural competence is the ability to use knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviour to

interact effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures” (Perry & Southwell, 2011, p. 455).

Using similar expressions, Chlopek (2008) encapsulates the meaning of, and implications for teaching intercultural competence in ELT, by arguing that systematic training thereof invites the students to gain knowledge of different cultures and to “develop the ability to compare their native culture to other cultures, to evaluate critically and to apply this knowledge successfully in both verbal and non-verbal communication, for both transactional and interactional purposes” (p. 4). Chlopek (2008) further argues that by learning English in the context of EIL, students will become interculturally competent in the sense that they will be able to interact with people from all over the world in culturally diverse environments (Chlopek, 2008), which exemplifies that the IC approach is comprised within the principles of EIL.

2.6 Cultural and linguistic imperialism

A number of researchers have emphasised the importance of improving the application of research on IC and EIL to pedagogies and instructional materials in ELT. (e.g., Alpketin, 2002; McKay, 2003, Baker, 2015). McKay (2003) for example, convincingly argues that “English belongs to its users, and as such it is the users’ cultural content and their sense of the appropriate use of English that should inform language pedagogy.” (p. 13). Along this line, Alptekin (2002) highlights the need for a language pedagogy that treats the language-culture relationship from an intercultural, EIL-perspective. Despite this, the native-speaker norm and the nationalisation of the relationship between language and culture still influence the treatment of culture and intercultural competence in ELT (e.g., Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002; Alptekin, 2002; McKay, 2003; Chlopek, 2008; Kramsch, 2014; Baker, 2015). It seems as if, even when there is an ambition to move away from the traditional approach, towards IC and EIL, it is still difficult to realise fully.

One reason for the discrepancy between current research about EIL and IC, and the imbalanced occurrence of the traditional approach in ELT pedagogy and materials, could possibly be related to influential English language policy makers working within a structure that Phillipson (2009) calls ‘linguistic imperialism’, which in turn is linked to cultural imperialism (Phillipson, 2009). Phillipson means that:

Throughout the entire post-colonial world, English has been marketed as the language of ‘international communication and understanding’, economic ‘development’, ‘national unity, and similar positive ascriptions, but these soft-cell terms obscure the reality of globalization, which is that the majority of the world’s population is being impoverished, that natural resources are being plundered in unsustainable ways, that the global cultural and linguistic ecology is under threat, and that speakers of most languages do not have their linguistic human rights respected (Phillipson 2009, p. 41—42).

Comparably, Pennycook (1998) identifies a link between practices, theories and contexts of ELT, and English colonialism, and criticises the lack of discussion in Applied linguistics and ELT research.

In sum, the relationship between language and culture, the international status of the English language and the diverse purposes for learning it worldwide, the importance of teaching IC, combined with the issues of the traditional approach and linguistic imperialism, are all factors that affect the practice of teaching culture in ELT today. Similarly, they are all relatable factors to the studies of cultural contents in ELT textbooks, which will be reviewed in the following section.

3 Literature review

A cultural group could be related to a nationalisation of the relationship between language and culture, meaning that the total amount of citizens of a country is considered a cultural group. It could also refer to people of different race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, professional contexts, age, or subculture, or even more probable, a combination of several of these categories. In the papers included in this review, the groups in focus are those that refer to nationality, race, gender, and socioeconomic status.

The review is divided into two sections. The first contains studies that have investigated bias in relation to representations of nationality of character, of countries/regions, and of English varieties. The second section treats studies with additional focus on bias related to race, and/or gender, and/or socioeconomic status.

3.1 Representations of English variety, character nationality and, countries/regions

In a study by Matsuda (2002), the representation of English users and uses in seven beginning EFL textbooks used in secondary schools (7th grade) in Japan was explored, and the findings were discussed in relation to the way English is used globally. To investigate the representation of English *users*, Matsuda noted the nationality of the main characters of each textbook and counted the number of words uttered by each character. Regarding the nationality of characters, she reported that of the 74 main characters, almost 50% were Japanese (an expanding-circle country) followed by those from inner-circle countries including the U.S., Canada, Australia, and Scotland. Only two characters from outer-circle countries, and five characters from expanding-circle countries other than Japan, were identified. A similar pattern was reported regarding the number of words uttered, with inner-circle country characters and Japanese characters producing 3074 words and 2844 words respectively. Characters from the outer and expanding circles produced only 213 and 419 words, respectively.

With regards to what kinds of English *uses* were represented, Matsuda (2002) identified the countries in which the characters used English in order to place them in different contexts of English uses. Then, the number of chapters depicting each context was counted. The main categories for these contexts were named: “(1) Japan, (2) inner-circle countries, (3) outer-circle countries, (4) expanding-circle countries other than Japan” (Matsuda, 2002, p.187). The results showed that the use of English occurs more often in Japan and the inner circle. English use in the expanding-circle is not represented in any of the textbooks. Intranational and international use were also examined, and similar results were reported, showing a predominant representation of native speakers in intranational use, and a predominant representation of international use between native and non-native speakers. In other words, the textbooks contain more situations where native-speakers talk between themselves than situations where non-native speakers talk between themselves, in single-country settings. In contrast, in international settings the conversation is often set between a native speaker and a non-native speaker.

Matsuda (2002) concluded that there was an overall predominating representation of inner-circle countries in all the issues investigated, which implied that native speakers were the dominant users of English, while users from the outer and expanding circles were marginalised, and thus depicted as secondary users. She also reported that, even though many

main characters represented Japanese users, the lack of intranational use between them, gave the impression that they were “prototypical examples of EFL learners [rather than] regular and extensive users of English” (Matsuda, 2002, p. 195).

A study by Shin, Eslami and Chen (2011) came to similar conclusions regarding the overrepresentation of inner-circle countries in EFL textbooks. They investigated if 25 internationally distributed textbooks on different levels (from seven series) (1) reflect the cultural perspective of the EIL paradigm, and (2) how comprehensively the textbooks represent that perspective. Using a mixed method, quantifying the findings of a qualitative content analysis of the texts, different aspects of culture was subdivided into categories of inner-, outer-, and expanding-circle countries. The results show a domination of cultural content belonging to inner-circle countries. However, some textbook series feature some global and international content, e.g. role-playing exercises and email exchanges among global English speakers, which shows that there is some ambition to align with EIL principles (Shin et al., 2011). Shin et al. (2011) drew the conclusion that inner-circle cultures dominate in the textbooks investigated, and that this stands in contrast to the fact that the majority of English speakers use English in international contexts.

Although using a different system from that of Kachru (1985) for categorising regions and countries, Yuen (2011) also reported an imbalance regarding cultural representation. He investigated the representation of cultures of English speaking countries contra cultures from other foreign countries in an English as a second language (ESL) context in Hong Kong. A total of twelve books from two series of ESL secondary textbooks, commonly used in Hong Kong, were chosen. Both texts and pictures were analysed. The cultural aspects were identified as “a mention or depiction of products, practices, perspectives, or persons of a place that is foreign and its connection to the origin is obvious” (Yuen, 2011, p. 461). These mentions or depictions were counted with reference to categories of origin: Asian countries, African countries, and Western countries (subdivided into English-speaking western countries and non-English speaking Western countries).

Although Kachru’s (1985) model, used in the aforementioned studies, and the model used by Yuen (2011), differ in some obvious respects (for example, there are both Asian and African countries that would be included in Kachru’s outer circle), the findings and conclusions drawn from the studies using Kachru’s model, point to the same general directions as do Yuen’s study. Hence, Yuen (2011) reported that the cultures of the Western English-speaking countries dominate the total cultural content analysed (336 out of 494 samples), followed by the Asian countries (136 out of 494), and lastly by the African

countries (18 out of 494). Thus, Yuen (2011) identified a strong cultural bias towards Western, particularly English-speaking countries; a result comparable to the inner-circle dominance reported in the studies above. In addition, He concluded that the cultures represented in the textbooks were “fragmented and stereotypical” (Yuen, 2011, p. 464).

Comparable findings regarding a general overrepresentation of inner-circle countries is presented in a study by Meidani and Pishghadam (2012). However, they also report an overall increase of EIL principles in textbooks over time. Their analysis was conducted on four EFL textbooks in relation to the concept of EIL. To see if the EIL perspective had changed over time, the textbooks were selected with reference to different publication dates (1995, 1996, 2005 and 2006) of which the two latter ones claim to have a global perspective on English. The study was conducted in an Iranian context, but the textbooks chosen had all been used extensively internationally.

Meidani & Pishghadam (2012) primarily looked at (1) the division of representation between inner-, outer- and expanding-circle countries, (2) representation of dialogues in non-English speaking countries or non-native dialects in relation to English speaking countries and native dialects, and (3) the representation and depiction of famous people. The percentage of representations was calculated for the first two questions, and for the third question the nationalities of famous people were noted.

The results regarding representation of countries (1) showed that references to inner-circle countries have decreased over the years. For example, the textbook published in 1995 showed a representation of inner circle-countries of 93 % (outer/expanding 8%), while the one published in 2006 showed an inner-circle country representation of 29% (outer/expanding 71%). The results for representation of dialogue settings and dialects (2) showed an increase of non-native accents over time. The inclusion of non-native accents in the books from 1995 and 1996 was 0%, while the 2006 book had an 18% inclusion. The same pattern was presented regarding the representation of dialogues in non-English speaking countries. Featuring a 25 % share of dialogues in a non-English speaking setting, the book published in 2006 was the only one to include these types of dialogues at all. The findings regarding representation and depiction of famous people (3) showed that, apart from the 2006 book, a majority of the famous people depicted, come from inner-circle countries, most of them being American Hollywood figures. They also reported that even though the depiction of famous non-native speaking characters had increased in the latest published textbook, they noted a difference in the type of people that are represented between the famous people from inner-

circle countries (e.g., Hollywood personalities, singers, successful sportsmen) and those from outer- and expanding-circle countries (people engaging in humanitarian activities).

Thus, Meidani and Pishghadam (2012) showed that there has been a gradual increase in representation of speakers, settings, and depiction of famous people from outer- and expanding-circle countries, hence an increased support of the EIL perspective on English language teaching was identified. However, the authors concluded that a completely democratized view of the issues regarding non-native accents and dialogues in non-English speaking countries, is still relatively far fetched, and that “there is still room for inclusion of marginalized cultures” (Meidani & Pishghadam, 2012, p. 10).

In the light of the overrepresentation of Western and inner-circle countries, specifically the US and the UK, reported in the studies so far, the representation of race becomes a relevant aspect. If we accept that representation of country/region, speaker status and race are equally relevant from a perspective of power imbalance in language teaching, the issues of gender, and socioeconomic status also become relevant. The following section comprises studies that — apart from investigating bias of country/region or English variety — have additionally explored biases related to race, gender, or socioeconomic status.

3.2 Representations of English variety, character nationality, and countries/regions, with an additional perspective on race, gender and socioeconomic status

Lee (2009) investigated the cultural content of 11 high-school EFL conversation textbooks in Korea. Exploring the pictures and drawings, Lee (2009) found that the majority depicted people of European ethnicity, specifically middle-class figures in a US setting, communicating in English with the same ethnic groups or with Koreans. Analysing the texts, he also found that the US variety among all English-speaking cultures was presented as the highest ranking source of the English language. Thus, Lee (2009) concluded that the books are not designed to enable intercultural communicative competence.

Similarly, bias related to nationality/region and race was investigated by Su (2016), but in his study gender was also included. One series of six volumes of Taiwan EFL textbooks for grades 10 to 12 (ages 16-18) was analysed. The study focused on the reading passages of the books, where cultural representation in relation to EIL, intercultural/international understanding and communication, diversity and globalisation were investigated. One aspect

of investigation in the study was representation of regions. Su (2016) reported that the US (50%) and the UK (11%) dominate other native English-speaking and non-native English-speaking countries. European countries were represented by 11 %, leaving what she calls “the near east/Arabic culture” (Su, 2016, p. 397) and African countries/cultures underrepresented. Another angle investigated was “the limited awareness of English and the need for international communication” (Su, 2016, p. 397). From these results, Su (2016) concludes that the textbook series fail in helping students understand the changing status of the English language with regards to it being an international language spoken in many different varieties all over the world. In fact, she reports that no examples of varieties of English was given, except the standard varieties of the US and UK. Additionally, Su (2016) analysed “the theme of over-generalized cultural concepts and limited understanding of diversity”, looking at different countries/regions in relation to the themes of e.g. literary works, famous people, lifestyles, and science. In all themes, the US, UK and European countries were shown to have a much higher coverage than other countries and regions.

Overall, the study shows bias regarding nationality, region, race, gender and language variety, depicting white, Caucasian or American male characters as predominating, particularly those originating from the US or UK, leaving marginalised groups (including females in the US and Europe) in the periphery. Also, although the texts in some ways “develop a positive influence of [...] the need for competence in English being global, the complex dimensions of globalization on the expansion of English and global Americanization throughout the world is not addressed, nor is how their business views and popular culture is exported to peripheral territories” (Su, 2006, p. 403).

In a study by Sherman (2010), native-speaker bias, and gender-bias were explored through dialogue analyses in four internationally distributed EFL textbooks. To distinguish between native-speakers and non-native speakers, he used Kachru’s model of the inner, outer and expanding circles. Furthermore, two frameworks, originally developed for the study of gender bias, were adapted and used to analyse the dialogues: (1) Jones, Kitemu & Sunderland’s (1997) quantitative categories of *initiation*, *turns*, and number of *words spoken* in mixed-sex dialogues. Since Sherman (2010) was also looking at native-speaker bias in same-sex, and mixed-sex dialogues, that aspect was added, classifying the speakers as non-native male or female, and native male or female; (2) Lesikin’s (2001) framework was used to search for speaker- and gender-bias with regards to frequency of “gender-specific nouns and pronouns as *theme* and *last stressed element* in ‘unmarked’ clauses for [...] female and male speakers [respectively]” (Sherman, 2010, p. 275). This perspective was included since it can reveal

‘communicative prominence’, which means that the gender in the position of theme or of last stressed element is implicitly depicted as the gender of higher social status (Lesikin, 2001 as cited in Sherman, 2010, p. 270). As with the framework of Jones’s et al (1997), the aspects of native-speaker/non-native speaker were added by Sherman (2010) to enable the detection of communicative prominence in both gender and speaker.

The results showed an overall discrimination of both gender and speaker status, favouring native English-speaking males. Regarding the themes of initiation, turns and words spoken, non-native females were underrepresented in mixed-sex and same-sex dialogues, followed by non-native men in mixed-sex dialogues. Native-speaker dominance was also found regarding the theme of communicative prominence. However, Sherman (2010) found it noteworthy that famous people from non-native speaking countries are from a high status of socioeconomic background. Sherman (2010) concludes that, overall, the non-native speaker is portrayed in an unfair and biased way. The native-speakers are given roles of higher communicative prominence, since non-native speakers do not initiate dialogues with native-speakers, but rather passively respond to native-speaker initiatives. According to Sherman (2010), this higher communicative prominence suggests that native speakers have a higher social status, and thus possesses more power, compared to non-native speakers.

Comparable unequal power relations were investigated in a study by Song (2013). She analysed how cultural representations and intercultural interactions in ELT textbooks are reflected in relation to race, gender, nationality and English variety. The reading sections of four Korean English language textbooks “from relatively large Korean textbook publishers” (Song, 2013, p. 384) were chosen. She states that the analysis was made in the light of the Korean national English curriculum which emphasis the importance of understanding diverse cultures and languages, promoting cultural awareness, and in the light of Apple’s (2001) discussion on unequal power relations reproduced in curricula and textbooks (Song, 2013, p. 383).

Regarding, race gender and nationality, Song (2013) reported that overall, the representation of white, male, specifically American characters, dominate the textbook content, although characters of other nationalities are included to some extent, which according to her, points to an ambition of promoting diverse cultures and intercultural understanding. However, she reports that these characters of other nationalities are not represented in audio clips and texts with respect to English variety. In fact, there are only three varieties represented that are not American, of which only two are examples of non-standard varieties (one British, one Bangladeshi, and one Indian). Alike Sherman (2010), she

reported it to be noteworthy that the characters representing non-standard varieties reflect higher socioeconomic status, which puts these characters in powerful positions. She means that this may help “challenge negative cultural stereotypes” (Song, 2013, p. 386). She concludes that the analysis showed unequal cultural representations revealing the dominance of white and male representations. In terms of intercultural interactions, the majority of the examples engage in a superficial level of cultural engagement which, according to Song, reproduces inequality.

4 Discussion

Several of the studies reviewed came to very similar conclusions and implications. Overall, a domination of white, male textbook characters from inner-circle countries, particularly from the US and UK, often depicted with high socioeconomic status, was found. In contrast, places and characters from outer- and expanding-circle countries were underrepresented, often depicted as less successful users of English, and sometimes depicted as coming from a lower socioeconomic background. Also, a general elevation of western values was reported by e.g., Meidani & Pishghadam (2012) and Yuen (2011). These results do not reflect contents that are up-to-date with current research on IC and EIL, which shows a clear gap between the treatment of culture in ELT textbooks in use and the recommendations of research. Because of the fact that all of the material reviewed come from Asia, it is not possible to generalise from these results. However, the studies indicate that cultural imbalances occur in both locally distributed ELT textbooks in several countries in Asia and in some internationally distributed ones, which signals that issues of IC and EIL need attention and further investigation in several more textbooks and parts of the world.

As mentioned in the background section, Kachru’s (1985) model has been criticised, and the use thereof could be questioned. It is probable that the reason for its use in some of the studies is that it is a tool that provides a general perception of the spread of English. Moreover, this general depiction is interesting from a sociolinguistic perspective with reference to power imbalances. The results emerging in relation to Kachru’s circles can be seen as eloquent for the view that textbook developers present regarding English cultural and language ownership in the sense that they reflect Kachru’s circles regarding representation. In this sense, despite its shortcomings, the model is a good way of exposing the flaws of textbooks concerning contents that do not match EIL principles and an IC approach, and

therefore the results that the use of this model produce can work as departure for discussion and further research.

When analysing the findings of the reviewed studies, two themes emerge as prominent. One concerns the consequences that the imbalances found have on learners' identification and motivation, and one concerns the consequences that they have on a reproduction of cultural and linguistic imperialism. These themes will be discussed separately below. Additionally, some proposals for solutions of how to make sure that IC and EIL principles become more prominent in ELT pedagogy and materials, will be discussed.

4.1 Consequences related to learner's identification and motivation

Several of the studies in this review conclude that imbalanced representation of characters from different cultures and countries have a problematic impact on learners' perceptions of the world and themselves. Su (2016), argues that her findings show a marginalisation of minority cultures and when they are included it is done in a simplistic manner which "encourages the reader to perceive cultural varieties, contradictions, and conflicts in a limited and potentially biased manner" (Su, 2016, p. 403). Comparably, Meidani and Pishghadam (2012) reported that the overrepresentation of wealthy, American Hollywood figures implied that these people represent universal, normative values, and suggests that this could be seen as an example of cultural imperialism. I am inclined to believe that the imbalance between depictions of successful, wealthy western characters contra characters from marginalised cultures struggling with humanitarian issues, tend to reproduce a conception of the dominating cultures as desirable, and the marginalised cultures as unenviable. This goes along the line of Yuen's (2011) conclusion which is that the cultures represented in the textbooks of his investigation are presented in a simplistic and stereotypical manner. Thus, even if, as Meidani and Pishghadam's (2012) study indicates, marginalised groups do make up a bigger part of textbooks these days, it is important to keep analysing and clarifying *how* dominating and marginalised cultures are depicted, and *what values* are ascribed to them, respectively. On the other hand, both Sherman's (2010) and Song's (2013) studies show another depiction of famous people from outer and expanding circles. These people do come from a high socioeconomic status, which could be seen as positive from an IC perspective, since this could work against the kind of stereotyping found in Meidani and Pishghadam's (2012) and Su's (2016) investigations.

Drawing on Cook's (2008) explanation of how the enabling of students' identification to other non-native users of English is an important aspect of language learning, it seems reasonable to believe that learners from outer- and expanding-circle countries should get the opportunity to identify, not only with people that are successful in using English as non-native speakers, but with people of different and diverse race, gender and socioeconomic status. These factors may also affect the outlooks for learners' identification with the characters in the textbooks. For instance, a female English-language student from an expanding-circle country, coming from a certain social background, might find it difficult to identify with a male character from an inner-circle country, coming from a different social background. On the other hand, this might not necessarily be the case, since there might be other factors enabling identification. Moreover, it would be difficult to produce a textbook that satisfies all students in this respect. Despite this, it may still be the case that the overall biased structure found in these studies, influence many learners in a way that is not beneficial for their identification, and henceforth their self-esteem and confidence. Along this line, Song (2013) argues that an introduction to different English varieties and information about the validity of 'accented English' can encourage speaker confidence amongst students. Similarly, Matsuda (2002) argues that more representation of dialogues in 'English as lingua franca' and multilingual settings from outer-circle countries could help learners understand that successful use of English is not exclusive to the inner circles.

Furthermore, identification and motivation are related (see Background section), and hence, the identification issues described here might have an impact on the learners' motivations to learning English, and possibly to their success in learning it. It could be argued that the Hollywood characters mentioned in some of the studies are included because they are hoped to work motivationally. Since global media contains much Hollywood products, characters and references, their inclusion in ELT materials for motivational reasons may not be unjustified. One could argue that this content is simply giving the learners what they want to engage in, and hence need, to facilitate language learning. On the contrary, however, it could be argued that the language teaching community has a responsibility to democratise language teaching and to challenge linguistic and cultural imperialistic norms and values, and as Phillipson (2009) suggests, be more sensitive to linguistic human rights, and global cultural and linguistic ecology.

4.2 Consequences related to linguistic and cultural imperialism

On the basis of the findings presented in this review, it is clear that there are linguistic and cultural power imbalances present in several modern ELT textbooks, and that these imbalances impact on the textbooks' conformity to research on EIL and IC. In relation to the representation of Hollywood figures, Meidani and Pishghadam (2012) discuss that the glorified consumerism and materialism that these characters depict are related to linguistic and cultural imperialism, and demonstrate "the hidden social, political and economic agenda backing the current status of the language" (p.11). Song (2013) argues that his results implied that the notion of interculturalism that was found in the textbooks "did not challenge but instead reproduced and legitimised unequal social and cultural relations" (p. 388). In the same manner as Song (2013), I believe that it is a probable implication that some ELT textbooks seem to reproduce, rather than challenge and problematize imbalanced sociocultural relations, and arguing along the line of Meidani and Pishghadam (2012), these imbalances seem to be related to linguistic and cultural imperialism. Concerning the linguistic imbalances, it could be argued that an overrepresentation of one variety is inevitable when it comes to spelling, grammar, and formal language, due to practicality, and to the fact that mixing varieties could cause confusion. When it comes to audio materials (see Song, 2013) and cultural contents though, this standardisation becomes less defensible. From an EIL perspective, it does not match international functionality, and therefore it is probably unbeneficial for the students' learning, since they should be prepared to interact with the vast majority of English-speaking people that are not part of the standardised varieties and cultures that are overrepresented in the ELT textbooks presented in this review. For many English learners it may be more probable that they need cultural knowledge that is *not* connected to the inner-circle countries.

The studies presented in this review undoubtedly show a gap between research on IC and EIL and its application in ELT textbooks in use. Phillipson's (2009) and Pennycook's (1998) explorations of the spread of English, and how imperialistic and globalised structures impact language policy makers and material developers over the world become relevant for a discussion on why ELT textbooks have not adapted more to research. It is an interesting topic for discussion and research, but it will not be further discussed here.

4.3 Suggested solutions

Based on the findings presented in this paper, some proposals of solutions to these challenges will be discussed here. Firstly, considering the imperialistic power structures that are intertwined in the ELT context, as discussed by Phillipson (2009) and Pennycook (1998), it is probably necessary that material developers and publishers develop a more critical stance to biased cultural representations, and that they increase their engagement in discussions about EIL and IC. However, alike e.g., Meidani and Pishghadam (2012), and Su (2016), I believe that it is also crucial that teachers develop a critical awareness in relation to IC and EIL regarding ELT textbooks in order to counteract reproduction of the equality present. Yuen (2011) on the other hand, further suggests that apart from applying an awareness in relation to their ELT context, teachers also have a responsibility to choose appropriate material and take more initiative in giving feedback to publishers, rather than acting as “passive end-users” (Yuen, 2011, p. 465). Related to teacher responsibility is teacher training, which may also play a part in strengthening the quality of materials over time, through educating teachers on the making and evaluation of textbooks.

Furthermore, I believe that it might not be suffice that teachers use their critical awareness to choose, evaluate and complement teaching materials, but it might also be beneficial to raise awareness among students. In the study by Su (2016), it is suggested that the elements of cultural imperialism present in the textbooks should be discussed between teachers and students. She means that since the global expansion of English is not problematized in the textbooks, teachers need to take responsibility to make their students aware of the importance of the cultural, commercial, and political uses of English worldwide, and help them “understand how the global media/economy promotes dominant cultural hegemony (cultural imperialism) at the expense of less-empowered groups” (Su, 2016, p. 404). Regardless of all the benefits there are to learning an international language, I believe that it is an important task for the ELT teacher to help learners to also critically problematize related sociolinguistic and sociocultural issues. Nevertheless, judging from the results of the studies analysed in this review, dealing with ELT material containing extensive and consistent linguistic and cultural imbalances seems a relatively large task for a teacher to take on. Therefore, to facilitate these classroom reflections it seems absolutely necessary that textbook developers take responsibility for adapting their work to better reflect EIL and IC principles. However, all of the above mentioned types of awareness-making acts of education and responsibility-taking, from student level to publisher level, would together be helpful to

prevent the reproduction of imbalanced cultural and linguistic power-relations in ELT classrooms over the world.

5 Conclusion and further research

5.1 Conclusion

The aim of this review was to explore whether there is a gap between current ELT research on EIL and IC, and current applications thereof in ELT textbooks. Within this aim, two research questions were posed: (1) is bias regarding region/country, character nationality and language variety present in the cultural content of ELT textbooks? (2) Is bias regarding race, gender and socioeconomic status present in the cultural content of ELT textbooks?

Based on findings in the studies reviewed, I draw the conclusion that a number of internationally, and locally distributed ELT textbooks in Asia, do not match modern principles and ambitions of EIL and IC that exist in the ELT research community, and in several curricular frameworks over the world. Findings reporting bias in relation to representation of region/country, character nationality, and language variety, show linguistic and cultural imbalances that seem to be contrary to the principles of EIL and IC. In addition, it is clear that there is bias regarding the representation of race, gender, and socioeconomic status in these textbooks, which contributes to unequal cultural representation. Over all, this suggests that there are both linguistic and cultural power-imbalances present in the textbooks that favour certain groups. In the case of this review, these groups have been identified as successful, white, male native-speakers of English from high socioeconomic backgrounds. In turn, the groups that have been identified as marginalised have sometimes been depicted as less successful, and less powerful.

More studies, looking at more publishers, would be needed, especially from additional parts of the world, but the studies reviewed here suggest that ELT textbooks need to decrease the content representing Western inner-circle countries, and increase content representing outer- and expanding-circle countries. In addition, characters from non-Western areas should be given more space in dialogues, and equal value should be placed on native- and non-native varieties and life-experiences. Moreover, equal representations of gender are apparently needed.

5.2 Further research

When searching for studies to review for this paper, it came as a surprise that few critical examinations of ELT textbooks could be found outside Asia. One could wonder if the lack of European or Western studies could be due to the fact that these populations and language policy makers might, to a greater degree than in Asia, be blind to the global Americanisation of culture, and to Western influence on English language policies. Could that in turn be related to the fact that British and US military and colonial interests and events, historically have had more negative impacts in Asia than in Europe? This question goes beyond the scope of this paper, but it is an interesting note, which in order to be properly answered needs further investigation. Nevertheless, the absence of similar studies from other parts of the world calls for further research in this respect.

Another related area of further research is how aware language material developers are of the issues raised in this review, and if and how they reflect on possible impacts from global language policies. It could be argued that publishers work within a global structure of language policies, which in their turn exist within the structure of linguistic and cultural imperialism, and hence, the influence from these structures may be stronger than the influence of the ELT research community, regarding ELT textbook development. While it is easy to see the connection between internationally distributed textbooks and language policies from countries such as the UK and the US, favouring the native-speaking stakeholders of the industry, as Pennycook (1998) and Phillipson (2009) convincingly suggest, it is perhaps a less obvious connection in the case of locally distributed textbooks. Therefore, it would be an interesting topic of research to explore the awareness and attitudes regarding EIL, IC and linguistic and cultural imperialism, of local ELT material developers.

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