A Comparative Analysis of the Cultural Contents and Elements in International and Localized ELT Textbooks

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Abstract

Considering the significant role of textbooks as culture carriers and the role that culture plays in the process of language learning, this study aimed at the cultural analysis of two widely used textbook series in the Iranian context. To this end, the *Touchstone* and *Iran Language Institute (ILI)* series were analyzed and compared for cultural content adopting Cortazzi and Jins's (1999) and Tajeddin and Teimournezhad's (2014) frameworks. The cultural elements of the series were also investigated utilizing Adaskou et al.'s (1990) model. In terms of cultural contents, *ILI* represented all four types of cultural contents, though not with equal weight; whereas, in the *Touchstone* series, the target culture followed by international themes had more weight, and the source culture had almost gone unnoticed. As for cultural elements, while both aesthetic and sociological senses of culture were highly dominant in both series, pragmatic and semantic senses were not in the spotlight. Furthermore, Chi-square tests indicated significant differences between these two series in terms of both cultural content and element representations.

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1. Introduction

Textbooks play a prominent role in the challenging process of English language teaching and learning. Today, both printed and digital formats are inseparable parts of any language learning curriculum. In fact, they act like a roadmap via which a pedagogical program can be pursued, or a course can be taught. To underscore the significance of textbooks in language education, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) take the discussion to another level and consider textbooks as an authority or an ideology in educational settings. Hence, it can be perceived that textbook design, development, and publication are considered a controversial task as it largely needs to fulfill educational, ideological, commercial, and even local obligations. A huge part of this controversy is related to cultural content inclusion, i.e., to what extent the source, target, or international culture needs to be included in English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks and what cultural aspects can be disregarded. As Xiong and Qian (2012) put it, learning languages involves dominance over sociolinguistic, ideological, and cultural underpinnings that might be hidden within the lines of textbooks. That is why, with the prominent role of culture in ELT, specifically for successful interaction among speakers of various languages and users of instructional materials, textbooks, as carriers of culture, can help learners with the process of understanding other people's cultural beliefs, norms, and values.

Considering the significance of ELT textbooks as building blocks of language instruction, the role that culture plays in the process of their development, and the position of culture in reflecting social values, this study is aimed at evaluating the cultural contents and elements of international and localized ELT textbooks. For so doing, *Touchstone* and *the Iran Language Institute* (*ILI*) *New Elementary,* as two widely used international and local textbook series taught in English language institutes in Iran, were analyzed and compared for cultural contents and elements represented in all sections plus visuals. Given the large number of studies in the literature paying heed to textbook adoption/analysis in the Iranian K-12 settings, the ultimate goal of this evaluation was to adopt a framework to extract culture-related themes of local and international textbooks at the institutional level, present those themes based on the existing taxonomies, and provide a road map for both textbook users and developers.

2. Theoretical Framework

To review the literature on culture and its representation in ELT textbooks, the attention should initially be drawn to the 1950s and 1960s. Weninger and Kiss (2013) trace the history of culture in these two decades and conclude that culture was mostly considered to be an object, an idea, or a set of concepts about the target language. After years, in the second phase of the conducted research over time, the focus was gradually off that objective view towards culture and on the culture with small c (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). It was in this second wave that the presence and role of culture in the process of language acquisition was highlighted. As a result, a mounting number of studies were conducted with a focus on intercultural and transcultural themes, which later were reflected in Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), the model that informs the framework of the current study. Byram (1997) asserts that intercultural competence is the "knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others, their beliefs, and behaviors" (p. 24). In the same vein, Deardorff (2006) underscores the significance of effective communication in ELT intercultural settings based on each language learner's intercultural understanding, skill, and mindset. Following that trend, the culture and ELT interface in the new millennium is largely informed by concepts such as "intercultural competence of the world citizen" (Risager, 2007, p. 222), "global cultural consciousness" (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 164), and "intercultural citizenship" (Byram, 2008, p. 157).

In line with the dominance of globalization (Liu & Fang, 2017) and the existing intercultural or sociocultural paradigms, educational administrators have recently merged intercultural competence and culture-related elements into curricula, teaching materials, and textbooks (Baker, 2015). Consequently, textbooks can be considered as culture carriers or cultural artifacts that might project the more/less dominant culture, affect language learners' inclination towards their own/foreign culture, and change the way they appreciate the value

system of society (Byram, 2008). Moreover, raising cultural awareness of the learners would only be possible if they have access to instructional materials that promote diversity of cultures (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Canale (2016) also takes the same stance, draws on the significant role of teaching materials in classrooms, and considers textbooks as a medium for the presentation of cultural values. Accordingly, in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context like Iran, where exposure to cultural contents or elements might be limited, both local and international ELT textbooks would hold more important positions. Therefore, the reflection of various cultural beliefs, ethnic diversities, and the support for various viewpoints need to be integrated with such textbooks.

The growing number of studies on the role of culture in ELT textbooks can clearly explain the impact of content evaluation and comparison on textbook development (Al-Sofi, 2018; Baleghizadeh & Jamali Motahed, 2010; Cheng & Biglar Beigi, 2012; Choubsaz et al., 2018; Ghoorchaei et al., 2021; Khodadady & Jajarmi, 2016; Perfecto & Paterno, 2018; Rashidi & Zolfaghari, 2018; Sadeghi & Sepahi, 2017; Sahraee Juybari & Bozorgian, 2020; Shahidipour & Tahririan, 2017; Sidhu et al., 2018; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014). In the Iranian context, specifically, a comparative analysis of local and international ELT textbooks by Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) indicated that culturally neutral elements – with no reference to any context – were more highlighted in localized textbooks. Furthermore, the aesthetic aspects of culture in the local series were less emphasized compared to the sociological aspects. On the flip side, international textbooks were full of intercultural elements, and the aesthetic aspects had more weight. The authors concluded that the elements of the target culture were reflected, to a larger extent, in international ELT textbooks. In another study, Tajeddin and Bahrebar (2017), just focusing on the reading and dialogue sections of 2 series of ELT textbooks, reported more inclusion of culture-free contents with more emphasis on sociological elements in comparison with the aesthetical sense in local series. In the global textbooks, however, sociological and aesthetic elements outnumbered the ones in localized ones. Comparing 3 ELT textbooks from inner, outer, and expanding circles, Rashidi and Meihami (2016) found more L1 and L2 culture content inclusion in ELT textbooks of the inner circle while the ELT textbooks of the expanding circle included L1 and international cultural content to a greater extent. Anyhow, in the outer circle, the inclusion of L1, L2, and international culture was evident. In terms of cultural senses or elements, L2 aesthetic elements were more underscored in inner and outer circles while L1 aesthetic and pragmatic elements were more frequent in the expanding circle ELT textbooks. Conducting a study on three advanced *ILI* textbooks as local series, Ashrafi and Ajideh (2018) reported that the target culture was the dominant one while the source culture had gone almost unnoticed. The dominance of big C themes in advanced textbook 1 and the slight dominance of little c themes in advanced textbooks 2 and 3 emerged as other findings of this study. In a more recent study, Gheitasi et al. (2020) focused on the cultural content of the *Vison* series; textbooks that are currently used in public secondary schools of Iran and argued that Persian cultural content had a lot of weight in these series; the focus was on aesthetic, followed by semantic, sociological and sociolinguistic/ pragmatic senses of culture.

As an international ELT textbook series, some cultural analyses are conducted on the *Touchstone* series. Madhkhan and Tabatabaei (2019), analyzing a corpus of 20 out of the 48 units, including five units of each textbook, compared these four series and indicated that the dominant cultural sense was the sociolinguistic/ pragmatic sense of the target culture. Moreover, none of these four series outweighed in terms of intercultural content inclusion. More recently, Köksal and Ulum (2021) analyzed the reading passages, dialogues, and exercises of 3 sets of ELT textbooks from inner, outer, and expanding circles, including *Touchstone* I and II, as instances of the inner circle. They tried to explore the imbued hegemonic practices and concluded that the inner circle, English, hegemony was the dominant one in all these three series.

The reviewed studies were only a small portion of the research conducted to demonstrate culture representation in ELT textbooks, the studies that evidently explain the significance

of cultural content evaluation as a trending topic (McConachy & Hata, 2013). However, the review of the related literature indicates that such culture-related studies are either narrow in focus or scope of analysis (Babaii et al., 2019; Khodadady & Jajarmi, 2016; Shahidipour & Tahririan, 2017) or take one public school textbook/series of textbooks into account for their analysis (Ahmadi Safa & Karampour, 2019; Ashrafi & Ajideh, 2018; Bakhtiari & Saadat, 2015; Gheitasi et al., 2021; Roohani et al., 2013). Moreover, there are other studies (Tajeddin & Bahrebar 2017; Madhkhan & Tabatabaei, 2019; Köksal & Ulum, 2021; Mofidi & Hashemi, 2019; Sahraee Juybari & Bozorgian, 2020) that opt for specific sections of textbooks to the exclusion of the other parts. To fill this void, stress the importance of promoting intercultural competence (Byram, 1997) at the institute level (not just school level) and complement the work of other researchers analyzing cultural content of both localized and international ELT textbooks (see Tajeddin & Teirmournezhad, 2014; Javadi & Azizinejad, 2017), this empirical study aimed to investigate the cultural contents and elements presented in all sections and visuals of two widely accepted textbook series in the Iranian ELT market. To this end, *Touchstone* (I & II) and *the Iran Language Institute* (*ILI*) *New Elementary* (I, II & III) series were analyzed and compared through the lens of two commonly used frameworks. Our study crystallizes around the following research questions:

1. How are cultural contents and elements represented in the *Iran Language Institute New Elementary* and *Touchstone* series?
2. Is there any significant difference between the *Iran Language Institute New Elementary* and *Touchstone* series in terms of cultural contents and elements?

3. Methodology

Before elaborating on the adopted framework, a brief explanation on the choice and status of the textbooks seems indispensable.

3.1. Textbooks under Scrutiny

According to the information on the website (Iran Language Institute, n.d.), the *ILI* is the oldest nationwide ELT institute in Iran. With more than 300 centers all over the country, its

main goal after the Islamic Revolution has been to appreciate local and Islamic values to present a new educational model based on the current conditions of the society (Iran Language Institute, n.d.); the values that have had their impact on the teaching materials and the textbooks the *ILI* publishes. The *New Elementary* (I, II & III) series that was first published in the 2017 academic year by *ILI* Press are the adults' department textbook authored by the Research and Planning Department. With nine units in each textbook, the focus of the series is on developing the four language skills, specifically speaking, by adopting a topic-based syllabus (Iran Language Institute, n.d.). *Touchstone Second Edition* (McCarthy et al., 2014), as the other widely used series in Iran, is a mixed media product published by Cambridge University Press. With 12 units in each textbook, the back cover of the student's book introduces the product as "an innovative four-level series for adults and young adults based on research into the Cambridge English Corpus. *Touchstone* teaches English as it is really used" (Touchstone, 2014). In order to have a homogeneous comparative analysis with respect to cultural contents and elements, we opted for *Touchstone I* and *II* plus all three textbooks of *New Elementary*; the rationale for doing so was to have two localized and international ELT textbook series that prepare learners to gain the same level of language proficiency, A1 and A2 (basic level) based on the categorization on https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/ offered by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages.

3.2. Frameworks for Data Collection and Analysis

Informed by the previously conducted studies (Al-Sofi, 2018; Gheitasi et al., 2020; Mofidi & Hashemi, 2019), we adopted the framework proposed by Cortazzi and Jin (1999) to classify the cultural contents into three types: (1) source culture that represents cultural contents of learners' first language; (2) target culture that represents cultural contents of learners' target language; (3) international culture that encompasses the variety of cultural contents irrespective of learners' first and target language. Following the practice of Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014), another type of

content, (4) culturally neutral, was added to the adopted framework; the step taken to assign a category for the group of themes that might be cultural but without reference to any of the other three existing categories.

To classify the cultural elements, the framework proposed by Adaskou et al. (1990) was adopted. The aesthetic, sociological, semantic, and pragmatic meanings of culture form the four distinct areas of the framework. The aesthetic sense represents the big 'C' culture, where themes related to media, cinema, music, literature, geography, and history (Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014) are extracted. The sociological sense is equivalent to small 'c' culture that mostly deals with "the organization and nature of family, of home life, of interpersonal relations, material conditions, work and leisure, customs and institutions" (Adaskou et al., 1990, p. 3). The semantic sense is defined as the system of thinking and idea development that is inherent in the language, the system through which our perceptions are formed (Adaskou et al., 1990). Lastly, the pragmatic sense would be "the background knowledge, social skills, and paralinguistic skills that, in addition to mastery of the language code, make possible successful communication" (Adaskou et al., 1990, p. 4). Though the aesthetic and sociological senses represent cultural values in a more transparent way, the semantic and pragmatic senses of the framework lean towards conceptual and subjective orientations. Therefore, establishing the reliability of data collection and analysis was of the utmost importance.

Despite the qualitative nature of textbook content analysis and the focus on locating cultural themes, this study tried to quantify the results using frequency, percentage, and statistical measurements. By referring to the classifications presented in the adopted frameworks, a set of tables and charts was developed as our guiding principle. After forming the four types of cultural contents and the four strands of cultural elements using Word tables, about 10% of the whole data, three units of each textbook, was analyzed by two separate coders. Given that the coders were M.A. students of Applied Linguistics, they both were already familiar with the adopted frameworks. The analysis of inter-coder reliability using Cohen's (1988) kappa showed that the level of agreement between the coders was 0.71, which is usually considered to be an acceptable numeric term (Pallant, 2011).

4. Results

In the following section, the extracted cultural themes from both ELT textbook series, their frequency, percentage, and the obtained statistical measurements are presented to answer the research questions.

4.1. Representation of Cultural Contents and Elements

To demonstrate the four types of cultural contents and the four strands of cultural elements, all textual sections of *ILI New Elementary (I, II & III)* and *Touchstone (I & II)* such as warm-up activities, conversations, and mini dialogs, readings, vocabulary, and grammatical chunks, writing practices, form or function sections, pronunciation, and speaking hints were analyzed. To make the study more comprehensive, the visual sections of both ELT textbook series were also considered for inclusion and analysis. Altogether, the bulk of data turned to be 27 units of *ILI New Elementary* and 24 units of *Touchstone*. Table 1, as the initial part of the results, presents the cultural content counts and their related percentage terms to answer a part of the first research question.

Table 1
Frequency of Cultural Contents in ILI New Elementary and Touchstone

			Textbooks		Total
			ILI	*Touchstone*	
Cultural Contents	Source Culture	Count	304	1	305
		% Within cultural contents	99.7%	0.3%	100.0%
	Target Culture	Count	195	447	642

		% Within cultural contents	30.4%	69.6%	100.0%
	International Culture	Count	501	387	888
		% Within cultural contents	56.4%	43.6%	100.0%
	Culturally Neutral	Count	292	291	583
		% Within cultural contents	50.1%	49.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	1292	1126	2418
		% Within cultural contents	53.4%	46.6%	100.0%

As can be noticed in Table 1, *ILI New Elementary* represents all four types of cultural contents, though not with equal weight. The international culture is highly dominant with 501 counts, followed by the source culture (304), culturally neutral contents (292), and then the target culture (105). For *Touchstone*, however, the analysis results are different. Despite the weight of the target culture (447), international culture (387), and neutral themes (291), the source culture has almost gone unnoticed.

To come up with a definite answer to the first research question, the representation of cultural elements in the two series is also taken into account. Table 2, as the subsequent part of the results, presents the cultural elements of *ILI New Elementary* and *Touchstone* and their related percentage terms in the form of a cross-tabulation.

Table 2
Frequency of Cultural Elements in ILI New Elementary and Touchstone)

			Textbooks		Total
			ILI	*Touchstone*	
Cultural Elements	Aesthetic	Count	731	578	1309
		% Within cultural elements	55.8%	44.2%	100.0%
	Sociological	Count	486	443	929
		% Within cultural elements	52.3%	47.7%	100.0%
	Pragmatic	Count	24	60	84
		% Within cultural elements	28.6%	71.4%	100.0%
	Semantic	Count	51	45	96
		% Within cultural elements	53.1%	46.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	1292	1126	2418
		% Within cultural elements	53.4%	46.6%	100.0%

A general understanding of Table 2 is that while both aesthetic and sociological senses of culture - with 1309 and 929 counts - are highly dominant in the *ILI New Elementary* and *Touchstone* series, pragmatic (84) and semantic (96) senses are not in the spotlight. To demonstrate the explicit nature of aesthetic and sociological senses, the conceptual essence of pragmatic and semantic senses, and to complement the quantitative results of Tables 1 and 2, a small portion of the qualitative textbook analysis is presented in the following section. Table 3 depicts the analysis of the cultural contents and elements in the *ILI New Elementary*.

Table 3

Representation of Cultural Contents and Elements in the ILI New Elementary

Cultural Contents / Cultural Elements	Source culture	Target culture	International culture	Culturally neutral
Aesthetic	-Iranian cities: Tehran, Tabriz, Isfahan, Shiraz, Ahvaz & Yazd -Flag of Iran -Iranian nature and wildlife: Damavand, Alborz, Caspian Sea, The Persian Gulf, Persian leopard, Lut Desert, Gandom-e-Beryan & Karoon River -Iranian universities and institutions: Tehran University, Amir Kabir University, Kanoon & Iran Language Institute -A popular Iranian movie: Children of Heaven -Famous people, actors & actresses: Allame Jafari (philosopher), Hossein Shahriar (poet), Dr. Hessabi (mathematician), Hossein Behzad (painter), Sorayya Ghasemi (actress), Ali Hatami (director), Maryam Mirzakhani (math professor), Sohrab Sepehri (poet & painter), Nasreoddin stories -Iranian comedy show Khandevaneh -Cultural Monuments: Takht-e-Jamshid, mosques, Azadi square -Sightseeing places: Cypress of Abarkuh -Fashion: Iranian doll called Sara in local clothes	-Name of countries and cities: USA, America & London -Church -Famous people and celebrities: Harry Smith, Owen Wilson (American actor), Thomas Edison, Charles Dickens, Nelson Mandela, Jane Austen, David Copperfield, Oliver Twist, Muhammad Ali, Bill Gates, Josephine, Cochrane & Steve Jobs -Western companies: Apple Computer Company -Sightseeing places and tourist attractions: Tower Hotel, Sway, Hampshire, Laguna beach, Monash University & Mississippi River	-Name of countries and cities: Egypt, Dubai, Germany, Turkey, China, India & Bhutan -International foods and dishes: Turkish Baklava, Turkish and Spanish Omelet & Greek Salad -Sightseeing places and tourist attractions: Eiffel Tower, the Pyramids in Egypt, Mardan Palace in Turkey, Amazon, Danube &Volga River -A famous movie: Shanghai Noon -Famous people: Jackie Chan, Gandhi, Ludwig van Beethoven, Marie Curie, Pierre Curie & Pablo Picasso -A famous painting: Reading the Letter 1921 -Paris, the art capital of the world -Cubism, a style of painting traditions in South Korea -Banchan, a tradition in Mexico -Greek story, 'King Midas'	-A museum -An art exhibition -Art paintings -Comedy show -Horror movies -Sculpture -Movie genres -Musical instruments
Sociological	-Iranian customs and traditions: wearing hijab, saying prayers & thanking God -Iranian greetings: female hugging & male handshaking	-American lifestyles: a routine man habits in America -Traditions and customs: a culture shock in the USA, jaywalking	-Special days and ceremonies: Brazilian Independence Day - Russian victory day -Italian Republic Day -Rio Olympics -Dragon Boat Festival	-Parties and gatherings: wedding anniversary & birthday party -Family relationships:

	-Traditions: fasting in Ramadan -Special days and Ceremonies: Eid Al Fitr & Eid Al-Adha -Muslims -Iranian Yalda night -Iranian food: Kebab, Omelet, Shirazi Salad, Soup, Saffron Rice Pudding, stew & dessert	as a tradition in Australia -Celebrations: New Year's Eve & April's Fools' Day	-A tradition in Malaysia -A Japanese Festival, Setsubun -An African American celebration called 'Kwanzaa' -New Year celebration, fireworks -Customs around the world: a culture shock in India, different traditions, a tradition in France, a tradition in a lecture in Germany, a tradition in Korea, traditions in Latin America, kissing when greeting family -Relationships: Hindu families	mother-in-law, father-in-law -Helping others -Buying a gift for a birthday -Family relationships -Visiting relatives -Free time activities: a vacation at the beach
Pragmatic		-Rising and Falling intonations -Communication strategies -Formal and informal ways of speaking		
Semantic		-Idioms and proverbs like money grows on trees		

In light of the adopted framework (Adaskou et al., 1990), all culture-related themes of the *ILI New Elementary* series were recorded. Then, the most recurrent ones were picked and merged with each other to give a better visual representation in Table 3. It is evident that the four types of cultural contents and the four strands of cultural elements are embedded in the three textbooks. As for cultural elements, aesthetic and sociological-related themes have more weight, and as for cultural contents, source and international culture are highly dominant. Aesthetic aspects of the source, target, and international culture are realized through themes such as cities, nature, universities, movies, famous people, and tourist attractions, to mention only a few instances. The sociological aspects of the source and target culture revolve around themes such as traditions and ceremonies, greetings, and types of food, while the international culture is manifested through themes like special days of the countries (e.g., Italian Republic Day) and global events (e.g., the Olympics). The culturally neutral contents are presented through aesthetic (e.g., TV shows and musical instruments) and sociological (e.g., partying, family gatherings, and helping others) senses. Finally, the pragmatic and semantic senses, which are quite infrequent in the three textbooks, are realized merely through themes of the target culture like formal/informal ways of speaking, the intonation patterns of English, and the use of idioms and proverbs (e.g., money grows on trees); the point that can also be observed in the analysis of the *Touchstone* series, a portion of which is depicted in Table 4.

Table 4
Representation of Cultural Contents and Elements in Touchstone

Cultural Contents	Source culture	Target culture	International culture	Culturally neutral
Cultural Elements				
Aesthetic		-Name of countries and cities: USA, America, New York, Britain, South Africa & London -Actors, actresses & celebrities: Andrew Garfield, Johnny Depp, Josh Hutcherson & Scarlet Johansson -Music genres: folk -Singers: Adele, Mariah Carey, Javier Colon, Taylor swift, Cold Play, Chris Martin, the Beatles, Lady Gaga, Angelina Jolie & Lucy Liu -The flag of the USA -National anthem of England -Sightseeing places: Times Square, Statue of Liberty, Empire State Building, Central Park, Manhattan's Greenwich Village, Lake Tahoe, Shakespeare Theater & the Lighthouse Hotel in Scotland	-Name of continents, countries & cities around the world: China, Asia, Dubai & Turkey -Sightseeing places and tourist attractions: Dubai, Chill Out Ice Restaurant, Bangkok, Hajime Robot restaurant, Asian dishes, Shinjuku, Ginza, Wilson Park, France, Eiffel Tower, a palace in Istanbul, Turkey, Culhane park, Topkapi Palace, Bosphorus, Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia Mosque, Grand Bazar, Turkish rugs, the Cave hotel & the Spa Hotel in Austria -International singers and actresses: Enrique, Zhang Ziyi, Penelope Cruz & Shakira	-Art issues: museums & handicrafts -Natural beauties of places -Movies and TV shows -Music genres -Musical instruments
Sociological	-Woman wearing hijab	-Greetings: hugging & handshaking -American lifestyle: average American life & American routines -Special days & celebrations: April Fools' Day, Thanksgiving, New Year's Eve & maid of honor -Spare time activities and vacation destinations: vacation in Hawaii, Laguna beach & vacation in London	-Traditions and customs: Chinese & Mexican traditions -Special days and celebrations: Mexican day, Mexican ceremonies, Fiesta, taco, the festival of colors, Bonfires of Saint John, South American Carnivals -Asian foods: Chay, Turkish tea, Borek, Thai food & sushi	-Family relationships -Organization of family -Gift giving -Tardiness at work -Mother's Day -Party, birthday, anniversary & wedding ring -Housewarming party -Going to a country to learn about the culture -Tourist areas -Giving cards for birthdays -Outdoor activities

			-Spending time with friends
Pragmatic	-Falling and rising intonations -American and British accents -Conversation strategies -Formal and informal ways of speaking		-Small talks -Eye contact -Tips for a good conversation
Semantic	-Idioms and proverbs: Every cloud has a silver lining -Symbols in texting dates and months in the calendar of countries		

Table 4 presents the most recurrent themes as they are reflected in the cultural contents and elements of *Touchstone*. By way of comparison, the target culture has most of the weight among the four types of cultural contents, followed by international culture and culturally neutral themes. The source culture of the learners, however, with only one occurrence (a woman wearing hijab), has gone unnoticed. The four strands of cultural elements are considered in *Touchstone*, though not with equal weight. The aesthetic sense of the target and international culture is fully dominant, and it is realized through themes such as names of cities and countries, national anthems, sightseeing places, actors, actresses, and celebrities. The sociological sense, which holds the second rank of the cultural elements, is mainly realized through the themes of both target and international cultures, such as greetings, customs, traditions, food, and celebrations. The pragmatic sense is manifested through target culture (e.g., American & British accents) and culturally neutral themes (e.g., tips for a good conversation). Lastly, the idioms, proverbs, and symbols of the target culture help with the realization of the semantic sense.

Following a brief presentation of the qualitative results, the answer to the second research question would come into focus using quantitative measurements. To test the significance of the difference between the *ILI New Elementary* and *Touchstone* series in terms of cultural content representation, a Chi-square test of significance was conducted. The results can be observed in Table 5.

Table 5

Chi-square Test for the Differences between ILI New Elementary and Touchstone in Terms of Cultural Contents

Test	Value	*df*	*Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)*
Pearson Chi-Square	405.079	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	514.281	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	41.905	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	2418		

As Table 5 depicts, the value for Pearson chi-square was 405.079, with a degree of freedom of 3 and $p<.05$. Therefore, it can be concluded that there was a significant difference between the *ILI New Elementary* and *Touchstone* series in terms of cultural content representation.

Similarly, to complement the answer to the second research question, i.e., testing the significance of the difference between the *ILI New Elementary* and *Touchstone* series in terms of cultural elements representation, another Chi-square test was carried out. Table 6 presents the results.

Table 6
Chi-square Test for the Differences between ILI New Elementary and Touchstone in Terms of Cultural Elements

Test	Value	*df*	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	24.396	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	24.825	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.462	1	.004
N of Valid Cases	2418		

As can be observed in Table 6, the value for Pearson chi-square turned to be 24.396, with a degree of freedom of 3 and *p*<.05. Yet again, we can conclude that there was a significant difference between the *ILI New Elementary* and *Touchstone* series in terms of cultural elements representation.

5. Discussion

This comparative analysis was conducted to shed light on the representation of cultural contents and elements in two widely used local and international ELT textbook series in the Iranian context. From one side, with a bird's eye view, it provides evidence that cultural concepts are deeply rooted within the texts - what Chao (2011) calls covert syllabus - and visualizations of ELT textbooks (Dinh, 2017); and that their analysis, presentation, and understanding might reflect facts about textbook contents that have to be considered for developing language learner's ICC (Byram, 1997). From the other side, it could be realized that culture-related themes of such textbooks might lean towards a specific cultural context in disregard of cultural and ideological underpinnings of the others. To uncover that in the current study, using cross-tabulation analysis and frequency counts in the textbook series under investigation, it was realized that the *ILI New Elementary* represents more than 99% of the total contents reflecting the source culture. This can partly be linked to the macro policies of the *ILI* in producing 'Islamic-Iranian' contents and partly the inclination of the *ILI* textbook developers towards the use of source and international contents to reduce the weight of the western-oriented materials (Mofidi & Hashemi, 2019). The orientation towards international culture in *New Elementary*, as the *ILI* textbook developers explain in their symposiums and internal publications, is to familiarize the local language learners with the culture of other countries. However, a heavy reliance on the source culture (and similarly the international culture) can be mainly interpreted as the avoidance of Anglo-Saxon western culture (Aliakbari, 2004; Mofidi & Hashemi, 2019) to include more of the 'Islamic-Iranian' cultural contents (Iran Language Institute, n.d.) and to prevent the English-speaking countries dominance over the developing countries (Pishghada & Naji, 2012). As Pishghadam and Naji (2012) suggest, to deal with the issue of linguistic imperialism, which may consequently threaten local languages and cultures, localization and maintenance of national culture and identity can be considered as justifiable attempts. With regard to cultural element representation, our findings here are consistent with the arguments of Rashidi and Meihami (2016), Gheitasi et al. (2020), and Hassaskhah and Abdollahi (2021), who confirmed that the content of textbooks published in non-English-speaking countries mostly focused on the language learners' L1 culture; a focus that might hamper the development of learners' intercultural awareness (Majdzadeh, 2002). However, the findings contradict Ashrafi and Ajideh (2018), who reported the target culture as the dominant category in local textbooks.

The contents representing the target culture, however, were more highlighted in the *Touchstone* series. In other words, out of 642 culture-related themes reflecting the target culture, 447 (almost 70%) were found in *Touchstone*, whereas 195 (almost 30%) appeared in the *ILI New Elementary*. Considering that the *Touchstone* series are designed, developed, and published in an English-speaking country, the large number of target culture themes would be quite predictable. Taking into account the wide readership of internationally designed textbooks like *Touchstone*, part of this somehow one-sided view of culture is understandable; nevertheless, as Hager (2011) posits, an overemphasis on the western manifestation of culture hardly leaves room for other countries to present their cultural beliefs and values.

Moreover, presenting educational materials in contexts linked to learners' everyday lives can increase their learning motivation in EFL classes (Adaskou et al., 1990). In line with Pishghadam and Zabihi (2012), a shift from only-language classes to life-and language environments can pave the way for local culture inclusion in English written materials. The contents representing the international culture are probably the most encouraging findings of the current study. A large number of international cultural content could be rooted in the international readership and audience of Cambridge University products. Yet, when it comes to the culture of non-speaking English countries or marginalized contexts (Canagarajah, 2002; Kumaravadivelu, 2003), it seems that *Touchstone* fails to include contents that cover EFL learners' source culture (Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015). In line with the results of Mofidi and Hashemi (2019), out of 888 (36% of the total) extracted international culture-related themes, the *ILI New Elementary* with 501 (56%) and *Touchstone* with 378 (44%) counts, both represent contents that highly appreciate intercultural/transcultural underpinnings. It is via such balanced intercultural contents that the language learners can be guided towards global cultural consciousness (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Finally, out of 583 culturally neutral themes, 292 were found in the *ILI New Elementary* and 291 in the *Touchstone* series. Considering the weight of such culture-free pieces in relation to the total number of extracted themes (583 of 2418), our findings would be dissimilar to Tajeddin and Bahrebar's (2017), reporting that most of the cultural contents in their textbook corpus were culturally neutral.

As for cultural elements representation, a general view of the analysis indicated that aesthetic and sociologically-oriented themes - 92% of the total counts - are by far the most evident manifestation of cultural senses. Pragmatic and semantic senses, however, represent only 8% of our corpus of 2418 culture-related elements. One justification for this could be the nature of textbook development in which manifesting cultural elements to the readers is facilitated through tangible concepts of aesthetics and sociology such as cinema, music, or interpersonal-related themes. In other words, to borrow Tajeddin and Teimournezhad's (2014) terminology, aesthetic

and sociological senses are more "culturally laden", whereas pragmatic and sematic senses "are more conceptually oriented" (p. 5). In general, the overweight of aesthetical and sociological senses of culture in ELT textbooks is comparable to the findings of Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) and Tajeddin and Bahrebar (2017), who merely focused on the realization of culture in the aesthetic and sociological senses, as these two are believed to be more culturally representative. However, focusing on the ranks of cultural sense representations, they reported a higher representation of sociological elements in localized textbooks and the dominance of aesthetic senses in global textbooks, which are not in line with the findings of the current study. The obtained results also contradict Tajeddin and Bahrebar's (2017) findings reporting a higher weight of sociological representation in local textbooks. Moreover, comparing local and global textbooks, they came up with a higher representation of the sociological and aesthetic sense of culture in global textbooks, which contradicts the findings of the present study. The results also contradict Ashrafi and Ajideh (2018), who concluded the slight dominance of sociological, i.e., small c culture dimension in *ILI advanced* (2 & 3) textbooks. However, a wide gap with a tendency towards big C culture, i.e., aesthetic representation in *ILI advanced 1* textbook, supports our findings. Unlike the above-mentioned studies, Gheitasi et al. (2020) and Rashidi and Meihami (2016) took sociolinguistic/pragmatic and semantic cultural senses into consideration in their analyses. Gheitasi et al. (2020) indicated more emphasis on aesthetic culture sense followed by semantic, sociological, and pragmatic, respectively. These findings are not in line with the cultural element representation ranks displayed by the current study. Dissimilar to the present study in which the rank of cultural elements was similar for local and international textbooks, Rashidi and Meihami (2016) found a higher frequency for L2 aesthetic elements in international textbooks and a higher tendency towards L1 aesthetic and pragmatic representation in local textbooks.

With regard to the second research question, the findings indicated a statistically significant difference between these two textbook series under focus. The *ILI* turned out to be more balanced in terms of cultural content and

element incorporation. This supports the idea that textbooks function as institutionally sanctioned and sociocultural materials having their own ideology (Curdt-Christiansen & Weninger, 2015).

All in all, it can be concluded that the inclusion of culture in ELT textbooks is inevitable, and it depends on policymakers and stakeholders which cultural windows to be kept open to learners. Different textbooks or even different levels of the same series of textbooks may plan different ways of cultural representations. The point, however, is to feel the responsibility of cultivating learners' cultural literacy, openness to learn about other cultures, and at the same time feeling proud of one's own culture trying to share it with others. Therefore, opening a narrow window to the worldwide culture, either merely through source culture or target culture, would hinder ELT textbooks from bringing the world into the classroom. Furthermore, as Pishghadam et al. (2020) state, the decisive role of culture in identity information indicates that culture development demands diffusing it and raising it to public awareness. In fact, people themselves can play significant roles in transmitting, reproducing, balancing, and even eradicating their own cultural memes (Pishghadam et al., 2020). Instead of viewing their national identity as an impediment or non-existent in the process of language learning, Iranian students should be directed to maintain their cultural integrity and view their national identity as negotiable with others (Pishghadam et al., 2013). Informed by Pishghadam et al. (in press), since Iranians seem to become emotional and excited when exposed to the English language, ELT textbooks and the way that they represent culture can also be viewed as frameworks for activating learners' emotioncies. Taking the complexities of culture into account, teachers and practitioners are advised to base their teaching on textbooks that represent a coherent whole rather than a fragmented representation of culture. In other words, as language teachers, we have the responsibility to remind the learners that based on the specific social contexts, they can draw on different aspects of their identity, either national or international (Fitzsimons, 2019).

With an overemphasis on intercultural competence development and its effectiveness in cross-cultural interactions, ELT policymakers and stakeholders are advised to give a second look to incorporating culture and cultural senses into ELT textbooks. Actually, in today's increasingly interconnected world, what the students need is a global understanding and awareness of other cultures so that a deeper understanding of their own culture is developed. Closing windows to other cultures and exposing learners to limited cultural senses would not result in cultural literacy, cultural liberty, and openness demanded in today's diverse world. New today invites materials developers and educators to reconsider the incorporation of culture into ELT textbooks in a way to promote intercultural understanding. The language teachers should also keep this fact in mind that the contents are not just what they see and observe; rather, there might be contents hidden within the lines. Therefore, while selecting textbooks besides considering language content, they should also consider the ideology behind the textbooks. In the process of developing local textbooks, materials developers are advised to include local culture in English texts and avoid so much reliance on target culture presentation and authentic text inclusion (Pishghadam & Naji, 2012). Anyhow, as prime users of ELT textbooks, administrators and language teachers, before selecting textbooks, should form their own evaluations about cultural analysis of textbooks and the impacts they might have on language learners.

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