THE CULTURAL CONTENT OF GLOBALLY-DESIGNED ENGLISH COURSE BOOKS
AND THEIR IMPLICATION IN ELT

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Abstract: Over recent years, there has been much interest in the role of culture in foreign language teaching. Language and culture are interconnected, and the teaching of the former in the foreign situation requires the teacher to be sensitive to the latter. Hence, EFL teachers need to be careful in deciding the selection of cultural content for ELT classrooms. Most of the cultural information is retrieved in course books that are designed for a specific language. Course books may directly or indirectly communicate sets of cultural values. In this paper, an assessment of a globally-designed course book (Headway) for elementary English learners will be explored in terms of the way in which the target culture has been described, considering the appropriacy of the cultural and the socio-political content to the real situation in Indonesia. The basic framework of this analysis is adopted from the model comprising a series of categories, which was elaborated by Risager (1991). The implications for the decisions about the culture as content in foreign language pedagogy will be discussed from the perspective of the appropriacy in Indonesian context.

Keywords: culture, cultural content, course book, language teaching

Introduction

According to Kramsch (1995), the term 'cultural' has often been associated with the term 'social', as when one talks about the 'socio-cultural' factors which affect the teaching and learning a foreign language. Culture is always linked to moral values, notions of good and bad, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly. One of the major ways in which culture manifests itself is through language. With the respect to the relationship between culture and language, Kramsch makes a brief description that 'language plays a crucial role not only in the construction of culture, but in the emergence of cultural change'. In addition, Kilickaya (2004) posits that the term 'culture' will be used in the sense of whatever a person must have in order to function and live in a particular society. This includes also socio-cultural factors in the language teaching materials.

With the necessity of cultural component in foreign language teaching, there have been different perspectives. Some might argue that to teach culture without language is 'fundamentally flawed' and to separate language and culture teaching is to imply that a foreign language can be treated in the early learning stages as if it were self-contained and independent of other sociocultural phenomena' (Byram 1991). Culture in language teaching materials is so essential to communication that it is sometimes considered as the fifth skill, apart from the four macro skills which have always been taught in the classroom (Tomalin, 2008). From these perspectives, the teaching of culture as a component of language teaching can give learners opportunity to cope with experience in a different way, in other words 'broadening of the learner's horizon'.

By contrast, others might argue that the learning of especially high-status language associated with cultural empires could result in ideological colonization (Holly 1990). This perspective may indicate the embedded danger in including cultural component in foreign language teaching, in that it may impose the views, beliefs, attitudes, and feeling of the target language society on foreign language learners.

In particular, with regard of teaching English as a foreign language, there has been inconclusive debate as to what extent teachers should hold non-native speakers to native speaker's convention of language use, and to native speaker's norms of interpretation, and as to how it can affect foreign language context. There appears to be different perspective concerning this matter. One is that in teaching English to those for whom it is a second or foreign language we may be promoting different ways of thinking and different values from those with which they are familiar. Barrow (1990) advocate:

English does indeed enshrine a variety of ways thinking, values and assumptions that may be absent from, or variance with, the presuppositions of other language, just as it may fill to recognize certain ways of reviewing the world that are implicit in other language.

Furthermore he argues that our fear of cultural imperialism is unjustified because it is a fact of life and some language and cultures are, in reality, superior to others. However, in my view, there seems to be danger in this approach to teaching English as a foreign language. Nowadays English is a worldly dominated language as a means of communication. The purpose of learning English varies at different situation, in that English is needed as an international language by people who are not interested in British or American culture in some respects. As
Cook (1983) states, cultural content is irrelevant to this kind of goal. Even though cultural content may suit the integratively motivated student to perfection, it is thought that every culture has its own characteristics and it should be respected equally. Similarly Phillipson (1996) warns that the dominance of English has also resulted in the imposition of the Anglo-Saxon culture that goes with it. ELT material export not only globally conceived English content, but also a methodology often associated with an Anglo-Saxon view of communication.

Under the circumstances, where contrastive arguments exist, there has been much interest in the role of textbooks as a tool for transmission of culture. According to Risager (1991), Textbooks have been ascribed an increasingly important cultural role as well as linguistic, in that "linguistic examples have been dramatized to a larger extent, interlocutors have become flesh and bloody by the way of drawing and photos, and the everyday life, the social context, and the natural environment of the foreign countries concerned have been gradually introduced".

With respect to the evaluation of textbooks, there has been criticism that globally designed course books tend to be stubbornly Anglo centric. They cannot by definition draw on local varieties of English and have not gone very far in recognizing English as an international language either. Some argue that they failed to take local sensitivities into account and have, as a result, made the learning process more difficult (Alpetekin 1993, Phillipson 1993).

**The Analysis of The Course Book (Headway)**

**Overall evaluation of this course book**

On the whole, even though there seems to be relatively little cultural content of the target language in this course book, which can be interpreted that it is aimed for those who have relatively limited amount of language proficiency, this course book is still characterized by the fact that the presentation of the target language in relation to its own culture is the generally stereotypical representation of that culture. As Gahagan (1984 cited in Clarke and Clarke 1990) puts it:

A stereotype, therefore, is fixed and not open to modification like a generalization. Thus new experiences will not enhance and develop understanding, but will be filtered in order to reinforce the existing stereotype.

As for the stereotypical representations in TESOL materials. Clarke and Clarke (1990) claim that Britishness seems to be the standard, and cross-cultural perspectives in communication are de-emphasized or denied, pointing to numerous instances of stereotyping in British EFL material in areas of gender, race, class, and religion. This kind of judgment seems to apply to this course book in some way. The more detailed discussion about the way of cultural content representation and its propriacy in Indonesian context will be described below. The categories can be distributed into two groups.

**2-1 The micro level- phenomena of social and cultural anthropology**

**Social system**

Apparently, the distinguishing feature of Britain compared with other countries is viewed as its monarchy system. For example, in the description of life of The Royal Family, this course book (p 36) tend to ignore the real nature of monarchy system, only depicting the Queen's daily life as being luxurious and comfortable and present splendid photos. It would be more plausible to depict its system from the perspective of ordinary people and its current issues related to the possible question of its existence.

In Indonesia, which has different political system in some respects, this description may not suffice students' understanding of the reality in Britain system, assuming the Queen as a heroine in fairy tale book.

**World viewpoint**

In describing world historical facts and art, this course book give preponderance to introducing western people in both text and photos, such as Mozart, Picasso, Einstein (p42) Leonardo da Vinci (p60) and three inventors (p55) as great contributors to the development of science or art. This viewpoint appears to represent the assumption that mainly western people have established the world civilization, implying that western people are the centre of the world as leaders in the world.

However, it seems to me that Oriental civilization also have made great contribution to the development of science and art and philosophy. In Indonesia as one of oriental countries, this kind of naive interpretation of world history may have an negative influence on learners' viewpoint of the world in a subtle way, ignoring their cultural inheritance. Nowadays Indonesian adolescent students tend to follow and be already affected by Western trend culture. Even though intercultural education seems to be important in broadening students' thinking, the situation above leads to the warning that it is time to regain country's cultural pride and people should need enlightened attitude toward their culture.
Class

On the whole, the middle class has preponderated such as doctor (p13), interpreter (p20, journalist (p13, 20, 25, 27) all the characters (p77) are regarded as successful people in their career. In the depiction of the life of middle class, it is described as being comfortable working and people spend their time taking leisure instead of working in their job area (p27, 33). In other words, situations at work of interaction rarely exist, rather situations of interaction mainly consist of party (p42, 52, 53, 78,107) spare time (p7, 104) etc.

Over the world, there are many different life styles in terms of class. So the middle-class focus seems partly to be a cultural lag today. In Indonesian context, students may guess the life of Western middle class, in that people are just enjoying party and having plenty of time to take trips etc. Even though it contains a little grain of truth, students need to perceive class problem which exists in the target society and also in their own countries from various perspective. This representation seems to be fragmented, which means real life is described in flashes.

Gender

Since Porreca (1984) described how sexism is manifested in ESL textbooks and with what consequences following a review of research on the relationship between language and sexism, there seems to have been a change of sex roles in ELT textbooks. According to Porreca, the sexism in ELT materials can be characterized by omission (females are depicted or mentioned only as often as males in both text and illustrations), firstness (male firstness is three times as prevalent as female firstness), occupations (women are far less visible than men in occupational roles are).

However, while the old family centred textbooks always depicted housewives working at home (Risager ibid.), this course book seems to be careful to represent women having out-of-home occupations such as journalist (p12), doctor (p14), interpreter (p20), interviewer for the BBC (p25) etc. In text and illustrations, the content and photo dealing with females appears to account for more than half.

In spite of tangible change in depicting women, stereotyping in describing female's character still remains in this course book. For example, short story 'The girl with green eyes' (p.96) is typical of representing the prejudice that 'woman is the romantic' (Kaye 1989). In this short story, when a woman called Julie with green with eyes is having a trip with her husband, she found her husband talkative and boring. At that time, there is a man who is assumed to come from Japan (p96 'Nice hands,' she thought. He wore a very expensive Japanese watch. I'd like to go to Japan). As soon as she saw him, she appears to have interest in that man. Finally, she left her husband with that man without saying anything. It seems to me that this short story may imply widespread prejudice that woman tend to follow just romantic thing without responsibility and prefer luxurious life to ordinary life.

Similarly, this kind of stereotypical representation is found in one letter (p1 09), whose content is that a woman called Paula left home with her lover because of her parents objection to their wedding. This letter seems to be adopted from Beatles' popular song. Again in the content of Beatles' song, one daughter left home, presumably because of the conflict with her parents. Usually this kind of role as a runaway is given to woman not man, even though we admit the fact that there exists generation gap between the old and the young. If the authors wish to present generation conflict, the focus on this conflict is not necessarily confined to this kind of recurrent theme 'love' related to women, neglecting other social problems.

From a different point of view, in one letter (p107-108) one woman wrote a thanks-letter for the dinner party, but in another dialogue with her friend, she complains of the bad taste of food and boring atmosphere in that party contrary to her letter), it seems to be difficult to interpret the author's intention. There seems to arise as to whether this description represents middle class housewife's life in Britain or whether it is another stereotypical representation of woman. Both cases may lead to students' misjudgement about the life of woman in Britain, furthermore, promoting misgeneralization over woman.

Geographical environment

With respect of the geographical environment, it is dominated by life in urban centres, usually it focused on European cities and Anglo-American cities such as Paris (p27), Portugal (p29), Budapest (p74), Prague (p74) with pictures, usually the Asian countries are not mentioned except again Japan.
In case of comparing city with country, the comparison seems to be flat and tokenistical style (p69) The perceived problem of the gap between city and country are rarely shown.

2-2 The macro level - social, political and historical matters

Broad social political facts and problems

In this course book, little information on sociocultural facts is given. Usually, if this information is shown (e.g.p49, 92), some information seems to be irrelevant to the real description of contemporary society, in that just presenting fragmented facts or some ridiculous questions (p92) such as ‘Who did the actress Elizabeth Taylor marry twice?'

Similarly, broad socio-political problems such as youth unemployment, violence, drug, pollution, smoking, which can lead students to understand the society in which they are related to, are not mentioned in deeper level.

As for the photograph (p30 one woman asks the other woman ‘do you have a light?’), it seems to me that this situation may make students misunderstand the problem of smoking. Even though it is generally accepted that smoking is a kind of personal taste and Indonesia is becoming westernized and is under the influence of fragmentation, this is not in tune with Indonesian's value and emotion from the traditional viewpoint of Indonesia, in that, which is considered as taboo for specially women in Indonesia. It seems to me that the advocacy of smoking in terms of the symbol of woman liberation may not apply to this case, in that we do not have to encourage smoking. But this might be the possible debate for or against smoking.

Race and international representations

Stereotypical representations of Britain culture might be applied in this case. As Clarke and Clarke (ibid) points the omission of aspects such as the ethnic diversity constitute devaluation and denial. One of the most widely examined manifestations of racism is omission. Except few photos (p58, 77) few black people appeared by the way of photographs, which leads presumably, learners may infer the assumption that there are few black people in Britain and their range of activity is not great. In fact, as Clarke and Clarke (ibid.) express, they may also be found, like other people, in a wide range of occupations and roles.

In contrast to the limited depiction of black, Japanese and relatively frequently have been appeared in both texts and illustrations (p7, 8, 20, 29, 40, 96) as a representative of Asian people, assuming that there seems to be no Asian countries except Japan. This kind of view may indicate the attitude toward Asian people and show the commercialism of ELT material (e.g. even advertise Japanese product (e.g. p11 Nikon camera). Under the circumstances, where especially this book is targeted for young learners, this kind of advertisement may influence learners' future consumption. Especially in Indonesia where we can see contradictory feelings toward Japan, students may feel this course book is aimed for Japanese students. This is likely to cause a reluctance to learning.

Implication

Holliday (1994) argues that the professionalism in ELT is ethnocentric, failing to appreciate the social backgrounds of others, using international English language education to feed its own expansionism. We should therefore seek to develop pedagogy more appropriate to local conditions.

Furthermore, with regard of appropriateness in ELT, Widdowson (1994) suggests that a pedagogy of the appropriate, which revises the authentic and adapts it to the local needs. Similarly, Kramsch and Sullivan argues:

Appropriate pedagogy would thus allow learners either to conform to British social norms and give the socially expected rejoinders, or create their own context of use according to the values cherished in their national, professional-academic, or institutional culture.

From their perspective, we can draw useful insight into the way in which cultural content of English language teaching may be made decision about in Indonesian context.

Learning English now are more pragmatic in nature, Prodromou (1988) propose that textbook material, whether locally of internationally produced, authentic English and local varieties of English, can be all sources of 'content', but they can at the same time be methodologically processed in such a way that they relate more closely to the culture and experience of the learners. Alptekin and Alptekin (1984) advocate that teaching of English should be independent of its nationality-bound cultural context, with a view to creating bilingual yet not necessarily bicultural people. They suggest that local and international contexts which are familiar and relevant to students' lives should be used instead of unfamiliar and irrelevant contexts from the English-speaking world. Furthermore Alptekin (1993) argue that foreign language teaching materials which make use of target language culture elements to present the systemic data are likely to interfere with the natural tendency, which is that it is
most natural for learners to rely on their already established schematic knowledge when developing new systemic knowledge.

Even though we notice the embedded danger pointed by the view of linguistic, or cultural imperialism, there seems to still be left some questions to resolve as to what should language teaching be about. To what extent knowledge of the target culture is necessary in foreign language teaching, considering the fact that we have no choice but to teach English. It can be a problem for teachers of English as a foreign language to determine how to approach the teaching of the aspects of background knowledge. As a way of solving this problem, Brown (1990) argues that it is more useful to teach explicit strategies for making inferences from the language used, stating that the benefit of inference is to show students how far they can go interpretation without specific cultural knowledge.

Conclusion

On the basis of the analysis of this course book in terms of the way in which this book portrays the target culture, we have seen that this course book lacks any awareness of some such as class, gender, race, adopting apparently, a policy of avoiding cultural issues, as if they are too sensitive to countenance. Cartoon pictures, 'cultural free' texts and texts of interest to people of many nationalities, and other vain attempts to de-culture content rest on lowest common denominators rather than diversity within and across cultures.

We have shown that, in spite of well-organized framework and multiple and balanced activity, it seems to be relatively inappropriate to the Indonesian context, in that the depiction of western society and people tend to prevail in the whole content of this course book. Especially for young students in Indonesian secondary schools, who have already been affected by western cultures and tend to follow it without discreet judgment, the usage of this book may result in promotion of western cultural imperialism. Even though some argue the cultural pedagogy of foreign language teaching should be based on intercultural understanding, one side orientation (from western to country concerned) instead of mutual understanding can be distorted in some sense. Under the circumstance, we should find appropriate pedagogy to local situation.

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