Analysis of Culture and Multimodality in a Local English Textbook Series

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Abstract

Culture is regarded as a part of English language teaching (ELT). Also, ELT textbooks are a main source of intercultural teaching / learning in most English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning contexts. Thus, representation of cultural content and development of (inter)cultural aspects are important issues in ELT textbooks, particularly in EFL contexts. This study analyzed the representation of culture in the *Vision* series, a recently developed ELT series used nationwide in Iranian high schools, and examined how multimodality in these local textbooks would provide context to develop (inter)cultural aspects. To collect the data, an adapted version of Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) classification of culture (source, target, international, and globally-shared) was used to analyze the content of the *Vision* series to see which culture was reflected in these high school textbooks. Additionally, the Wenninger and Kiss's (2013) semiotic framework was used to examine how multimodality would serve cultural contents through analyzing image-text relationship. The content analysis demonstrated the domination of source (i.e., Iranian) and globally-shared cultural elements with less attention to the target and international cultures. Furthermore, the results showed that multimodality in these textbooks could provide the opportunity for critical cultural reflection, though it was limited to source and globally-shared cultures. By implication, ELT material developers in Iran should incorporate more appropriate materials and culturally engaging visuals associated with diverse cultures into local ELT textbooks to promote Iranian EFL students' cultural reflection, and, subsequently, their intercultural competence.

Keywords*:* culture, ELT textbooks, intercultural competence, *Vision* series, semiotics

Introduction

English as an international language is now learned and used by millions of nonnative speakers who outnumber native speakers. Hence, many scholars (e.g., Jenkins, 2006; Sharifian, 2009; 2017) are critical of the hegemony of the American or British native-speaker norms in the field of English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching and, in consequence, advocate *intercultural competence* in English language teaching (ELT). Intercultural competence is "the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world" (Spitzberg & Chagnon, 2009, p. 7).

Culture, whether through an emphasis on the target language literature or whether through a sense of concern and curiosity about the people, country, and customs, is affiliated with the language (Baker, 2015). It is dynamic and is created and recreated by individuals through communication (Baker, 2012), and, more importantly, it is viewed as an integral part of second / foreign language (L2) education (Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014). That is to say, central to the process of learning another language is the realization of the ways in which language and culture interact, and the ways culture is represented in L2, including ELT, programs and materials to foster adequate intercultural competence or intercultural communication skills in today's world (Tolosa et al., 2018). That is why the representation of culture in instructional L2 instructional materials, particularly in ELT materials taught in EFL contexts, has become an important concern in recent decades (McConachy & Hatta, 2013). Unquestionably, instructional L2 textbooks, including ELT textbooks, are one of the main sources of cultural knowledge and one important avenue for investigating the synergy of culture and language (Derakhshan, 2018; Kilickaya, 2004), the potential sources for transferring intercultural messages, and an authentic source to improve intercultural awareness of L2 learners (Oakes & Sunders, 2004). Despite this issue, not all the instructional L2 textbooks, including ELT textbooks, present cultural content appropriately, and some exclude important aspects of local or target culture, hindering EFL students' cultural learning and intercultural development. Hence, it is important to see *how* and *whose* culture is to be represented in ELT textbooks. The research on this topic can help to expand ELT material developers' understanding of cultural content and how to incorporate culture into their instructional textbooks more effectively.

Over and above that**,** visual representation has become a pervasive and visible feature of many instructional textbooks, including multimodal ELT textbooks, and, as Janko & Peskova (2013) maintain, visuals hold the potential of producing manifold layers of meaning (Mofidi & Hashemi, 2019), and can be a good source of language learning and fostering students' intercultural competence (Kiss & Weninger, 2017)**. As** Emmison and Smith (2000) maintain, the inclusion of visuals in textbooks is advantageous because they bear an iconic resemblance to the cultural reality they represent. However, surprisingly, not much attention has been paid to the role of visuals, namely multimodality in ELT **t**extbooks, in meaning making regarding culture and its representation (Weninger & Kiss, 2015).

Therefore, research, such as the current study, on the role of visuals in presenting cultural content in ELT textbooks can be promising.

To touch upon intercultural competence and explore cultural meaning potential embedded in multimodal ELT textbooks, multimodal resources, namely visuals (e.g., photos and pictures) combined with texts, can be examined through a semiotic approach, that is, semiotic relationships between images and texts in ELT textbooks. Semiotics, as the "formal science of signs", and semiosis, as the "action of signs", can be utilized to investigate cultural content in instructional textbooks (Queiroz & Merrell, 2006). In fact, a semiotic approach to the analysis of cultural content of multimodal ELT textbooks can "explicate how contextual semiotic resources shape the process of meaning making" (Weninger & Kiss, 2013, p. 22). The current study was an attempt to explore how culture was presented in a recently developed ELT series, i.e., the *Vision* series, and examine whether visuals in the multimodal texts, namely visuals combined with language in texts, served cultural contents in these local ELT textbooks taught nationwide in Iranian high schools. More specifically, it first sought to see which culture (source, target, or other) was presented more and, second, how multimodal resources in these textbooks would serve (inter)cultural contents by relying on a semiotic analytic approach.

Literature Review

(Inter)cultural Competence and Language Learning

In relating culture to language, many scholars (e.g., Byram, 2008) support the claim that L2 speakers would not be able to use the target language properly without knowledge of cultural context in which it is used. Hence, the concept of intercultural communicative competence or intercultural competence (ICC, henceforth) largely prevails in the field of L2 teaching / learning. ICC is "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2006, p. 13). It aims to develop learners' cultural awareness to make them ready for culturally effective communication with individuals from other cultures (Larzen-ÖstermarK, 2008). ICC can help L2 learners understand how intercultural interactions take place and how intercultural perceptions may influence the success of communication (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002). Therefore, the necessity of including cultural elements and dealing with aspects of culture for developing ICC seems to be vital for L2 policy makers and educators.

As Valencia and Medina (2009) assert, to develop ICC necessitates taking a critical standpoint, which include the judgement about the target culture, such as English, and the understanding of their own culture. When L2 students deal with only a limited range of cultures, they cannot promote ICC skills because they have little opportunity to engage in the critical process of viewing and reflecting over cultural diversities (Göldner, 2011). One possibility for providing L2 learners with cultural diversity and, consequently, raising their cultural awareness and enhancing their skills to ensure appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts is through the representation of diverse cultures and cultural elements in L2

instructional textbooks. However, this issue might not be a serious concern for many textbook writers who are involved, in one way or another, with L2 pedagogy. A**s** Valencia and Medina (2009) and Borjian (2013) point out, the issue of ICC development and offering critical queries about culture might be in the background for many L2 textbook authors and, accordingly, for many L2 teachers who pay scant attention to the students' development of ICC in writing or teaching their L2 textbooks.

Culture in ELT Textbooks

Cultural contents are represented in ELT textbooks in various manners. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) described three major categories to which ELT textbooks can be aligned to: source, target, and international cultures. The source culture represents first language (L1) or local culture, that is, language learners' own culture at national level. The target culture represents the culture of the people who speak the target language. In case of EFL learners, it mainly focuses on the cultures of Anglophone countries, such as the US and UK. Finally, the international culture includes a wide range of different cultures, such as the culture of countries where English is used as an international language. Later, Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) added another category to Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) classification and named it neutral culture. They have used this category for those cultural elements which are neutral. The neutral elements may be "cultural in nature but cannot be attributed to any particular culture" (p. 5).

The decision as to which culture is to be addressed in ELT textbooks and how it should be represented by L2 material developers, including textbook writers, who may have their own hidden agendas for incorporating or discarding specific cultural contents, are far from being agreed. Yet, as many scholars (e.g., Sukarni, 2003; Tolosa et al., 2018**)** state, for the ELT textbooks to develop EFL learner's intercultural competence, they should consider learners' own culture, namely, local culture, in addition to the target language culture. As many L2 researchers (e.g., Majdzadeh, 2002; Borjian, 2013) assert, even when ELT textbooks are to be localized, they should not exclude the target and international cultures if they aim to facilitate EFL learners' intercultural development.

With the aim of contributing to the issue of cultural understating and awareness, several researchers have made attempts to explore the representation of culture in ELT textbooks. For instance, Garcia (2005) analyzed international and intercultural aspects in 14 ELT textbooks in Spain. The findings indicated that the ELT textbooks taught in Spain did not have a cross-cultural approach and provided little opportunity for Spanish EFL students to develop ICC. Also, in a European Union founded project (Languages and Cultures in Europe), language curricula in 13 countries were analyzed in 2007 to find out what objectives in the area of intercultural competences were prescribed by foreign language curricula. The results showed that the national curricula mostly paid attention to the development of linguistic competences. Intercultural competences, if included in the curriculum, received less consideration (European Union, 2007).

Other researchers have also indicated that scant attention has been paid to the issue of the local culture in ELT textbooks. For instance, bringing the issue of cultural hegemony to the foreground, Shin et al. (2011) investigated the representation of local and international culture in seven series of internationally distributed ELT textbooks. They found that cultural content of Anglophone countries dominated most of the ELT textbooks published internationally. Furthermore, in the context of Korea, Kim and Paek (2015) investigated the representation of culture-related contents in five ELT textbooks for second year middle school students in Korea. The findings revealed that all five ELT textbooks had relatively less intercultural interaction elements, constraining the opportunities to reinforce Korean students' multicultural perspectives. Moreover, Baker (2012) designed a course in global Englishes and intercultural awareness for undergraduate university students in Thailand. This online course adopted a perspective that probed local or Thai, regional or Asian, and global English uses as well as the various socio-cultural contexts. The course included elements of cultural awareness, especially in offering connections between language and culture exceeding domestic understandings of culture. According to the results, both Thai teachers and students largely demonstrated positive attitudes toward the course. Baker's (2012) project accentuates the feasibility of taking an intercultural perspective in a language teaching course.

In the context of Iran, Majdzadeh (2002) investigated the role of culture in secondary school ELT textbooks published in the last decade. The findings of her study revealed that the locally produced Iranian ELT textbooks exclusively advocated Iranian culture. Accordingly, she asked for more provision of target culture in these textbooks to provide opportunity for Iranian students to develop ICC. Also, Aliakbari (2004) analyzed the old version of the local ELT textbooks used in Iranian high schools and concluded that these textbooks were not well enough to develop ICC and cultural understanding, because target and international cultural elements were largely excluded from them. Similarly, Razmjoo (2007) concluded high school ELT textbooks in Iran mainly were bereft of cultural diversity. Unlike the above the studies by Majdzadeh (2002) and Aliakbari (2004), Roohani and Molana (2013) focused on the international textbooks taught in the context of Iran. They analyzed cultural representation in the international *Interchange* series and found that international cultures and American culture were dominant in these popular textbooks. Later, Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) compared and contrasted two international (*Top Notch: English for Today's World*) and localized (*The ILI English Series: Intermediate*) series, widely taught in Iran. The results revealed that most of the cultural elements included in the localized ELT textbooks were culturally neutral. Surprisingly, they found that L1 culture was not featured, to a large extent, in the localized ILI textbooks. They concluded that localized ELT textbooks published in Iran lacked enough references to EFL learners' target, source, and international cultures.

Recently, Mofidi and Hashemi (2019) examined culture representation in a recent ELT series published by Iran Language Institute, namely, the *ACT* series, with an eye on the visual materials. The analysis of the visual materials (e.g.,

pictures and photos) showed that the writers of this series put an emphasis on the international and source (Persian) cultures in the visuals. In essence, the English (target) culture received comparatively insufficient attention to meet the objective for which the *ACT* textbooks were written. However, the researchers concluded that the series could be useful in developing intercultural awareness in Iranian EFL readers and offering them an opportunity to interact and communicate their identity at the cultural level with other English speakers from other countries.

By reviewing the aforementioned studies, it is understood that although intercultural development requires reflection and attention in instructional L2 materials, such as ELT textbooks, many ELT textbook writers pay little attention to the issue of ICC in ELT textbooks whereas , as Canagarajah (2005) maintains, ELT materials should offer diverse culture references and help language learners enhance critical awareness of local exigencies by, first, identifying cross-cultural differences and problems, and then, reflecting and taking actions. Moreover, it is clear that quite few studies have considered the potential of semiotic relationship between the texts, images, and tasks in cultural content analysis. This issue deserves more attention and the current study is an attempt to makes use of the potential of the text-image semiotic relationship to examine the multimodality in a local ELT series, which is dealt with in the next section.

Semiotics and Multimodal ELT Textbooks

Semiotics studies the signs with respect to their functioning in sign processes within sign systems (Queiroz & Merrell, 2006). A semiotic approach is an analytic tool for conducting a discursive investigation of how individuals communicate meanings in signs (Al-Naimat & Saidat, *2019*). This approach tries to "explicate how contextual semiotic resources shape the process of meaning making" (Weninger & Kiss, 2013, p. 22). Evidently, language learners often engage with textbooks through different modes including images, texts, as well as the activity within which they are situated. That is, visuals which are included in ELT textbooks may form a particular semiotic relationship with texts within given tasks in the textbooks.

Using Peirc's (1980) terms, the semiotic relationship between visuals (images) and texts can be iconic, symbolic, or indexical. Icons resemble their referent (the object, person, or phenomena that the sign refers to) based on the virtue that they have something in common. Symbols refer back to their referent by some sort of habit, norm, or law. Indexes and their referent are connected through an actual relationship or direct contact. If an image stands in a manner which can be freely interpreted, that is, it is not there to reinforce lexical or grammatical forms, there could be an iconic or symbolic relationship. In their engagement with iconic or symbolic visuals, learners explore their own understanding of texts and images without the constraints of a pedagogic task that channels learners' attention to the lexical or grammatical forms. In contrast, if an image just exists as lexical or grammatical reinforcement, it may form an indexical relationship, that is, both image and text refer to one another. In the semiotic approach, language learners'

participation during meaning-making process in the classroom and their critical engagement with the multimodal materials are crucial.

The semiotic approach can be used to look into different modes and the interaction of texts, images and tasks to analyze the meaning and cultural message that is communicated to textbook readers. This approach can demonstrate the interrelatedness of language and culture at different levels and substantiate this relationship in EFL textbooks by focusing on intercultural dimensions of cultural competence and awareness development (Risager, 2012; Tseng, 2002; Weninger & Kiss, 2013). A**s** Ishihara and Cohen (2010) maintain, through this viable approach, it is possible to examine the construction of cultural meanings from the co-representation of images, texts, and tasks via semiosis process and find out the cultural messages which underlie visual materials and facilitate learners' cultural learning. Despite its potential for textbook evaluation and image analysis, quite a few studies have capitalized on the semiotic approach and employed it to analyze multimodality in L2 textbooks for cultural content. In a study which was done in 2013, Weninger and Kiss took the principles of Peircean semiotics to examine the Hungarian ELT textbooks in terms of their cultural representation. They found that images were typically used as visual reinforcement of vocabulary and grammar, but their cultural meaning potentials were unexploited in the Hungarian ELT textbooks. They concluded that, for the ELT textbooks to foster (inter)cultural awareness, images should perform a function more than just being as visual reinforcement or space-fillers.

In sum, ICC requires more reflection on the local and foreign cultures, and, as Kramsch (2013) maintains, knowing a foreign culture needs placing the target culture in association with our one's own culture. It needs knowledge of learners' local culture and understanding culturally-shaped behaviors of the target culture**.** One way to achieve this objective is to provide context for language learners to reflect on diverse cultural and intercultural issues in their instructional L2 textbooks (Shin et al., 2011). However, based on the review of the literature, this issue is sometimes disregarded by textbook writer and the important role of visuals as carriers of ideological and culturally-loaded meanings and practices of a given culture is overlooked in some recently published ELT textbooks. After all, research on both cultural and visual content, namely, cultural representation and visual analysis, in new ELT textbooks may provide some insight for L2 educators and materials developers to reconsider ICC in L2 teaching. All things considered, this study investigated cultural representation in a newly developed ELT textbooks (i.e., the *Vision* series) taught nationwide in Iranian high schools. Also, attempt was made to investigate how the multimodality in these local textbooks could provide the context for EFL learners to reflect upon (inter)cultural contents by relying on semiotic approach. Hence, the following *questions* were posed in this study:

1. Which cultures (source, target, international, globally-shared?) are presented in the *Vision* textbooks?
2. How does multimodality in the *Vision* textbooks provide context to develop (inter)cultural aspects through analysis of image-text semiotic relationship?

Methodology

Materials

The corpus consists of three local ELT textbooks (*Vision 1, Vision 2, and Vision 3)*, developed and published by Iranian ministry of education in 2016-2018 to be taught nationwide in Iranian senior high schools for EFL students with age range of 16-19. The three *Vision t*extbooks have similar patterns and structures. All four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are addressed in these ELT series. Each lesson in the *Vision* series starts with *Get Ready* section, and *Conversation* and *New Words* sections present new vocabularies and dialogs. Other sections are tilted as *Reading, Grammar, Listening*, *Speaking*, *Pronunciation* and *Writing*. These textbooks emphasize communicative approaches to ELT (Khodabandeh & Mombini, 2018). Table 1 presents a summary of descriptive information about these ELT series.

Table 1
Descriptive Information on the *Textbooks*

Textbook	Authors and Publisher	Number of Units	Title of Units
Vision 1	Alavimoghadam, Kheirabadi, Rahimi, and Davari, published by Iranian Ministry of Education in 2016	4	1. Saving Nature 2. Wonders of Creation 3. The Value of Knowledge 4. Travelling the World
Vision 2	Alavimoghadam, Kheirabadi, Rahimi, and Davari, published by Iranian Ministry of Education in 2017	3	1. Understanding People 2. A Healthy Lifestyle 3. Art and Culture
Vision 3	Alavimoghadam, Kheirabadi, Rahimi, and Davari, published by Iranian Ministry of Education in 2018	3	1. Sense of Appreciation 2. Look it Up! 3. Renewable Energy

Data Collection and Data Analysis Framework

Two frameworks were used to identify and analyze cultural contents embedded in the *Vision* textbooks. To address the first research question, the modified version of Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) framework was used because this framework could provide a model, going beyond the simple classification of local and target cultures, to classify ELT materials into four types with respect to their cultural content: (1)

source or L1 culture materials, (2) target or L2 culture materials, (3) international culture materials, and (4) culturally neutral / globally-shared culture martials. The source / L1 culture materials refer to those materials presenting language learners' own culture. The aim of the target / L2 target materials is usually to expose language learners to the cultural contexts of the target language, and international culture materials refer to those materials presenting a wide variety of cultures in countries where English is not used as L1 or L2, but as an international language. Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) added a fourth category to the Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) framework of (1) source culture materials, (2) target culture materials, and (3) international culture materials, to deal with elements that could be considered culturally neutral, that is, they may be cultural in nature, but cannot necessarily be associated with any specific culture. In the current study, culturally neutral category is reworded as globally-shared culture because a fourth category because it is believed that culture cannot be totally neutral and even those elements which are not attributed to any particular culture can be considered as universally shared.

By drawing on the aforementioned framework, content analysis, which is put to good use for texts, images, and transcripts (Weber, 1990), was applied. As Sándorová (2014) states, high quality research can apply it to combine both quantitative and qualitative analysis of images and texts as a useful way to certify the trustworthiness of the study. To ensure the validity / credibility of the data, several steps were taken in the current study. First, through the content analysis method / procedure, aspects of culture, such as clothing, food, lifestyle, festivals, rules, ceremonies, proverbs, and customs, which represented culture were identified by the two researchers i.e., raters. Second, they were categorized by each rater through drawing on the four categories of modified version of Cortazzi and Jin's (1990) framework, and their occurrences, that is, the representations, were obtained and reported in terms of frequencies and percentages for each category. This was done based on an agreed-upon definition of each of the four categories. Third, the outcomes were compared by the two raters before the conclusion was made in the last step. That is to say, the two raters (an associate professor of applied linguistics and a PhD student of TEFL who taught the *Vision* textbooks for three years) carried out content analysis individually to obtain the raw data, which were tabulated later based on the above-mentioned framework. For instance, Iranian artworks and handicrafts presented in *Vision* 2 were considered as elements of source / L1 culture; English proverbs in *Vision* 3 were considered as an element of the target culture; pictures of Eiffel tower in *Vision* 1 were considered as an element of international culture; and a short text about respecting parents in *Vision* 3 were taken as an element of globally appreciated culture. The agreement index, namely, Kappa coefficient, between the raters was also calculated in codifying the data in four categories. It should be noted that the raters' agreement was high (96%), a good index of interrater consistency. Yet, to improve the dependability of the data analysis, the two raters, together with another invited Professor of Applied Linguistics attended two sessions to resolve any disagreement in categorizing and tabulating the raw data before making inferences and drawing conclusions out of the data.

To address the second research question, Weninger and Kiss's (2013) framework was used because it had the potential for analyzing cultural contents of the *Vision* textbooks through drawing on image-text semiotic relationship so as to

examine how multimodality in the *Vision* series would provide context for reflection on (inter)cultural elements. Through this framework, it was possible to examine the construction of cultural messages or meanings in the images accompanied by texts or tasks. Weninger and Kiss's (2013) framework is "an alternative, semiotic framework that examines texts, images, and tasks as merely engendering particular meanings in the act of semiosis" (p. 1). According to this framework, the relationship between images and texts was categorized into two main types: (1) indexical and (2) symbolic or iconic. The rationale is, as Weninger and Kiss (2013) have pointed out, to foster (inter)cultural reflection and awareness, images need to form symbolic or iconic relationships with texts complemented by tasks. That is, iconic and symbolic relationship put together in contrast to indexical relationship. The second research question was not meant basically to be answered quantitively. Rather, to address this question, content analysis of each textbook (*Vision1, Vision 2, and Vision 3*) was done in the second round by the two researchers in six joint sessions. Mainly, a deductive content analysis was used. The primary unit of analysis was images, which were accompanied by texts, and sometimes by tasks, in the whole textbooks. Based on agreed-upon definitions and explicit categories based on the Weninger and Kiss's (2013) framework, the raters together decided whether the visuals i.e., images in each textbook were signs (e.g., the photo of the polar bear) which stood as icons or symbols or whether they were signs (e.g., cutting trees) which stood as indexes. The aim was to find out indexical vs. symbolic / iconic relationship between images and texts in the three textbooks to make inference or conclusion about whether multimodality in the *Vision* series could provide context to develop cultural aspects. Though it was not the main focus, the percentages of indexical relationship vs. symbolic / iconic relationship in the series was calculated and interrater consistency, which was high (Kapp = .98), was measured. The suitability of the framework, clear definitions and explicit classification, content analysis by two experts contributed to both validity / credibility and dependability of the data in the second round of content analysis. In sum**, t**here were two rounds of analyses by the present researchers. In the first round of analysis, as mentioned above, the type of culture represented in the *Vision* series was examined in the entire sections of the textbooks, and tabulated in terms of frequencies and percentages. In the second round of analysis, the textbooks were scrutinized for the image-text semeiotic relationship**.**

Findings and Discussion

The first research question aimed to investigate the types of culture represented in the *Vision* series. The source culture was represented through such elements as "Iranian handicrafts" and "Iranian scientists". For instance, a conversation which was about Iranian cheetahs in *Vision 1* was considered as an aspect of the source culture. The target culture was represented through such elements as English proverbs (e.g., birds of a feather flock together) and different food vocabulary and American / British dishes. International culture was represented through such elements as pictures of famous places and monuments around the world (e.g., the Pizza tower and Egyptian pyramids). Globally-shared culture was represented through such elements as saving nature and preserving endangered species in the world (e.g., whales). Table 2 presents some cultural elements or aspects with corresponding examples based on the types of culture used in the textbooks.

Table 2

Types of Culture and Some Cultural Elements Represented in the Vision Series

Cultural Category	Textbook	Elements / Aspects	Example
Source culture	*Vision 1*	Iranian rare species Iranian scientists Iranian attractions and monuments	Persian zebra, Iranian Cheetah, Persian gazelle Razi, *Nasireddin Toosi,* Mount Damavand, Milad Tower, Gahar Lake,
	Vision 2	Iranian artworks and handicrafts Popular Iranian food Iranian famous places	Qashqai Gabbeh, Isfahan Termeh, Iranian Calligraphy, Rice dishes Darband, Mazandaran
	Vision 3	Iranian poets, Iranian scientists, Iranian architecture, Iranian Ceremonies	Ferdowsi, Hafez Dr. Gharib Yazd Historical buildings Norooz / Nowruz
Target culture	*Vision 1*	American inventions British scientists English names for boys / girls	Edison's inventions Alexander Fleming Jim, David
	Vision 2	Food vocabulary and diet in English	English or British bread and cake
	Vision 3	English proverbs American and British dictionaries and books	Practice makes perfect Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary
International culture	*Vision 1*	Different nationalities, famous places and monuments	Japanese traditional house, The Nile River in Egypt, famous places in Africa
	Vision 2	Important languages around the world Different continents in the world	French, Russian, German Asia, Africa, America, Europe, Oceania
	Vision 3	_____	_____
Globally-shared culture	*Vision 1*	Saving endangered species Wonders of creation	Whales, pandas, elephants Wonderful parts of human body, Planet Earth
	Vision 2	Lifestyle, diet, education Preserving and promoting languages	Healthy lifestyle, healthy diet Endangered languages
	Vision 3	Renewable energy, clean energy Elderly and parent issues	Solar power, wind power Elderly care and respect

Tables 3 presents the frequency and percentage of the data representing the four types of culture in the *Vision* textbooks.

Table 3
Types of Culture and Frequency of Their Representation in the Vision Series

Type of culture	Textbook	Frequency	Total
Source culture	*Vision 1*	40 (37%)	108 (46.1%)
	Vision 2	36 (33%)	
	Vision 3	32 (30%)	
Target culture	*Vision 1*	3 (37.5%)	8 (3.5%)
	Vision 2	5 (62.5%)	
	Vision 3	0	
International culture	*Vision 1*	15 (40.5%)	37 (15.8%)
	Vision 2	13 (35.2%)	
	Vision 3	9 (24.3%)	
Globally-shared culture	*Vision 1*	23 (28.4%)	81 (34.6%)
	Vision 2	25 (30.9%)	
	Vision 3	33 (40.7%)	

All four types of culture were represented in the *Vision* textbooks to different degrees. The target culture constituting 3.5% of the data received very little attention. By contrast, there were frequent realizations of the source cultural elements in the three textbooks. Also, the representation of the source culture was followed in percentage by the globally-shared culture.

The source cultural elements, such as "Iranian handicrafts" and "Iranian scientists", were represented more frequently in the *Vision* textbooks and the realization of the source culture, unlike the target culture, was a dominant feature. This finding is in agreement with the findings of prior research, such as Majdzadeh (2002) and Aliakbari (2004) indicating the locally produced Iranian ELT textbooks largely advocate Iranian culture. This finding of the study was not against expectation. The local *Vision* textbooks have been introduced by Iranian ministry of education as an attempt to touch on the principles of communicative language teaching. According to the guidelines of National Curriculum Document in Iran, English should be taught to Iranian students as a foreign language to enable them to effectively communicate with people from other parts of the world. However, this should be done by stressing the values of Iranian and Islamic culture (Kheirabadi, 2019). Also, the Comprehensive Science Roadmap, which makes and prioritize policies in social and physical sciences, has demanded the inclusion of the Iranian

and Islamic perspective in syllabuses and textbooks in education as well as the localization of foreign language education contents and syllabuses in line with local and Islamic culture (Mofidi & Hashemi, 2019)**.** In this way, Iranian EFL students would become more aware of their own identity and be culturally equipped to communicate in the target language (English), but not by ignoring their L1 cultural values and ideologies.

Also, it is likely that differences between Iran and some countries such as the US at the political level might have made the writers of these ELT textbooks pay more attention to the home culture to safeguard against the *invading culture* of some Anglophone countries such as the US and UK. That is, cultural invasion might be in the back of their mind. Therefore, it is not surprising that the series have mainly employed elements from the local culture. As Cortazzi and Jinn (1999) state, by including aspects of the local culture, language learners become aware of their own identity by dealing with elements from their own culture and be able to introduce their culture to the world and interact more successfully with people from other cultures. This issue might be a positive point because, as Adaskou et al. (1990) argue, presenting language in contexts relevant to the language learners' own lives and culture can help them become more motivated to learn target language.

Also, more global perspective towards culture can be traced from *Vision* 1 to *Vision* 2 and *Vision* 3. *Vision 1* mainly features the Iranian culture through referring to elements such as "Iranian symbols" (e.g., endangered Iranian cheetah), "Iranian scientists" (e.g., *Avicenna*), and "Iranian historical attractions" (e.g., holy shrines in Qom). In *Vision* 2, even though one unit is dedicated to the Iranian art and culture, two units mainly feature the globally-shared cultural issues, such as "preserving and promoting languages" (i.e., preserving endangered languages) and "lifestyles" (e.g., having a healthy diet). *Vision* 3 took a more global orientation towards culture than the other two textbooks by including topics such as "elderly care", and "using renewable energy". It seems that through these globally-shared cultural elements, the writers of such textbooks could gradually create mutual understanding, which can be a positive orientation in these textbooks. This orientation is supported by Menard-Warwick's (2009) claim that the one of the main aims of cultural teaching is to create mutual understanding and respect and develop responsive actions.

Despite this issue, the international culture generally received little attention in this series. It was poorly represented through reference to some famous characters and people's names (e.g., *Diego)*, or some famous places in the world (e.g., the pyramids) in *Vision* 1, and through describing some main languages (e.g., French) in *Vision* 2. One justification for their low percentage might be the concern of the writers of such textbooks for the national culture. Besides, such textbooks do not target international students. Thus, international perspective has a low profile in this series. This finding is echoed in the conclusions of Tajeddin and Teimournezhad's (2014) study that local ELT textbooks published in Iran do not present sufficient references to EFL learners' international cultural elements. In closing, the above analysis provided a picture about the cultural perspectives adopted in the *Vision* series. However, the frequency of cultural representation did not provide sufficient information on how the series might help the EFL reader raise

cultural awareness and reflection. Further qualitative analysis could be at stake to make better deductions.

As for the second purpose of the study, content analysis was done to find out indexical and symbolic / iconic relationship between images and texts in the three textbooks. For instance, Unit 1 in *Vision 1* was titled "Saving Nature". As displayed in Figure 1, the four photos on the left from Unit 1 are signs which stand as icons or symbols, because they do not refer to any specific text. As an example, the photo of the polar bear walking on a melting ice floe can be a signifier referring to the issue of global warming (i.e., signified notion). Presumably, the inclusion of the image is not just to reinforce the vocabulary or grammatical structure related to the unit focus, but it is paired with the task that prompts the reader to reflect upon the topic of saving the nature. That is, the task involves the EFL readers in sharing their ideas and beliefs on how to save the nature, a globally shared aspect of culture. In fact, the Iranian readers of *Vision 1* are asked to reflect on a globally shared aspect of culture through answering such questions: "Why have we had a little rain recently?", "Why did the level of water decrease in rivers?", "Why do people produce so much garbage?", "How can we prevent producing so much garbage?", and "Why is the earth getting warmer?". Hence, such photos in the textbooks do not have a decorative purpose; rather, they contribute to meaning-construction and promote cultural learning. These photos are considered as icon signifiers and the interpretant i.e., what the audience or reader makes of the sign, can help cultural learning.

However, in the image on the right in Figure 1, the photos are signs which stand as indexes. The signifier (i.e., the pictures) signify the notion of deforestation and hurting animals. In each of these photos, the presence of the former (signifier) implies that the latter (signified) exists. The reader is required to match linguistic phrases or words, such as cutting tress (the signified), with the appropriate photos (the signifier). Therefore, the image and text are set into an indexical relation i.e., the photos (signs) point to their concepts such as hurting animals and putting out fire. This kind of relation focuses on the creation or reinforcement of lexical meaning, which has pedagogical purposes; that is, it is a supporting item to the linguistic content. However, this kind of relationship does **not pro**vide the enough opportunity for the reader to carefully reflect on the image and its cultural content. To use Pierce's terminology, the interpretants here do not develop intercultural knowledge and reflection effectively.

Figure 1

Images from Vision 1 (Alavimoghaddam et al., 2016, p.17)

Like *Vision* 1, there were many instances of images in *Vision* 2 which provided the required contexts for EFL students to raise their cultural awareness. However, they were related to the aspects of either the source culture or globally-shared culture, and they were not concerned with such differences as ethnic, religious, or racial diversities between the source (Iranian) and target cultures (English) to assure effectiveness in communication. Figure 2 shows two examples from *Vision* 2. The unit was titled "Art and Culture". As the Figure 2 displays, these photos are used in the textbook without any textual support; that is, they can be freely interpreted by the EFL readers. Despite the fact that they make the readers think about such aspects of the local culture as calligraphy, they do not contribute to ICC development. The images on the left in Figure 2 are icons. On the positive side, most of such iconic relationships in *Vision* 2 help Iranian readers create their own interpretation and provide the context for them to reflect on some locally and globally shared cultural aspects; on the negative side, they do not involve the readers in the process of active acceptance to communicate across cultural boundaries. For instance, in the task which is related to the pictures in Figure 2, the reader is asked to reflect more on the elements of the local culture through sharing his / her ideas through such reflective questions as "What skills are required for the calligraphy?", "Are you familiar with the different styles of painting?", "and "Which part of Iran is famous for the art of etching?". In this way, cultural awareness takes place, but such awareness is limited to the aspects of the local culture and fails to lead to an understating of foreign language references and appreciation of cultural diversity.

Figure 2

Images from Vision 2 (Alavimoghaddam et al., 2017, pp. 82-83)

The image on the right in Figure 2 is linked indexically to the text complemented by a task which requires the reader to match the photos (i.e., signifiers) with the appropriate words (i.e., signified). Hence, the focus in such indexical relationships is on the vocabulary reinforcement, contributing to the process of learning English; however, the reader is not provided with the possibility to reflect upon the photos, used as indexes, to explore the cultural meaning potentials. To foster critical reflection, photos need to be presented in a way that require EFL learners' interpretation rather than being presented as a simple matching task. In sum, the images used as icons or symbols in *Vision* 1 and *Vision* 2 provide a better context for cultural reflection, though they do not involve the readers of such ELT textbooks to encounter cross-cultural differences between the local and target culture. This orientation was observed in *Vision* 3, too. This orientation is supported by the results of Razmjoo's (2007) study that ELT textbooks taught at state-run high schools in Iran largely lack cultural diversity. As he asserts, little attention is given to cross-cultural understanding of local and target culture and ICC development in many local EFL textbooks in Iran, in particular, and in L2 educational policy, in general.

The images in Figure 3 are taken from the Unit 1 in *Vision* 3, which is about the "Sense of Appreciation". Possibly they were included in the textbook to make Iranian readers familiar with the notions of helping charity, respecting parents, and taking care of elderly people. Pictures (signs) indicate iconic / symbolic

relationships. The Iranian readers are asked to look at the them and check appropriate behaviors. Thus, they can find the opportunity to explore the cultural meaning potentials in such iconic relationship while exploring different ways by which they can show their love to their parents / teachers, and discussing why old people or teachers are precious to us. Such kinds of iconic relationships can generate interpretants which provide a good context for cultural reflection. However, such reflections are mostly related to the aspects of source and globally-shared cultures, and do not deal with those aspects of local vs. target and international cultures and cultural diversities in depth.

Figure 3

Images from Vision 3 (Alavimoghaddam et al., 2018, p. 17)

The content analysis revealed that the percentage of indexical relationship was more than symbolic / iconic relationship in the series. A total of 65% of the semiotic relationships in the series (27%, 20%, and 18% in *Vision 1, Vision 2, and Vision 3,* respectively) were indexical. In contrast, about 35% of the semiotic relationships were symbolic / iconic (13.3%, 10.5%, and 11.2% in *Vision 1, Vision 2, and Vision 3,* respectively). Thus, the dominant semiotic relationship was indexical, making up

more than half (66%). Given that the indexical relationship generates the representations which can result in less cultural learning and developing intercultural awareness. This finding means that multimodality in the series, though they perform some pedagogical functions, do not provide serious challenges for Iranian EFL readers to experience cross-cultural differences to foster their ICC skills.

Conclusion and Implications

The results have demonstrated the representation of the four cultures (source, target, international, and globally-shared) in the *Vision* series. However, the dominant one is source culture, followed by globally-shared culture. More likely, the textbook writers and publishers intend to engage the readers in recognizing the values of Iranian and Islamic culture, and create mutual understanding and respect through stressing globally-shared cultural elements. Also, based on the results, the aspects of target and international cultures receive comparatively less attention, partly because the issue of cultural invasion is at stake in Iran and such ELT textbooks do not target international students. The findings partially support the claim put forward by other researchers such as Aliakbari (2004) and Borjian (2013) Razmjoo (2007) that insufficient attention is still given to ICC development in many local ELT textbooks taught in the educational system in Iran.

The results have demonstrated two positive points. First, various cultures are represented, almost catering for many Iranian EFL students' needs and tastes. Second, the textbook writers pay attention to the L1 culture and raised awareness to cultural aspects by providing contexts relevant to the Iranian EFL students' own lives and local culture. This can be motivating and may result in better cultural learning. However, as Shin et al. (2011) point out, domination of a single culture may not meet the interest of those students who learn an international language such as English and are desperate to develop skills to communicate with people from other cultures. By implication, the ELT textbook writers who cooperate with the Iranian ministry of education should incorporate sufficient cultural and intercultural content as well as effective pedagogical strategies into local ELT textbooks like the *Vision* series to enhance EFL students' ICC in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness. It is suggested that high school EFL teachers in Iran should be responsive and provide additional materials when they see the failure of local ELT textbooks in terms of cultural teaching / learning.

Based on the analytic visual data analysis, the cultural aspects in the *Vision* series are presented by visual content. Analyzing semiotic relationship between images and texts in these textbooks show that multimodality resources can, to some degree, provide the reader with the opportunity for critical cultural reflection, particularly in case of iconic / symbolic relationship. However, based on the results of this study, this issue is limited to the source and globally-shared cultures. By implication, the ELT material developers in the Iranian ministry of education should

incorporate more culturally appropriate and engaging visuals which relate them to texts and tasks and promote iconic / symbolic relationship. Also, they need to turned their attention to the interplay of aspects of local, target, and international cultures while incorporating visual materials into local ELT textbooks like the *Vision* series. EFL students should be both linguistically and interculturally competent. Based on the findings, multimodality in the *Vision* textbooks, though it is sometimes employed as the supporting item to the linguistic content, does not provide an adequate context for Iranian EFL readers to experience cross-cultural differences, cultivate curiosity, and cognitive flexibility. It is thus recommended that the ELT textbook writers in the ministry of education take this issue into account to adapt less culturally engaging visual materials and develop supplementary materials including activities and tasks on how to semiotically connect images with texts to engage students in meaning-making, critical discussions and ICC development.

The findings of the study can be interpreted with regard to several limitations. First, L2 instructional textbooks do not convey cultural messages in a fixed manner. They are a medium for the creation or recreation of cultural messages which can be achieved successfully through the interaction of teachers and students with textbooks. This study relied on just textbooks for data collection. Future research can include cultural informants such as EFL teachers and students to (in)validate the findings of this study. Second, just three ELT textbooks were investigated in this study. Future research can look into the topic in other local ELT textbooks to increase generalizability. Finally, this research drew on two frameworks: the modified version of Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) and Weninger and Kiss's (2013) frameworks. Future research can use other more recent frameworks for the analysis of culture and multimodality in textbook.

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Conflict of Interest Disclosures

There is no conflict of interes

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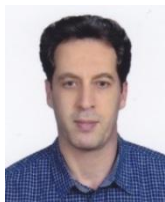
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