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The International Status of English for Intercultural Understanding in Taiwan's High School EFL Textbooks

Abstract

The spread of English language throughout the world had led to its status as a global *lingua franca*. English language teaching (ELT) not only instructs in language, but also helps learners develop their awareness and understanding of multicultural and multiethnic societies around the world. The purpose of this study is to compare how intercultural/international issues are presented in Taiwanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks. One set of EFL commercial textbooks at the high school level published by Taiwanese publishing houses is chosen for analysis. The methodology focuses on content analysis. Results found that the textbooks legitimate the hegemony of American English and British English as the only variety or standard form of the language.

Introduction

Impelled by the trend of globalization, English language has come to have a widely disseminated and ubiquitous status. It is used for the medium of cross-communication in a wide variety of international and intercultural settings, such as transport, tourism, academic conferences, economic and political summits as well as for surfing the internet and scientific research (Warschauer, 2000). The spread of its usage throughout the world had led to the current status of English as a global *lingua franca*. This implies that English language teaching should help learners enhance their intercultural/international awareness and understanding of the multicultural and multiethnic society within native English-speaking communities and around the world (Nault, 2006).

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this study are to develop an understanding of how intercultural issues are presented in one set of EFL textbooks. One series of ELT textbooks at high school levels published by

Taiwan's local publisher is chosen for analysis.

Theoretical Framework

English communication is increasingly taking place in intercultural and international contexts, which raises the issue of the varieties of English language being used. Kachru (1985) discussed the spread of English in terms of three concentric circles, representing different ways in which the language has been acquired and currently used: (1) the inner circle refers to the traditional bases of English, where English is used as the first language (e.g., the USA, UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand); (2) the outer circle involves the earlier phase of the spread of English in non-native settings, where English is used as the second language (e.g., Singapore, India, Malawi, and over fifty other territories); and (3) the expanding circles involve those nations where English is recognized as an important international language and taught as a foreign language, do not have a history of colonization by members of the inner circle (e.g., China, Japan, Greece, and Poland). Graddol (1997) argued that the views of nations within the inner, outer, and expanding circles is increasingly challenged by the growing assertiveness of countries adopting English as a second language in a form that becomes adopted or unique to them. This argument reflects that English is spreading many new varieties which differ from older or more standardized varieties of English.

Because English is used globally to communicate with people from different races, religions, and linguistic and cultural backgrounds within native English-speaking communities and worldwide, EFL curriculum should not uncritically focus on promoting Anglo-American norms, values, and life experiences at the exclusion of all others. Teachers should design curriculum with “an international and multicultural focus” (Nault, 2006, p. 320).

In the EFL and ESL context, the textbooks are theoretically written to provide students with knowledge of the language and culture of the target group. Since English is used globally, this raises questions such as whose life experiences and cultural values are being transmitted in textbooks.

Methodology

This study centers on textbook analysis of one set of EFL high-school textbooks published by the local company. In total, 68 chapters within 12 texts are analyzed. Methodology focused on the content analysis involves identifying which national cultural values and life experiences are highlighted and thus transmitted in the texts.

Results and Conclusion

Results show that more than half of the chapters introduce one specific nation or target culture as their only referenced source. The texts exclude the fact that native English speakers are far from being alike in the way they think, speak, and act (Sardi, cited in Nault, 2006). Second, regarding the status of English language, although the text reflects the existence of English language bias in regards to gender, race, and the disabled, most examples of English language usage and phrases are American or British forms. Third, most chapters of the EFL high school textbooks analyzed in this study are mostly limited to specific aspects of cultural topics, where praise is given to literary genres and attainments in Western literature (specifically poetry), along with significant people, scientific studies, cultural traditions, mysterious events and geography, climate issues, and attractive tourist destinations that largely focus on examples found in Western nations.

References

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