

## Representation of Culture in EFL Textbooks: A Linguistic and Content Analysis of *My Book of English*

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### Abstract

This study explores the representation of culture in *My Book of English*, a second-generation English-language book for the first-year middle school in Algeria. Based on both content and a linguistic analysis method, our objective was to demonstrate the cultural significance of some representational choices. The notion of ideology was exploited in this study to examine the part that language takes in perpetuating ideas about culture, multiculturalism, diversity, nationalism, and identity. According to the findings, cultural and social representations capture both the tendencies of cultural heritage preservation and the promotion of innovation and change. The analysis demonstrates that *My Book of English* acknowledges, to a certain extent, the role that English plays in the processes of internationalization and globalism. However, as a foreign language material, the book exaggeratedly highlights the source culture, making it difficult for the learners to transcend national boundaries.

**Keywords:** Algerian EFL textbook, culture, diversity, ideology, multiculturalism, My Book of English, representations

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## Introduction

Researchers working on the relationship between culture and foreign language acquisition have developed a range of theories, approaches, and models. According to Weninger and Kiss (2013), during the mid-1950s to early 1990s, culture was referred to as fixed symbols to be learned about the target language culture. The Acculturation Model proposed by Schumann (1978; 1986) suggests that acquiring a second language is widely linked to the acculturation process, and learners' success or failure is determined in relation to the target language culture. In this respect, Byram (1988) points out that if culture is to be understood from the inside, pupils should use language as it is used by the native speakers in grammatical and semantic terms.

The views calling for promoting more functional approaches were highly inspired by Hymes's (1972) theory of 'communicative competence,' which was further developed by Canale and Swain (1980) in North America and van Ek (1986) in Europe. According to Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence includes four components: grammatical, sociolinguistic, communication strategies, and strategic competence. A few years later, Van Ek (1986) suggested that foreign language teaching should include more than just communication skills training; it should also include the learner's personal and social development. Van Ek (1986) presented a framework for comprehensive foreign language objectives that included aspects like social competence, autonomy promotion, and the development of social responsibility. The excitement about the communicative approach, according to Kramsch (1995), resulted in making some teachers "dissatisfied with purely functional uses of language" (p. 83), asking for more cultural content to be used.

Intercultural learning and culture pedagogy gained popularity in the 1990s, as many foreign language teachers and academics worldwide began to regard intercultural learning as an essential aspect of language learning. The work of Kramsch (1993) on language, culture, and context from a postmodern perspective and the study of Byram (1997) on intercultural communicative competence are still very influential. For of Weninger and Kiss (2013), the shift from solely focusing on the target language culture to considering a more holistic and complex view of the relationship between language and culture has been represented in literature since 2000. As representations of the new phase, terms like transnational, globalism, hybridity, and multiculturalism began to be associated with the term culture. In this respect, postmodernist education encourages cross-cultural dialogue, promotes diversity, and takes particular interest in the individual students' qualifications, personal experiences and expectations, attitudes, and ability to deal with different cultural contexts (Risager, 2012). More than ever, current educational practices prioritize helping the learners acquire the knowledge and the skills necessary to develop a critical mind capable of distinguishing real and unreal, between information and disinformation, and between ideas and ideologies (Kumaraverdivelu, 2008).

Over the last few decades, researchers have taken a particular interest in the cultural aspects of the different learning materials, mainly language school textbooks. The examination of the English-language books was conducted using quantitative research tools (e.g., frequency counts of words, images, etc.), qualitative methods (e.g., critical discourse analysis), or any other valuable techniques. Some of these studies required a critical orientation and provided valuable insights

into how dominant political and cultural ideologies surface in the visual and textual content. Some researchers went further, problematizing the role of EFL books as instruments of hegemony. For them, the fact that the readers must obey these hegemonic values without putting them into question may negatively affect their way of positioning themselves and others.

Li (2016) conducted a study to examine the cultural values conveyed via texts and illustrations in EFL textbooks in China. The study demonstrated that much of the cultural values represented in the textbooks reflected the editors and writers' intentions to implement the national curriculum as part of the teaching of English to Chinese learners. Behnam and Mozaheb (2013) also attempted to investigate the link between religion and EFL textbooks in Iran. The researchers' objective was to show the interrelatedness of religion and education in EFL settings. In Turkey, Tüm and Uğuz (2014) examined a textbook teaching Turkish to foreigners for the existence of any cultural elements. Tüm and Uğuz's study revealed that, unlike the target culture, elements from native and world cultures were slightly inserted within the textbook. Ait Aissa and Chami (2020) carried out a microanalysis of the cultural topics in the Algerian English foreign language textbook *New Prospects*, designed for third-year secondary school students. The researchers aimed to explore the distribution of the types and categories of culture in the target textbook. The study demonstrated the dominance of big "C" culture and non-target cultural materials over small "c" culture and target culture.

This study is devoted to exploring of embedded cultural representations in *My Book of English*, a second-generation English-language book for first-year middle schools in Algeria. We aimed to highlight the cultural and ideological implications of representational choices throughout the investigation. The symbolic forms responsible for establishing of specific cultural patterns were given special attention.

This work has, therefore, attempted to address the following research questions:

- To what extent is the Algerian EFL school textbook culturally loaded?
- How is culture embedded in the discourse of *My Book of English*?
- How does ideology operate in the discourse of *My Book of English*?
- What culture should be introduced to Algerian English classes?

## Literature Review

### *Discourse of textbooks as a locus of ideologies*

Ideology is commonly defined as the set of opinions or beliefs of a group or an individual. Such a neutral understanding of the concept is not what the opponents of the critical theory of society care to gain. Ideology, from this perspective, is just a "general sociological category describing an anthropological feature of humans and society" (Fuchs, 2020, p. 220). In the view of Fuchs (2020), the concept of ideology is only meaningful when it is associated with the justification, dominance, and "legitimatization of class interests, or a group's ideas by distortion and dissimulation" (p. 220). Dominant ideologies generally serve to justify the interests of dominant groups (Giddens, 1997), and the targets are usually the masses that are dependent on these groups. Such a hegemonic nature of ideology is also significant for a critical theory of language, which interrogates the discursive dimensions of ideologies. Hegemonic ideologies are mediated through powerful political and social institutions (E.g., the government, the school, the

law, and the medical profession), which “have more or less exclusive access to, and control over, one or more types of public discourse” (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 356). In the view of Fuchs (2020), such encoded ideologies manifest themselves “in artifacts, belief systems, concepts, ideas, institutions, meanings, phrases, practices, representations, sentences, systems, texts, thoughts, and words that are employed to misrepresent or distort reality” (p.221).

A very powerful institution is the school where professors, teachers, educators, and educational decision-makers control scholarly discourse. The educational settings are also, where the intricate links between knowledge, power, and identity are established and where learning and meaning making are networked together in specific ways and for particular purposes. In the same vein, Gramsci (1994) pointed out that school as an institution is problematic in that it acts as a vehicle for the transmission of dominant ideologies like gender and patriarchy, which are embodied in both formal and covert forms in the curricula.

Within the educational institutions, many of the dominant ideologies are mediated through the school textbook. In the view of Lisovskaya and Karpov (1999), school textbooks can be considered as collectively produced cultural phenomena that can be used as socialization instruments to maintain and legitimize the status quo. Luk (2004) noticed that, besides playing a significant role in reinforcing what students learn from other contexts, school textbooks could also be used to achieve transformative goals (p. 3).

Over the last few decades, several studies, mostly in the field of critical discourse analysis, have attempted to explore how ideologies operate in discourse. According to Knowles and Malmkjaer (1996), “It is possible to identify typical strategies of symbolic construction through which the general modes of operation of ideology may be realized” (p. 46). Knowles and Malmkjaer asserted that the writers' linguistic choices, whether purposeful or not, may have an ideological purpose. Similarly, Fowler (1986) pointed out that “linguistic codes do not reflect reality neutrally; they interpret, organize, and classify the subjects of discourse. They embody theories of how the world is arranged: world-views or ideologies” (p.27). The scholars, thus, have devoted increasing attention to those linguistic codes present in the school textbook, which embody a lot of experiences, expectations, and assumptions about culture and may be judged to be ideologically loaded. Very recently, Kirkgoz (2019) has conducted a study to investigate whether the Turkish English Language textbooks used in secondary schools “were influenced by ideologically driven policies described in the curriculum of the national ministry of education” (p.107). Gu (2015) used the theory of systemic functional linguistics to examine evidentiality, subjectivity, and ideology in a Japanese history textbook. Bazzul and Sykes (2011), in their analysis of the conceptualization of the notion of gender and sexuality in the science textbooks used in Ontario schools, employed the Queer theory and focused on the discourses of science education. According to Bazzul and Sykes (2011), “a close examination of textbooks is crucial to disrupting the perpetuation of substantive and often invisible heteronormative oppression” (p, 273). A qualitative study by Prihatiningsih et al. (2021) employed Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal social semiotic approach to examine the types of cultures represented in the EFL textbooks for the seventh graders. Compared to target and worldwide culture, the data revealed that the source culture was more prevalent.

In this study, the notion of ideology was used to investigate the subtle configurations of ideology in relation to culture and foreign language instruction. Particular attention was paid to such discursive practices as positioning, labeling, naming conventions, describing, and categorizing as they unfolded throughout the book.

### ***The Algerian EFL Textbook***

In Algeria, French is taught from the second year of primary school until the final year of secondary school, whereas English is taught only in middle and secondary schools. During the period 1963–1964, Arabic became compulsory in all programs and at all levels, following the start of the language Arabisation policy shortly after Algeria's independence in July 1962. (Benrabah, 2007). The amount of time spent on teaching French has gradually decreased because of many reforms (Bennoune, 2000).

Despite the enormous effort made by the Algerian government to promote indigenous Arabic, French is still extensively used in business and professional circles. According to Rebai Maamri (2009), "certain aspects of formal education, and research are still carried in the French language and a great part of the economic and industrial sectors and press still use French extensively" (p.86).

In terms of English language instruction, very few measures have been taken to enhance its use in schools and universities. In 1993, primary school pupils (4th grade) were asked to choose between French and English as a compulsory foreign language. However, this experimental program failed as most parents chose French over English. According to Benrabah (1999), one reason for parents' rejection of English is that Algerians believe French is easier to acquire and more vital for socio-economic prosperity. In 2002, a national education reform planned the teaching of English in the sixth grade (intermediate school), two grades earlier than in the past (Rezig, 2011).

At the tertiary education level, the former higher education minister, Tayeb Bouzid, made the bold decision in July 2019 to replace French with English progressively at the Algerian universities. Two committees of professors were even appointed in September 2019 to discuss ways to gradually enhance the English language at the level of higher education and scientific research (Chorouk online, 2019).

In terms of the English language school textbook, it is worth noting that this teaching and learning material has gone through numerous stages of development at the official level. During the first decade of post-independence, the teaching of English as a foreign language had little significance because the country's school system had not yet been updated to introduce foreign languages. French was the language of administration and education, and demand for 'Arabization' in educational, religious and political spheres was a national priority. The Algerian educational system had to face the complexities of two conflicting mentalities, and the reforms adopted had to maintain a balance between the national needs and foreign resources. The first phase of the teaching of English was characterized by the general use of British course books until the late 70s. These commercial textbooks were designed to address a particular audience, with no emphasis on a specific home culture or educational program. The primary goal was to achieve a particular proficiency in English as a foreign language, not a specific culture (Hamada, 2011). The cultural

content “was characterized by imaginary characters, involved in artificial situations, and illustrated with stick-drawing figures. Proper names, places, activities, roles and environmental setting were stereotypes of the English speaking culture” (Hamada, 2011, p. 3). The first Algerian textbooks with national cultural themes appeared in the 1980s. They were primarily designed to address the country's development needs by allowing students to deal with differences and, later in life, to have better opportunities to communicate with foreign partners and acquire scientific knowledge. The goal was not to promote multicultural variety but to make the Algerian learner a constructive contribution to the international community (Hamada, 2011).

According to Hamada (2011), the teaching of a second language began to integrate some sociocultural components to help the learner transcend local barriers fulfill worldwide international diversity and inclusion requirements. In 2003, new textbooks were introduced due to the adoption of a reform known as the first generation program, based on a competency-based approach as an instructional framework for primary, middle, and secondary education.

More work is still being done despite the efforts made to design English learning materials that emphasize authentic language use in various situations. Messerehi (2014) found that most of the subjects covered in the secondary school textbook *Getting Through* were broad and provided learners with little opportunity to participate in culture-related activities, such as debates on cultural differences and cross-cultural habits and beliefs.

## Methods

We opted for content and a linguistic method of analysis to investigate the cultural aspects of the book. The representation of social actors and their activities in the textbook was examined using some elements from Van Leeuwen's (2008) socio-semiotic inventory. Within this framework, the study examines how social actors can be excluded or included for ideological reasons through the mechanisms of differentiation, nomination, and categorization and identification. The notion of transitivity has also been used to investigate how specific meanings in texts are pushed in a particular direction or how a text's linguistic structures encode viewpoints and experiences.

This study mainly draws on Thompson's (1990) inventory of the modes of operation of ideology to discern the typical linguistic structures responsible for the ideological representation of culture in the analysis. We focused on two modes, *unification* and *fragmentation*.

## Research Instruments

*My Book of English* was first introduced in 2016. It was compiled by a team of four teachers and inspectors. It consists of five sequences carefully designed to include a range of communicative linguistic and visual resources and tools. This book falls into the category of the second-generation books, reflecting new perspectives on innovation and openness.

Two years before the book's publication, the Ministry of National Education formed a partnership with the British Council Algeria, providing inspector and teacher trainer training at the Norwich Institute of Language Education and in Algeria to aid in the development and improvement of English teaching and learning in Algerian middle schools. Former Minister of National Education Ms. Benghebrat attended the international conference on education technology

in London in 1916. This yearly event brings people from all around the world together to talk about the future of education.

### Analysis

Unsurprisingly, the three types of culture are represented in *My Book of English*, The source culture (Algeria), the target culture (UK and USA), and the global culture (Countries representing the four corners of the world), reflecting a gradually established reform agenda. However, this language book looks intriguing because it construes certain social realities in a very unrealistic and manipulative way. What follows is the analysis of the cultural embedment in My Book of English.

### *National Culture as a Unifying Force*

What appears to be a recurring theme in My Book of English is how it uses various symbolic forms to establish a sense of national unity and belonging among the readers. According to Thompson (1990), unification, as a mode of operation of ideology, “embraces individuals in a collective identity” (p.64). This particular discursive practice is linked to two strategies: standardization and symbolization of unity. Standardization refers to making symbolic forms conform to particular framework which “is promoted as the shared and acceptable basis of symbolic exchange” (Thompson, 1990, p.64). In *My Book of English*, the strategy of standardizing a national culture is rather prevalent. Specific physical characteristics and cultural and social practices are associated exclusively with Algerian social participants using visual and written modes to generate a sense of national identity. In the excerpt below, from the book’s preface, exceptionally in Arabic, the authors overtly remind the reader of what attachment and commitment to one’s own country should mean. The terms ‘Oma’ (Nation) and ‘Watan’ ‘homeland’ are ideologically used to refer to patriotism and national pride.

#### (1)

أمل أن فيك لحي فين أك سيتعلم هذطالغة لاجي دة الإثراء لوف لظل ش خيري. مطورا لم هاريتك  
لوف املك بتمش ع لقي مكال وطي. نفتح لحي ال علم. نناق ا هتيسك. وق ادرا لحي استع علم ه  
ك أدات و لوف عب ه رية وطنك. جاعال من نلتمك ش ام خفي ال لحي بي بخت لف ال ممال حي

We hope you will learn this new language to enrich your knowledge. Develop your skills and competencies, imbued with your national values, open to the world, confident in yourself, and capable of using it as a communication tool to raise your homeland's flag high, making your nation lofty among the other existing countries.

The school textbook is heavily exploited to standardize behaviors and practices such as how to behave at school, at home, how to dress, how to engage oneself, and so on, with many of these activities aimed at promoting the source culture. The recurrent use of the pictures of the Algerian flag throughout the six pedagogical units, symbolizing unity and nationhood, exemplifies the symbolization of unity, which involves the construction of collective identity and identification through the use of symbols of national unity. Other symbols present in the texts include photographs of Algerian historical figures such as Djamilia Bouhired, Ben Boulaid, Ben M’hidi, Emir Abdelkader, and Ibn Badis. Some Algerians' celebrity, such as soccer player Riyad Mahrez, is also utilized to symbolize national unity and identity. Other recurring symbols employed as compelling images of collectiveness include the fennec fox, Algerian maps, and other local

locations. The names of Algerian towns are also used to create a sense of belonging and familiarity. The example below shows that the four corners of Algeria are represented.

(2)

- Sétif is in the East of Algeria.
- Tlemcen is in the West of Algeria.
- Algiers is in the North of Algeria.
- Tamanrasset is in the South of Algeria. (p.137)

The historical places and monuments, present in the book, also serve the (re) production and maintenance of positive attitudes towards the Algerian cultural legacy. Assekrem in the Hoggar Mountains, The Roman ruins in Batna, the Kasbah in Algiers, and the suspended bridges in Constantine are all considered sources of national pride. National and religious celebrations like Eid El Fitr and the 5<sup>th</sup> of July are also strong cultural markers in the book.

(3)

- Hi, I am Amine from Algeria. My national currency is the Algerian Dinar. My national dish is Couscous. One of my national celebration days is the 5<sup>th</sup> of July 1962. Eid El Fitr is one of my religious celebration days. (p.130)

The repetitive use of specific linguistic features such as national anthem, the beloved country, beautiful country, national heroes, and national dish also serves the need to reinforce the national and cultural identities.

(4)

- My ideal school is a school of values and happiness where the Algerian flag is always up (p.116)
- I sing a song about my homeland, a song I call 'I love you true.' The sea, the mountain, and the sand Algeria, the rose with the morning dew (p.136)

In this respect, it is worth noting that the need to establish particular social and cultural affiliations has led to the exclusion of certain social actors and the practices associated with them. According to Thompson (1990), the ideology of unification does not consider the elements that are not common to all individuals, particularly the ones that “*may separate them*” (p.64). In *My Book of English*, religious and ethnic differences are overlooked. The representations do not include, for instance, veiled women (except for the grandma) and indigenous people. Indeed, the exclusion of Berber names from a list of 21 names commonly considered to have originated in the Arab world is an ideologically loaded representational choice. According to Van Leeuwen (1996), such patterns of exclusion leave no traces in the representation, erasing both social actors and their activities.

### ***Global Culture as a Changing Force***

Since the adoption of the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions issues in 2015, Algeria has put in place several measures acknowledging the crucial role of culture, creativity, and cultural diversity in addressing political, social and economic issues. In this respect, the Algerian Ministry of National Education launched new educational program in 2016 known as the Second-Generation Program, which aimed to

promote global citizenship further. *My Book of English*, as a second-generation language book, stimulates learners' curiosity in diverse cultures both subtly and overtly. The use of words and representations demonstrates a keen awareness of the need to adapt to changing conditions.

## (5)

- I have duties and rights at school. I want to add more rights about: exams break, homework, computer room, class council, school website... (p.9)
- Pupils from all over the world introduce themselves on an International friendship blog. I post my information to make new friends and practice my English. (p.63)
- I respect the opinion of my friends from all over the world. (p. 112)

Learning about culture while learning a language like English, which has become a global language, is not just learning about a culture, which is historically rooted in Britain, but has become learning about cultures of the world.

## (6)

- I don't reject others' ideas; I don't behave rudely toward my classmates. (p. 118)
- I am happy. I speak English now. I have friends from all over the world. (p.138)

The book's last section contains many pieces of information about other people's cultures. For instance, the pupil may learn that Yorkshire pudding is a typical British food and that the Yuan is a Chinese currency.

## (7)

- Hi, I am Chen from China. My national currency is the Yuan. My national dish is Peking roasted duck. The national celebration day I like is the Chinese New Year. (p. 131)

The cover page of the book, which has a photo of six girls and seven boys from varied backgrounds holding hands around the world, is an excellent example of how inclusion and diversity strategies are implemented. The cover's topic may have been inspired by a song composed by Janice Kapp Perry in 2001 called *Holding hands around the world*.

Other symbols of globalization and multiculturalism used by the authors include the globe, the map of the world, the International Friendship Club, the Internet, to mention just a few. The act of nominating the characters provides the readers with some points of identification. According to Van Leeuwen (1996), "It is (...) always of interest to investigate which social actors are, in a given discourse, categorized and which nominated" (pp.52-53). The book contains thirteen foreign proper names, purposely selected to represent at least five continents. Names such as Bonnie (US), Santos (Brazil), Harry (Australia), Annita (Kenya), Chen (china) and Adaku (Nigeria) are used in the book as points of inclusion and diversity.

A significant aspect of global inclusion in the book is the authors' focus on technology and innovation as changing forces. For example, the reader is continuously reminded of the beneficial effects of electronic settings on human relationships. The frequent use of terms and visuals that

refer to technology, such as the Internet, blogs, e-mail, and tablets, connects readers to the rest of the world.

### ***Foreign Culture as a Dividing Force***

In My Book of English, culture appears to be a two-edged sword, sometimes functioning as a powerful agent of unification, providing a sense of identity and belonging, and other times serving as a powerful tool of division, setting boundaries and emphasizing differences. The pursuit of unity and autonomy often involves the construction of the 'us vs. them' way of thinking. According to Thompson (1990), fragmentation is a mode of ideology referring to the division and separation of groups by directing people toward the areas of differences, resulting in the "construction of a stranger" towards which "individuals are called upon collectively not to imitate" (p.65). The book explicitly or implicitly emphasizes the differences between groups (different names, different customs, and different physical appearances). It overtly foregrounds and highlights anything and everything about Algeria. The Algerian participants (Mounir, Leila, Kamel, Razane, etc.) are represented as the hosts and are allowed enough space. The others (Margaret, Peter, Adaku, Jack) are just guests and keypals.

#### **(8)**

- Omar is at home with his British guest, Peter. Omar shows Peter photos of his family. (P.44)
- Omar has an English friend. Her name is Mary. He sends her an e-mail to introduce his family members. (p. 8)
- Omar has an English friend. Her name is Margaret. He sends her an e-mail to introduce his family members. (p. 57)

Such representations may lead the reader to think that those who live in other nations and belong to different cultures are total strangers. Many of these assumptions are reinforced by the text's distribution of processes (verbal, mental, physical, behavioral, etc.) that construct human experience by linking words with external events.

The following example illustrates a cultural divide. Family values and social practices are depicted as unique to a particular country or culture. Indeed, Margaret, from England, and Younes, from Algeria, are linked to different social activities.

#### **(9)**

- Younes: At the weekend, I visit my grandmother who lives in the countryside. I water her trees and feed her pets. (P.80)
- Margaret: On Saturday morning, I attend ballet classes, and in the afternoon, my family goes for a walk in the countryside. (p. 85)

The way the authors describe a typical Algerian family, using words like "large," "extended," and "family relationships" (particularly grandchildren-grandparents relationships), reveals a lot about their attitudes. While many of these details are not explicitly mentioned, the reader would probably take them for granted. Such depictions serve the ideological goal of uniting the reader and writer in opposition to the different and strange characteristics and practices of *the other*.

#### **(10)**

- The family of Omar is large. It's the morning. The children greet their parents and grandparents. (p. 53)
- Omar is the first to greet his grandma. (p. 53)

A traditional account of culture seems to be implicitly and often explicitly advocated throughout the book. Culture seems to be understood in terms of belonging and otherness; if people are members of one group, they are not members of another. The following example demonstrates how school textbooks play a role in forming cultural boundaries.

**(11)**

You want to invite your friend to visit our beautiful country and its wonderful places and monuments. Make a leaflet to attract tourists from all over the world (include national dish, national currency, famous people, national and religious celebration days, languages...). (p. 143)

The concept of the 'other' is maintained throughout the book by juxtaposing people, situations, or actions to produce a comparison or contrast effect. Indeed, the e-mail exchanges between Adaku and Razane, Margaret and Younes, Houda and Kathleen, Younes and Margaret, etc., are placed in close proximity to emphasize differences.

**(12)**

Hi! Razane, My name is Adaku. I am 12 years old. I am from Nigeria. I speak English. (p. 60)

Hi Margret! These are the famous monuments and places in my beloved country Algeria. (p. 128)

Hi Houda! I am so happy to give you some information about my country, the United States of America. (p. 141)

## Discussion

The present study examined the representation of culture in *My Book of English*, a second-generation book designed to reflect the ministry of education reform agenda.

What appears to be a recurring theme in *My Book of English* is how it uses various symbolic forms to establish a sense of national and cultural unity among the readers through the processes of standardization and symbolization. To develop an understanding of national identity, particularly visual and written modes, descriptions, physical traits, and cultural and social practices are shown to be exclusively associated with Algerian participants. Several previous studies have highlighted the importance of sustaining national cultural standards. A very recent study by Merdassi (2021) involved the investigation of the representation of culture in *My Book of English 4*, a textbook used in the fourth year of middle school in Algeria. According to Merdassi, although the book has some explicit cultural resources, activities, and discussion that may help students develop cultural understanding, it contains few or no activities that would help students build their intercultural communication skills. A significant finding in Merdassi's investigation shows that the source culture is dominant in the reading, writing, and speaking tasks.

Although the linguistic and representational choices in *My Book of English* reflect a specific need to open up to the world and the changing cultural and social realities, the need to highlight national standards appears to be more prevalent. A possible explanation for this might be that Algeria, as a former French colony, has always strived to maintain its national values and interests. Indeed, the National Committee, in charge of the development of the curricula for the primary and intermediate levels, ensures that the teaching materials conform to the standards set by the reference texts, including unity of the nation and promotion of the values of citizenship in accordance with the values of Islam, Arabism, and Amazigh. However, one unexpected finding, as regards the analysis of the description of the Algerian cultural heritage, was the radical exclusion of the Berbers, who are Algeria's indigenous ethnic group. Such a pattern of representation, which overlooks differences, may stem from the need to emphasize the sense of unity and belongingness.

In terms of the ideological depiction of culture in school textbooks, our research shows that the writers' linguistic choices may influence the way the readers respond to views about culture and diversity. The descriptions and portrayals of groups of people (e.g., classmates, keypoints, historical figures), institutions (e.g., family, school), and social activities and practices (e.g., making friends, visiting relatives, listening to music) may contribute to the standardization, naturalization, and eternalization of specific assumptions about ways of being, thinking, and behaving, resulting in a subtle construction of the "us vs. them" representation. Although the working of ideology is not always the product of a conscious choice on the part of the author (Levorato, 2003), language school textbooks can be deliberately exploited to perpetuate ideas about the self and the other in relation to culture, identity, ethnicity, nationalism, and diversity.

When analyzing the role of language in the perpetuation of ideologies, Thompson (1990) emphasizes that the mobilization of meaning in the service of power not only maintains but also establishes relations of dominance. Ideological embedment in EFL textbooks has recently been highlighted in several studies (Ulum & Köksal, 2019; Kirkgoz, 2019; Mirhosseini, 2018). In an investigation into hegemonic cultural aspects portrayed in an ELT textbook used by the School of Languages in Tunja, Colombia, Caro and Caro (2019) found that the book, implicitly promotes the British culture as universal using positive expressions and adjectives.

Thus far, the present study's findings have important implications for developing a more holistic approach to elaborating EFL curricula. Indeed, the authors of EFL school textbooks must take into account the learners' sociolinguistic competency, i.e., their ability to communicate effectively in any situation. When it comes to the teaching and learning of a foreign language, the linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic components should be examined, as evidenced by data since Hymes (1972) introduced the theory of 'communicative competence.' Previous research has pointed to the inadequacies of current language textbooks. Substantial critique has mainly been aimed at the lack of adequate models for pragmatic language use (Gilmore 2007). In a comprehensive study of the role of the target culture in enhancing learners' socio-cultural competence, Khouni and Boudjelal (2019) found that possessing a great deal of social and cultural information can help learners achieve the right interpretation of any utterance, produce more socially and culturally appropriate comments, and avoid misunderstandings and communication breakdowns. In this regard, Prieto-Arranz and Jacob (2019) advocated for a transcultural approach, arguing that it is more acceptable to introduce language learners to issues that are universally

relevant across all cultures. In their study (2019), the participants were introduced to a series of culturally oriented work units as part of their learning of English as a Foreign Language. The findings contradict the widely accepted belief that transcultural competence leads to a person's view of themselves as culturally closer to members of their imagined communities.

To conclude, our initiative in this study consists of launching a call for adequate representation of culture in materials for EFL classrooms. More than ever, researchers and textbook writers need to work side-by-side, exchanging expertise for new insights.

Nevertheless, further investigations into the rest of the English course books used at middle and secondary school levels are encouraged to track the evolution of social and cultural representations.

### Conclusion

This study has examined the cultural representations in *My Book of English*, a first-year Middle School textbook of English. The linguistic and content analysis reveals that, while *My English Book* attempts to foster cultural awareness, it fails to convey balanced cultural representations. The examination of the different structures and symbolic forms present in the text shows that the book's content centers mainly on the source culture, revealing the writers' intention to construct a form of unity, which embraces Algerian learners in a collective identity, and culture. Specific characteristics of the target culture should, however, be highlighted in an English language book to provide learners with more opportunities for realistic communication processes that can help them improve their sociopragmatic competence. Indeed, the degree of exaggeration in the portrayal of Algeria in a foreign language book can be very confusing.

Algeria, more than ever, is facing the challenge of keeping pace with the growing demands of a globalized world, and a reasonable step would be to consider a more global dimension and a more holistic approach. The goal of fostering global cultural awareness in the classroom could be accomplished by providing resources that inspire students to question some of their commonly held beliefs about themselves and others.

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