TEACHERS' SOCIAL IDENTITY AND TEACHING MATERIALS

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Abstract - The nature of language teachers' identity is conceptualized in many studies as "a process of continual emerging and becoming" (Miller, 2009, p.173). This identify including social, ethical, cultural, linguistic, sociocultural identity, is shaped during the profession as the result of different factors. The current study focuses on the language course books used as the main teaching material. It is assumed that the teachers who are teaching languages are influenced by the culture and social aspects of the books. To conduct the present study, three English course books, widely used in Iran, are analyzed based on the framework proposed by Phillipson and also Kachru's inner, outer and expanding circles to investigate the content of the course books. Then twenty teachers who teach the books are interviewed to analyze their perspectives to the English culture. The results reveals that there are three main groups of teachers in this regard: those who are acculturated and their identity is totally influenced by the material, those who are resistant to the new culture and even try to avoid it, and finally those who try to keep the balance and see both their native and the other culture and be more critical. Bringing the obtained results into practice, teachers' awareness can be increased in teacher education courses to help them shape the identity with more wisely.

Index Terms - Teachers' identity, Culture, Teaching materials

I. INTRODUCTION

Identity is a multidimensional and complex concept and therefore is defined differently from different perspectives by many scholars. For Norton (2000) identity is "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how the relationship is constructed across time and space, and how that person understands possibilities for future" (p.5). Gee (2001) considers identity as a social concept and believes that "being recognized as a certain kind of person, identity is connected not to internal states but to performances in society. It is also an important analytical tool for understanding schools and society" (p.99). From Pennington's (2015, p.16) point of view, "identity can be viewed first in terms of the unique set of characteristics associated with a particular individual relative to the perceptions and characteristics of others". Since it is a very important issue in teaching profession, many scholars have investigated its construction and development. As Miller (2009) states, it is constructed continuously and influenced by many factors such as personal biography, interactional skills, knowledge, attitudes, and social capital. Therefore, as she believes the pre-service teachers have a repertoire of resources they can use as they developing their professional identities in social and institutional context and this professional identity is also affected by contextual factors including workplace conditions, curriculum policy, bilingual language policy, cultural differences, racism, etc. For language teachers, the identity is not the result of the pre-service training, it is the process which occurs during the career which starts with socialization (Freeman,2016; pp. 34-35). This socialization as he states, is the result of two social situations: as a student who learnt the language and as a language user who uses the language both in and out of the school setting. Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) define identity formation as "a process of practical knowledge-building characterized by an ongoing integration of what is individually and collectively seen as relevant to teaching" (p. 123). Pennington and Richards (2016) believes that identity which is "a person's self-image" can be form based on the concept of appropriate behavior or value-construct. Course books can have very important role in language classes. Byrd as cited in Celce-Murcia (2001) emphasizes the role of course books by stating that, "a few teachers enter the class without a text book that provides content and teaching/learning activities that shape much of what happens in the classroom." (p. 415). Therefore, they are one of the main channels to affect teachers' cultural and social identity. Some scholars even believe that they are one of the major tools for cultural imperialism. According to Modiana (2001, p.340):

Some sociolinguists perceive this process as linguistic imperialism, pointing out that government agency and private enterprises, primarily in the UK and the US, export educational materials and operate language schools as a way to extent their sphere of influence. It other words, the material of the course is a critical element which is influential for both students and teachers, it can also be the source of value-construction. As the teachers start the profession and deal with the books, they become more and more involved with the target culture and they get more aware of the native people's life style and social values. According to Gee (2008), when language teachers begin to work, they see the value of the world in different way. Sachs (2005) sees teacher identity as a concept that is not fixed, rather it is something that is negotiated and built through experience. Therefore, it

is assumed that teacher identity which, as Pennington and Richards (2016) claim is shaped based on their belief about good behaviors, starts developing considering the new values. Identity and identity development is crucial in teaching profession as compared with other professions (Singh and Richards, 2006). Thus, the process of its construction and all factors contributed to this process should be examined very carefully. One of the factors which is not that much explored is teaching material.

In this article, the content of English course books, as more common teaching material, are examined to investigate whether the cultural and social aspect presented in them represent the culture of English speaking countries. The next move is exploring the effect of the presented culture on the teachers' perception about the social and cultural issues and also their identity as a language teacher.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study is an attempt to answer the following question:

Q1: Do English course books represent the culture and social values of the English speaking countries?

Q2: Is EFL teachers' identity influenced by the course books?

Q3: How different do teachers react to the cultural and social loads in English course books?

III. METHOD

To answer the first research question "Do English course books represent the culture and social values of the English speaking countries?", three series of course books (New Headway, Total English, English Results), published by British publishers which are widely used in language institutes in Iran were analyzed by the researchers using Kachru's (1986) model. Kachru's model indicates the development of English from just a colonial language to a global one. His model of three concentric circles is widely quoted (Celce-Murcia, 2014 & Harmer, 2007): the Inner Circle comprises the six countries where an old variety of English is used and English has become the native language of the majority of the people. Britain, Ireland, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The Outer Circle contains more than 70 states (Kachru 1992, Kachru/Nelson 1996), in these countries English has a long history of use, and usually it has developed as a local variety. In those countries English has played a major role as a second and official language in many key educational and governmental institutions (Kachru/Nelson 1996). India, Pakistan, Singapore and Nigeria are considered typical countries of the Outer Circle where new varieties of English arose over time through contact with native languages. The Expanding Circle includes countries where English is widely studied as a foreign language; these countries were not colonized by any country of the Inner Circle, and English has no official status. Figure 1 shows Kachru's circles proposed in 1985.

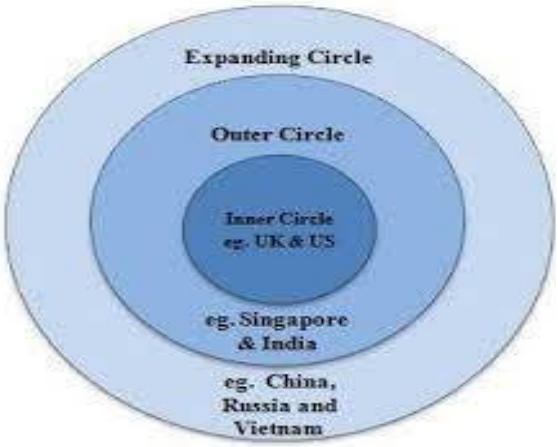


Figure 1: Kachru's circles, 1985

The main reading texts of each unit of these books were explored and the portion of the texts related to each circle was calculated. These texts were analyzed considering five aspects: Social values and norms, Life styles and behaviors, Customs and traditions, Literature and history, and finally Geography. To answer the second and the third questions "Is EFL teachers' identity influenced by the course books?" and "How different do teachers react to the cultural and social loads in English course books?", A questionnaire containing 20 statements based on the cultural aspects of these three books were administered to 44 teachers working in two institutes in Tehran, teaching these course books for more than three years. The teachers were asked to insert their ideas about them by term "strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree". Then, they were asked to express their opinion about the target culture and write their idea about teaching cultural sections briefly in a paragraph. The results obtained in this part were qualitatively analyzed.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Applying the Kachru's model to analyze the English course books, it was revealed that, about 60% of the materials used for reading lessons are related to the life style of the countries in Inner circle such as Britain, the United States, Australia, etc. About 35% is the life style of people all over the world (Global), 6% and 3% respectively involves with the life style of people in Expanding and Outer circle countries. 61% of the custom and traditions introduced in these course books are related to inner circle, 22% to Expanding, 17% Global, and just 5% to Outer circle. The location

of about 70% of the reading texts is the countries situated in Inner circle moreover, 75% of the literature and historical information is also related to the countries from the Inner circle. The statistical findings about social values and norms, life style and behavior, and also costumes and traditions are summarized in figure2, 3, and 4.

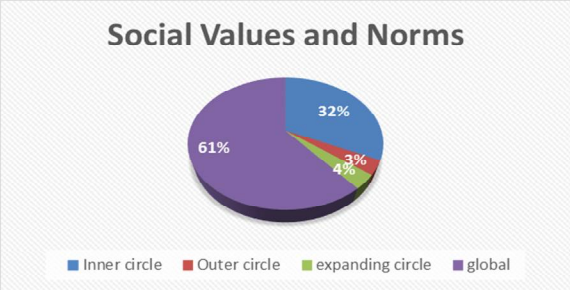


Figure 2. Social Values and Norms

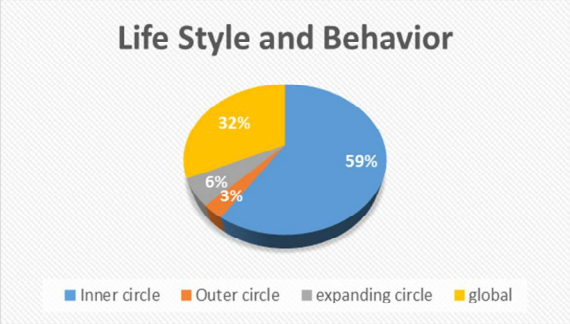


Figure 3. Life Style and Behavior

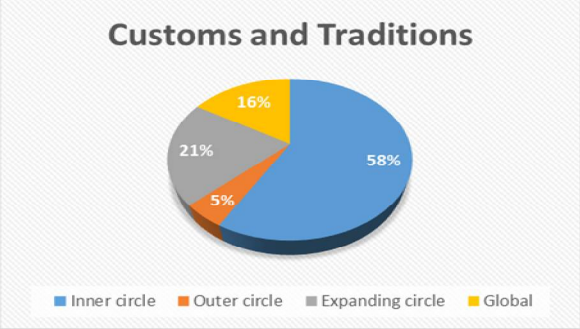


Figure 4: Chart 3. Customs and Traditions

In all these cases, there are some points to be considered:

1. The life style introduced in all these three books implicitly and explicitly present mostly the life style of the Inner countries especially UK. It worth highlighting that from all the categories we identified.
2. In all these books, most of the scientific achievements are attributed to the inner circle countries. The surveys done in these course books are also based on the norms of the inner circle countries, for example, the survey in English Result, p.42.
3. The Inner circle countries are ideal places to live where for example a Ukrainian girl, in "Headway New Edition", finds her health and gets educated to help people in her own country.
4. Literature, costume and tradition, and also life style have more portion of materials related to Inner circle.

Therefore, it can be concluded that these course books are reflecting the culture, life style and social values of the English speaking countries. As it was mentioned earlier, to answer the second and the third questions, first a questionnaire was administered to 44 teachers and then the teacher were asked to write a brief paragraph to express their opinion. Analyzing the findings, it was concluded that, 1) All teachers have influenced by the social and cultural issues presented in the books but in different ways. 2) Teachers who were the participants of the study, can be categorized into three groups according their attitudes toward these aspects. There were 23 teachers who had more tendency to the culture and social values of inner circle countries, they prefer that life style, norms and living standards and also reading English books, listening English songs and watching English movies more than reading, listening and watching something in their own language, 8 teachers who were resistant about English culture and even avoid teaching it and tried to replace it with some local values and native culture, and finally the third group including those teacher who had critical and comparative view. They commented on both native and second culture with no bias and encouraged the learners to get familiar with both while they are wisely aware of all aspects of each one.

CONCLUSION

According to Gee, cited in Freeman (2016, p.36), the identity of a language teacher involves many aspects such as being, talking, and experiencing the world and all social facts that are valued in his/her professional community builds the identity. English course books, like any other language course books, try to present the culture of the countries in which the target language is spoken. Although, learning and teaching the culture and social values is an important part of language education, the social and cultural knowledge that teachers gain through teaching these books like any other social facts can shape, re-shape, or totally change their perception of the world and consequently, their identities. The results obtained in this study indicate that all teachers can be affected by these factors, however, this can be different in different teachers since their opinions about that is totally different. While some teachers are acculturated in the target culture, some even do not teach the

necessary cultural point and think that the idea of presenting the social and cultural aspect is the matter of capitalism and linguistic imperialism. There are still another group that try to keep balance and while knowing and teaching about these aspects, they provide learners with critical thinking instrument to compare the cultures and see bright sides and pitfalls of each of them.

IMPLICATION

Training open-minded and insightful teachers who are critical thinks and can evaluate their current status, is with no doubt one of the main goals of any effective teacher training courses. Therefore, providing pre-service teachers with the idea of having a critical look at learning materials and having awareness about cons and pros of their contents, helps them in the process of identity building.

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