

CULTURAL SOURCE IMBALANCE IN JUNIOR HIGH ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS**Mei Yuling***Belarusian State University, Faculty of Philology**Minsk, Belarus, 619540665@qq.com*

This study examines the distribution of cultural sources in junior high school English textbooks. Based on an analysis of five volumes of the “Go for it!” textbook, a significant dominance of English-speaking countries’ culture is identified. Native Chinese culture and international culture are found to be underrepresented. This distribution fails to support bidirectional intercultural communicative competence.

Keywords: intercultural communication; English textbooks; cultural imbalance; cultural sources.

The present study investigates how different cultural sources are represented in a widely used junior high school English textbook series in China. The theoretical basis for this investigation comes from two interconnected frameworks. The first is Kachru’s “Three Concentric Circles” model, which divides English-using countries into the Inner Circle (native-speaking countries), the Outer Circle (English as an official language), and the Expanding Circle (English as a foreign language) [1]. Based on this classification, cultural content in English textbooks can be categorized into three sources: target language culture (Inner Circle countries), native culture (the learner’s own country), and international culture (Outer and Expanding Circle countries excluding the learner’s own) [2].

The second framework is Byram’s model for evaluating cultural content in teaching materials. This model breaks down cultural content into eight categories: social identity and social groups, social interaction, beliefs and behaviors, social and political systems, socialization and life circle, national history, national geography, and cultural stereotypes and national identity [3]. The present study adopts this classification system for data collection and analysis.

The research subject is the “Go for it!” junior high school English textbook series published by People’s Education Press (2024 edition). The series consists of five volumes: two volumes for Grade 7, two volumes for Grade 8, and one volume for Grade 9. All content across the five volumes was examined for cultural elements. Following Byram’s classification framework, each instance of cultural content was coded by source into one of three categories: native culture (Chinese culture), target language culture (cultures of Inner Circle countries), and international culture (cultures of Outer and Expanding Circle countries other than China) [3]. The textbook content was divided into five sections for analysis: Listening and Speaking, Reading, Reading for Writing, Grammar Focus, and Self-check.

The findings reveal a clear imbalance in the distribution of cultural sources. Target language culture accounts for the majority of cultural content in the five textbooks. Native Chinese culture appears considerably less frequently. International culture represents the smallest proportion among the three sources. Specifically, the data show that students are exposed to English-speaking country culture more than twice as often as they encounter their own cultural heritage. The cultures of Outer and Expanding Circle countries — such as India, Singapore, Japan, and Russia — are severely underrepresented.

Examples of target language culture appear most frequently in sections dealing with social interaction, festival celebrations, and daily life in Western countries. These include descriptions of Western dining customs, etiquette at social gatherings, traditional holiday celebrations, and typical daily activities in English-speaking countries. Examples of native Chinese culture include traditional Chinese festivals such as the Dragon Boat Festival and the Mid-Autumn Festival, folk tales such as the story of Yu Gong Moving the Mountains, and traditional cultural elements such as tea, kites, lanterns, paper-cutting, and clay sculpture. Examples of international culture include references to cultural symbols of Thailand and India, natural geographic features of various countries, and global environmental issues.

The distribution of cultural content across textbook sections is also uneven. The Reading section contains the most cultural material, followed closely by the Listening and Speaking section. The Reading for Writing section accounts for a smaller proportion. The Grammar Focus and Self-check sections contain the least amount of cultural content. This pattern indicates that cultural content is concentrated in input-oriented sections rather than in sections designed for student production or self-assessment.

The dominance of target language culture observed in this textbook reflects a broader pattern documented in previous research. Studies have shown that Inner Circle countries' cultures continue to occupy a central position in many ELT textbooks worldwide, while Outer and Expanding Circle cultures remain on the periphery [4]. This pattern is problematic for several reasons.

First, the imbalance contradicts the goals of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). ICC requires learners to mediate between their own culture and other cultures, not merely to absorb target language culture passively [5]. When the textbook presents English-speaking country culture as the default or most important cultural content, students may internalize the assumption that learning English is primarily about adopting Western cultural norms. This undermines the development of critical cultural awareness, which Byram identifies as a central component of ICC [3].

Second, the underrepresentation of native Chinese culture contributes to what researchers have called "Chinese Cultural Aphasia" — a phenomenon where students can express Western cultural concepts fluently in English but struggle to describe their own traditional culture in the target language [6]. The English curriculum standards explicitly state that students should "inherit and promote excellent traditional Chinese culture" [7]. The current textbook does not adequately support this goal, as students may learn to describe Thanksgiving or Halloween in detail but lack the vocabulary and cultural knowledge to explain Chinese festivals in English.

Third, the limited presence of international culture restricts students' exposure to the diversity of English-using contexts around the world. English today functions as a global lingua franca, used by speakers from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds [4]. Students need to encounter English as it is used in Outer Circle countries, not only as it is used in Inner Circle countries. A textbook that focuses primarily on Western cultural content presents an outdated picture of English as a language owned by its native speakers.

From the perspective of second language acquisition theory, the concentration of cultural content in reading and listening sections means that students receive cultural input but have relatively few opportunities for cultural output. According to Swain's Output Hypothesis, language production serves three important functions: the noticing function, which prompts learners to recognize gaps in their knowledge; the hypothesis-testing function, which allows learners to experiment with language use; and the metalinguistic

function, which enables learners to reflect on their own output [8]. Without adequate opportunities to produce cultural content in speaking and writing tasks, students may struggle to internalize and apply their cultural knowledge.

Several recommendations follow from these findings. For textbook compilers, a more balanced selection of cultural sources is needed. The proportion of native Chinese culture should be increased, particularly in sections dealing with traditional festivals, historical figures, and cultural practices. International culture from Outer and Expanding Circle countries should receive greater attention to reflect the global nature of English today. For classroom teachers, the textbook should not be treated as the sole source of cultural content. Teachers can supplement the textbook with materials on Chinese culture and international culture, design comparative activities that encourage students to reflect on cultural similarities and differences, and provide output opportunities where students practice expressing their own cultural knowledge in English.

This study has limitations. It focuses on a single textbook series, and the findings may not generalize to other textbooks used in different regions. Future research could compare multiple textbook series and examine how teachers actually use cultural content in the classroom. Despite these limitations, the study provides empirical evidence of a persistent imbalance in cultural source distribution and offers a basis for improving the design of English language teaching materials.

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КУЛЬТУРНЫЙ ДИСБАЛАНС В УЧЕБНИКАХ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА ДЛЯ СРЕДНЕЙ ШКОЛЫ

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В статье анализируется распределение культурных источников в учебниках английского языка для средней школы. На основе анализа пяти томов учебника «Go for it!» выявлено значительное преобладание культуры англоязычных стран. Родная китайская культура и международная культура представлены в недостаточном объеме. Такое распределение не способствует формированию двусторонней межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная коммуникация; учебники английского языка; культурный дисбаланс; источники культуры