
The intercultural component in EFL coursebooks

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The word *culture* in Chinese used to refer to 'a situation wherein a change takes place for one side or both sides concerned, as a result of their contact with each other' (Fang 2019 in Dervin & Yuan 2022:3).

The central idea of this conception seems to remain in the conceptualization of intercultural communicative competence, which implies the interest of knowing and learning about other cultural referents, the reflection upon identity and the desire to rebuild our own identity from an intercultural experience (Níkleva 2009). But, how is the intercultural component developed in EFL books? We looked at four books used in the teaching of English as a foreign language with the aim of examining how intercultural issues are approached in beginner level textbooks. A careful qualitative analysis including information extracted from the students' and the teachers' books was carried out. Attention was paid to the activities presented and to the visual support that accompanies each edition, with the goal of finding out which cultures are made visible. Finally, the focus was placed on the representation of these cultures in the recordings offered by the coursebooks. With the exception of a strong presence on the visual support, the results showed that the representation of the plural reality in the textbooks under study is still scarce and that the treatment of the cultural diversity is, in general, quite superficial.

Books under analysis and general approach to cultural issues in the teacher's books

The need to give an intercultural orientation to the teaching of languages emerged some decades ago (see Buttjes y Byram, 1991; Byram y Risager 1999; Kramsch, 2001; Neuner, 2003) and is now quite indisputable- as the prolific literature on the topic evidences (Baker 2022; Byram, 2021; Corbett, 2022; Estaji,

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2018, Karras 2021, among many others). Khukhlaev (2020: 14) states that Leung et al. (2014) 'note that today there are more than 30 models of intercultural competence and more than 300 constructs related to this problem'. However, we believe that much current language teaching practice still seems to treat this issue in quite a simplistic way.

We analysed 4 textbooks that introduce English for beginners- 2 used with pre- early teens and teenage students (*Your Space* and *Gateway*) and 2 for young adults and adults (*Speakout* and *Life*)¹.

As we can see in the extracts below (see table 1), all the teacher's books make reference, in one way or another to cultural issues through the inclusion of rich material (*Life*) prepared to expose learners to 'a wider world' (*Your Space*), content that is 'global in nature' (*Speakout*) and supports 'the development of learner autonomy, plurilingualism and intercultural awareness and competence' (*Gateway*).

¹ Complete references are listed at the end

Intercultural matters- Teacher's books

Life states that **the richness of the content introduced [taken from the National Geographic archives]** 'means that students are so engaged in learning about the content, and expressing their own opinions, that language learning has to take place in order for students to satisfy their curiosity and then react personally to what they have learnt' (p.8)

Your Space 'creates an interface between the familiar world they [students] know and the equally engaging but more challenging experiences of the **wider world**'... 'We aim to provide a course which reflects students' developments and **the world in all its rich variety**'. It contains material 'to equip students with the (not only linguistic) competences needed **in a global environment**' (p.IV)

Speakout 'offers engaging topics with authentic BBC material to really bring them to life'...'We have chosen **topics that are** relevant to students' lives and are **global in nature**' (p.19)

Gateway A1+ (2016) Macmillan states that *Edition* is **carefully mapped to the The**

Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

The European Language Portfolio (ELP) was developed by the Language Policy Unit of the Council of Europe **to support the development of learner autonomy, plurilingualism and intercultural awareness and competence**' (p.24).

Table 1. Intercultural matters. Teacher's books

The analysis will show that the extent to which intercultural matters are actually covered is quite varied.

Visual support

Analysing the images that accompany the activities of each book, we find differences in the approach in the textbooks aimed at youngsters and adults. The former basically display more illustrations than photos- generally waist shots- with blurred or one plain colour background which are cosmetic (as the extract from *Your Space* below reveals- pictures a and b) or lend themselves to practice a specific grammar point or support the development of vocabulary (such as the sample from *Gateway* shows- pictures c and d).



Pictures a and b

Pictures c and d

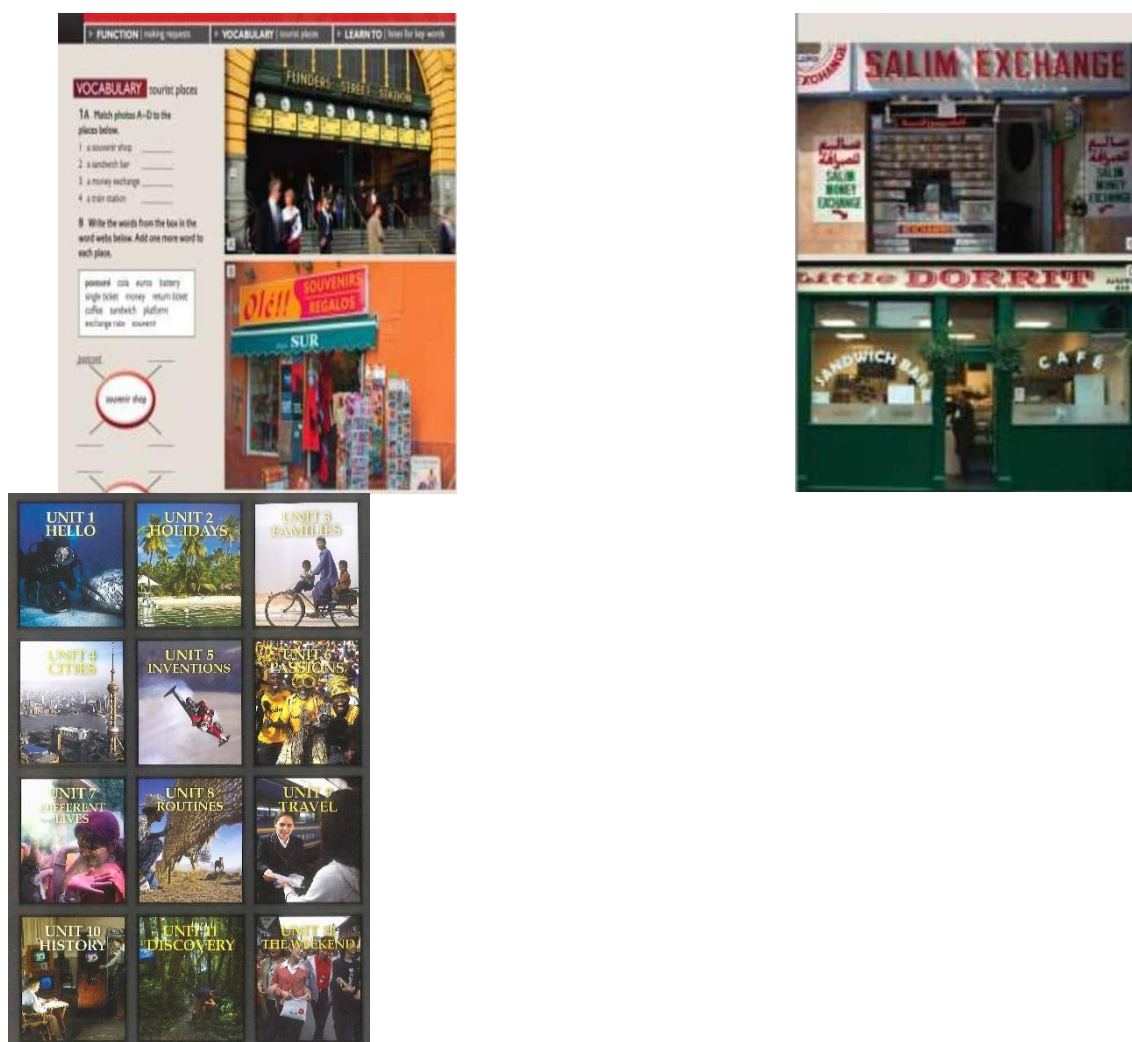
Your Space students' book pages 111 & 40
 page 25

Gateway students' book

The pictures in *Your Space* add very little to the activities themselves: in the first case, the illustration leads us to think that the speakers are not sharing the same room but, although the illustration does not show it, we are led to believe that the speakers are on the phone, which might justify why the woman asks the man about her activities instead of checking them herself). Surprisingly enough, in the case of the second activity, the passage is about the boy's family (not himself) and football is not mentioned at all- which means that the picture not only fails to contextualize the activity but it may also trigger unnecessary information.

As for *Gateway*- representative of many other textbooks- the visual material leads to the production of regular plural nouns (picture on the left) and to the recognition of vocabulary connected to description of people (the activity on the right). We believe that what the pictures show is so limited that they reduce the possible outcome expected from the students.

In textbooks aimed at adults the number of photographs increases as well as their exploitation. In the selection from *Speakout* shown above, we can see that the pictures (see pictures e-h) are integrated in many of the activities suggested: one that focuses on function (asking for requests), vocabulary and listening (connected to shops and buying) and speaking (ordering in a restaurant). In *Life*, photos are selected from the National Geographic archive and play a central role in stimulating learning, as the teacher's book describes: pictures serve as the starting point of each unit (as we see on page 8- pictures i-t) and trigger different kinds of activities (tell a story, provoke debate, support understanding of a text, among others- see teacher's book p. 9).



Pictures e-h
Speakout students' book pages 12 & 13
 book pages 8

Pictures i-t
Life students'

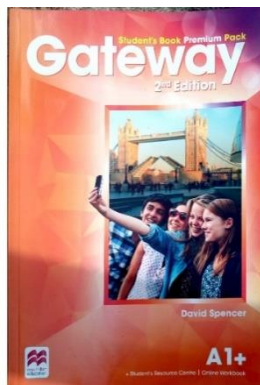
The fact that these books display long shots with global content opens more possibilities that allow, for example, reflexions and comparisons between the students' local environment and the ones shown in the books.

Cultural references

Once more, the treatment of cultural matters differs according to the age of the learners. We believe that this may respond to the fact that the topics suggested to young learners are related to the students' own world and experiences (school, family life, friends) whereas the tendency in adults' textbooks seems to be to deal with less private issues. This, in a way, widens the scope to the world in general. However, when the wider world is included, *Gateway* evidences a clear preference for British culture, starting from the cover (that shows the picture of the Tower Bridge- see picture u) to the number of British references over other cultures: the reading material includes 11 texts with information about Britain or the UK over other 12 cultures only mentioned once throughout the textbook. In

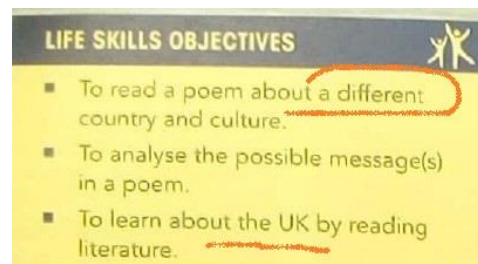
a section called 'Gateway to life skills: Art and culture', a poem 'about the UK' is introduced and one about 'a *different* country and culture' - which, in our opinion, places Britain as the culture of reference and India as a 'different' culture from the

Western-centric format.



Picture
Picture v

Gateway, textbook cover
p.130



Gateway students' book

Your Space also shows limited treatment of cultural issues with 9 texts about UK or Britain and 7 of other cultures that appear only once in the whole book.

The attention given to the variety of cultures is more balanced in *Speakout* and *Life*, since plural diversity is also present in the listening activities and videos, including also Latin American countries not usually considered in textbooks- such as Cuba and Argentina (in *Speakout*) and African cultures such as Uganda and Kenya (in the case of *Life*). The fact that both textbooks extract material from authentic sources contributes in a considerable way: As previously said, *Life* is based on the National Geographic archives, whereas *Speakout* extracts material from the BBC archives. But how many of these cultures are heard? And what is their representation in the recordings?

Audio material

When analysing the presence of different varieties of English in the audio material, the results are quite shocking, since- as the following table shows (table 2)- the presence of *World Englishes* is virtually non-existent.

	<i>Gateway</i>	<i>Your Space</i>	<i>Speakout</i>	<i>Life</i>
# of tracks	97	150	126	150
# of activities where nationalities are made explicit	3	7	2	4

Table 2. Audio material & the inclusion of different varieties of English

In general, audio files are practically all made by a male or a female native speaker of General British English repeated throughout the whole book. Many

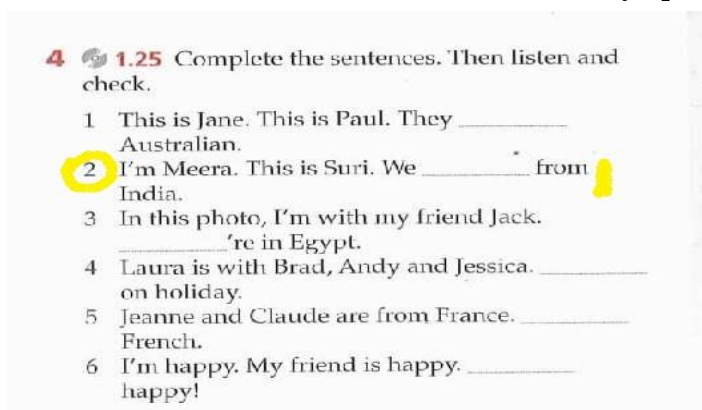
different places and origins are mentioned, but it is particularly interesting to analyse what happens when these are included in activities accompanied by recorded material. As we can see in the following examples (activity B 4.12 & 4 1.25 below), the voices of these cultures do not emerge because they are referred to by non-users of these varieties.

Activity B 4.12. Listen to a man talk about his favourite place and answer the questions above. p. 45 *Speakout*.

The segment is about Lake Titicaca but the description is made by a native speaker of English, so locals from the tourist place are not heard. A similar case is found in *Life* (activity 4 1.25), where 3 out of 6 situations introduce different nationalities (Australia (#1), India (#2) and France (#5)), apart from mentioning Egypt as well (#3).

Life Ex. 1.25 (p.22) Student's book

Only #2 constitutes a self- introduction. As in *Speakout*, the other nationalities are not heard because these people are introduced by an English native speaker. In addition, when we listen to #2, the variety spoken does not seem to match the




4 1.25 Complete the sentences. Then listen and check.

- 1 This is Jane. This is Paul. They _____ Australian.
- 2 I'm Meera. This is Suri. We _____ from India.
- 3 In this photo, I'm with my friend Jack. _____ 're in Egypt.
- 4 Laura is with Brad, Andy and Jessica. _____ on holiday.
- 5 Jeanne and Claude are from France. _____ French.
- 6 I'm happy. My friend is happy. _____ happy!

descriptions of Indian English. Taking the most salient characteristics of Indian English from Trudgill & Hannah (2017), the post alveolar approximant would be expected to sound as a flap or a retroflex flap in 'Mirra' y 'Suri' but it is actually produced with open

approximation in the recording. In some varieties of Indian English the labiovelar approximant /w/ is replaced by the labiodental fricative /v/, so 'we' /wi/ would probably be produced as /vi/. In Indian English, the voiced alveolar plosive /d/ usually takes the place of the dental fricative /D/ in words such as 'this', which would probably sound as /dis/. None of these characteristics are found in the speaker's production. According to Trudgill & Hannah (ibid.), alveolar sounds /d/ and /s/ tend to be replaced by retroflex consonants /ɖ/, /ʂ/ respectively, absent also in this recording in 'this' and in 'India'). Lastly, in Indian English functional words are not reduced. In this recording, though, the preposition 'from' is weak and reduced, as is the case in General British English.

Similar results are found in the books aimed at young learners- as the following activity reveals (activity 5 1.43), where students are asked to complete a chart with information about a Mexican boy.

5  **1.43** Ask students to look at the photos of the boy and girl. Elicit their names. Then elicit possible answers to complete the table.

Play the recording. Students listen and complete the table. They can compare answers in pairs. Play the recording again. Check answers.

Audioscript

Luis: Hello! My name's Luis and I'm from Mexico. I'm twelve and my birthday's on the 7th of April. My favourite colour is green and my favourite food is hamburgers.

Your Space Teacher's book p. 26

As well as in the rest of the books, in this case there are no references about varieties of English in the teacher's book to help students become aware of the existence of *World Englishes*. As regards the content of the activity, there is nothing that reflects the boy's culture in what he says nor in his oral performance. It seems quite improbable that one would mispronounce his/her own name that the boy produces here with a falling diphthong instead of a rising glide (Luis instead of Luís). Other peculiar characteristics, in our opinion, are: the correct use of weak forms in 'from', 'the', 'of' - not generally produced with schwa by Spanish speakers, the accurate production of the voiceless dental fricative - especially difficult in syllable-final position as in '7th' and 'birthday', and the quality of the vowels in 'food', 'colour', and the final sound in 'hamburger', quite close to the production of a native English model.

If, on the contrary, we are forced to believe that the recordings are actually made by native speakers of the varieties mentioned, we could say that the cases introduced are not prototypical in the sense that they do not match the descriptions included in the specific references of *World Englishes*. That is why we believe that they might give an erroneous idea of the variety they are trying to reproduce or, at least, that these models will not necessarily help students exposed to these recordings to identify these varieties in the future, nor achieve the goal of understanding them easily.

Final remarks

Nikleva (op. cit.: 31) states that

'El multiculturalismo se limita con la mera contemplación; se plantea la diversidad de escaparate (sin enriquecimiento). Mientras que la interculturalidad es la que implica diálogo intercultural, comprensión y encuentro'².

The present study reveals that the books under analysis show weak attempts to develop the intercultural component taking a multicultural more than an intercultural approach. The reductionism of the issue seems to show that there is

² 'Multiculturalism is limited to mere contemplation; display of diversity is exhibited (without enrichment). Whereas interculturality implies intercultural dialogue, understanding and encounter. (my own translation)

a gap to be filled between intercultural theory and practice and that practical suggestions do not yet meet theoretical discussions.

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