Cultural Representation in Primary School ELT Textbooks in Mainland China

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Abstract

This study aims to conduct a mixed-method analysis of PEP Primary English, a primary school English language teaching textbook series covering eight volumes widely used in Mainland China, to depict its representation of different cultures and explore whether the cultural representation follows the National English Language Curriculum Standard.

The textbook analysis proceeds in three steps. The first step is to develop the criteria of categorising cultural elements presented in PEP Primary English. An adapted version of Kachru’s (1985, 1992) three concentric circles of World Englishes is employed to define cultural categories. The cultural elements in the textbooks are generally grouped into two categories, namely, the local culture and the foreign culture. The local culture includes all the elements in relation to the home country where this textbook series has been published and widely used – China. The foreign culture is subcategorised into 1) the Inner Circle where English is applied as the mother tongue or a primary language due to its traditional historical and sociolinguistic bases over there, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand; 2) the Outer Circle where English is institutionalised as a lingua franca though it does not serve as the native language, such as India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong SAR; and 3) the Expanding Circle where English is utilised as a primary foreign language but does not play a historical or governmental role, such as China, Japan, South Korea, and Russia.

The second step is to tag those elements presented in the textbooks according to the established criteria of cultural categories; and to calculate their frequency in individual volumes and in the whole textbook series respectively.

The third step is to tabulate the frequency of cultural elements in the textbooks and to compare the features of their representation with the learning requirements for cultural awareness as stated in the National Curriculum.

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