Intercultural Competence – A Never-Ending Journey

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Abstract This chapter provides a conceptual framework of the journey of English from a language of colonial imperialism to one of a lingua franca (ELF) used by individuals as a tool for transcultural communication. Distinctions are drawn between the use of English as a neo-colonial medium of transmission of an assumed Eurocentric culture and the reality of many non-native speakers of English. The author argues that for intercultural competence to occur, a critical and an intersectional approach is required to equip students and teachers with the necessary skills for the use of English as a lingua franca. The aim is also to highlight how the colonial origins of ELF gave English a power that is now shared with the global majority user, yet the cultural content does not meet their needs. Hence, the main argument is that a more inclusive and deeper cultural representation approach is essential for the promotion of effective teaching and the fostering of a more equitable intercultural competence in ELT textbooks, using a kind of 'lingua culture'. A disruptive process of usualisation of culture and a more balanced and less stereotypical representation of otherness is vital and necessary to help educate students into becoming responsible global citizens who can empathise with one another on real-world issues.

Keywords Imperialism · Lingua franca · Eurocentric · Intercultural competence · Lingua culture · Usualisation · Otherness

1 Introduction

As a descendant of Indian immigrants, growing up in 70s and 80s Britain, I often found myself feeling embarrassed. Alagiah (2003, p. 36) describes it as "the tug of war between heritage and assimilation", which I felt for example over my mother's idea of party food or decision to wear a sari when out and about. Britain, at that

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time, had no space for being who you are because assimilation was about becoming invisible. Today, my mother's ability to create the perfect pakora and scones would be equally celebrated on a cooking TV series or in UK primary schools and gives me great pride. To many this illustrates multiculturalism in Britain, as does the existence of the first British-Indian Prime Minister of the UK. However, 'exotic' foods are perhaps more accepted than the people who introduced them to British shores. For example, in the aftermath of the Euro 2020 final match, the English footballers, Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho, and Bukayo Saka experienced extreme hate and racist abuse for missing their penalties. It would seem that while being different is very much part of British twenty-first century life, making mistakes is not yet acceptable for a person of colour.

Riz Ahmed has made his name as an actor despite the reality that films with primary and secondary Muslim characters are portrayed as immigrants, or refugees, who speak little or no English. He stated that,

> In the top 200 films over the last few years, Muslims have only 1.6 % of speaking roles .... What makes it worse is that over 90 % of films don't have any Muslim characters whatsoever. But when you do have Muslim characters, a tiny number of them, three quarters of the time, are portrayed as either perpetrators of or victims of violence. (Ahmed, 2021, YouTube video, 11:19)

After decades of textbooks having been Eurocentric, they now have more representation of different cultures, but the manner in which they are represented may be as misleading as Muslim characters are depicted in some Hollywood films.

This chapter aims to illustrate why having intercultural competence should not only entail knowledge of other ways of being, but also needs to embody the skills of how to interact respectfully across cultures, while removing colonial aspects of power relations. It will support the idea that fixed cultures being taught to English language students is outdated and that the idea of a "lingua culture" is more useful to users of English as a lingua franca (ELF) in today's globalised context (Taylor, 2021, p. 227). It will also promote, as Adib (2021) suggests, that instead of a focus on a culture of a nation, a broader focus could produce citizens of the world, which would allow the integration of culture with real-world relevance in topics such as climate change and other social inequalities.

2   Language of Power

Colonialisation brought about an imbalance of power and economic wealth that is still very much in existence today through the consequent power relations it has established. The colonisers created the social inequalities that allowed them easy access to the resources they required throughout their empires. This oppression allowed them to superimpose their language onto those colonised, especially those considered worthy of learning the language due to their higher class and perceived

ability to work in the civil service. Such colonial policies not only aided the discrimination between the elite classes native to the country and those of a lower working class, but also devalued local languages. In his Minute on Indian Education Macaulay said:

> All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are moreover so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them. It seems to be admitted on all sides, that the intellectual improvement of those classes of the people who have the means of pursuing higher studies can at present be affected only by means of some language not vernacular amongst them. (1935, Clause 8)

The colonisers saw it as a duty to educate their subordinates to lift them out of ignorance, which their own languages were not considered capable of doing. In many ways, it became a self-fulfilling prophecy because those who learnt English had access to higher education in English, which raised their potential further for increasing their earning capacity and their access to the colonial rulers. This Indian upper class became known as the 'brown sahibs', mimicking the white colonisers and filling the elite vacuum once the colonisers had left India. A secondary influence on the education of those colonised by the British was through the religious scholars, who preached in English to the subjugated populations. As Curtis explained, the links between the established church and education were often strong. For example, "most Hong Kong universities were founded by Christian missionaries" (2019, p. 15).

Today there are 22 state languages in India, which include Hindi but not English in the count because it is not a language of any single state. However, Hindi and English remain the official languages being used in Parliament, for communications between the central and state governments, and in the high and supreme courts. Due to India's diversity and the politically delicate nature of language policy, a single language is not considered representative of the historical, socio-political, and cultural aspects of the country as a whole. Therefore, India to date does not have an assigned national language (Kalia, 2021).

In Uganda, 30% of its people speak Swahili in comparison to 100% of neighbouring Kenyans. This is also a political decision because the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin reportedly distrusted any official educated in England who spoke better English than himself. Consequently, Amin had such officials removed from government offices as well as insisting that all official duties were conducted in Swahili. Due to Swahili being associated with the dictatorship, Ugandans chose English over Swahili as their official language while continuing to speak their personal tribal languages (Ellams, 2016). English, therefore, became a useful and safe alternative that helped to avert the power struggles between languages in some of the ex-colonies. English also offered great employment and social mobility opportunities for those who could afford quality higher education, both in the UK and in the post-colonial peripheries.

3   Language and Culture

Because India chose English as one of its official languages, (Article 343 of the Indian Constitution- Official Language of the Union) it now has the highest number of English speakers in the world, when one includes primary English and ELF users. According to worldpopulationreview.com, this translated to 1,393,409,038 users and was twenty times the number of English speakers in Britain in 2021. The fact that English has become such a successful lingua franca means there are more countries using ELF than there are countries using English as a primary language. Moreover, given the fact that the majority of the students of English in the world speak English as a second or additional language and due to the global widespread use of ELF, most learners of English in non-Anglophone countries may only require English to communicate with other non-native speakers (NNSs), both nationally and internationally. As stated in a British Council report, "non-native speakers now far outnumber native speakers – already at an estimated ration of 4:1, which can only grow. Our own forecast is for double digit growth in the demand for English" (2013, p. 4.)

The culture traditionally associated with English was that of a traditional Britain with its typical red post and telephone boxes. Through learning the language, one could access the culture, which in turn enabled one to communicate better with the native, primary user of English. Or so the thinking went. However, if English language learners are more likely to communicate with those from a variety of cultures and other NNSs, it must be questioned whether the focus should remain on cultural traditions of the English-only speaking countries.

Due to the idea of World Englishes, there is no longer a single 'correct' model of English. Similarly, there should not be a single cultural model either. Yet when 'other' cultures are explored in English language teaching books they sometimes skim the surface of practices in 'other' parts of the world. In subtle ways a Eurocentric image of English speakers is portrayed as being central, with anything else being treated as different and distinct. This could be viewed as 'normal' and 'abnormal', or 'us' and 'them', which can (indirectly) project a desirable lifestyle or one to emulate. Matsumoto (2006) points out that ELT materials simultaneously present culture "in very simplistic, stereotypic ways, as if to promote an ideology of differences" (p. 42).

4   The Power of 'Othering'

Being social animals, we use language essentially as a communicative tool to help manage relationships in different spheres of social exchanges. The ease with which we move from sphere to sphere depends on our ability to convey messages about who we are, our intentions, needs, attitudes, values, and key beliefs. Based on this information we gauge with which groups of people we are most likely to have

affinity and with whom to form stronger or closer ties. Affirming such social ties requires more than the ability to simply learn patterns of language, thus successful communication requires a careful calculation of not only the choice of words, but also the nuances, gestures, levels of politeness, and status.

This recognition of the crossover of societal norms and language is what gave birth to sociolinguistics, which looks closely at how people manage their interactions, depending on the group they belong to. It delves into language policies, effects of nationalism, ethnicity, gender, occupations, level of education, race, and the social groups one spends time in. Here we will consider this interaction of such differing areas as differing cultures and therefore consider the intersectionality that exists in the use of ELF.

Unlike ELF, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) comes from the perspective of users of English as a primary 'native' language and considers all languages apart from English as 'other'. As Liddicoat and Scarino state, "It is a positioning in terms of what the learner is not" (2013, p. 52). Decades after the idea of World Englishes was first mooted, ELT textbooks still seem to lack an acceptance of alternative worlds of English-speaking cultures. This may have its origins in the world of UK English language schools, whose students benefit from considerable cultural input about life in the UK because it provides them with the necessary skills to negotiate their temporary stay there.

Initially, the kind of students who would have been able to travel to experience English language in its home country were those from other parts of Europe. Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) believed the rise in economic wealth of countries outside of Europe to be one of the factors that brought about a greater need to explore and explain cultural differences in detail. One reason why they claimed the study of cross-cultural interaction became more important was that countries which are outside of Europe had the economic power to study in the 'ELT heartlands'. "Countries such as Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Thailand have very different traditions and cultural behaviours from the traditional ELT heartlands of Europe and North America" (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993, p. 5). Hence with more students from 'different' cultural traditions having the economic power to study in Anglophone countries, the need to explain and 'teach' about the cultural differences became greater.

It can, therefore, be argued that it was the market created by the language learners visiting the UK from other parts of Europe that originally gave rise to the ELT publishers' focus on European culture in their books, with a substantial layer of British culture built in. However, as Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) reported, those visiting the UK for language study have become ever more international, and yet there is still a tendency to focus on the culture of the "host" country (p. 6).

Despite this functioning beneficially for the language schools that 'host' visiting students to the UK, Ireland, North America, Australia, and New Zealand, it cannot be defined as 'cross-cultural' awareness. It is very much a one-way cultural direction that assumes the onus for becoming more culturally aware is only on the students learning English as an additional language. A further criticism of this type of cross-cultural teaching is that culture should not be tied only to countries or

nationalities, because "they simplify and fixate individual categories that are expected to determinate behaviour" (Dervin & Jacobsson, 2021, p. 19).

According to Treaty 018, European Cultural Convention (1954), the Council of Europe (CoE) created criteria in their language frameworks that were designed for all European countries, to encourage their people to be curious and learn about each other's cultures, traditions, and languages. The treaty was created to promote tolerance, understanding, harmony in Europe, and prevent any return to the horrors of war and hatred between its people. Simultaneously, ex-British colonies around the world were clamouring for or dealing with independence and the legacy of the British administration systems, all of which had been in the coloniser's language of English. As discussed, for a variety of reasons, many post-colonial countries like India and Uganda decided to continue to use the language of their colonisers. The newly independent ex-colonies therefore had English in use, often as an official language or a lingua franca, in bilingual or multilingual settings, as well as in the state and private education systems. Therefore, ELT was part of the norm in the general schooling system, either through EMI or as a subject (Migge & Léglise, 2007).

There were British subjects who decided to remain in the former colonies, some of them working in education or in the church, so primary users of English were not uncommon to find after independence. Unlike in the European settings, where travel to the UK provided more probable contact with British English speakers and their language, the ex-British colonial countries had real use of English outside the teaching of the language as a subject. As a result, English in the outer circle countries has evolved into indigenised varieties of English, which are now recognised as World Englishes. "World English has emerged because its users have changed the language as they have spread it" (Brutt-Griffler, 2002, pp. vii–viii).

With the ever-increasing number of people using ELF, it is imperative that publishers carefully consider if the target users still need an emphasis on British culture or if it is time to have a less Eurocentric outlook. However, it appears as if the fact is being ignored that English has become a world language and is being used by millions without any association to an Anglo-American and Western culture. For example, getting students to think about foreign holiday destinations can be, at the very least, embarrassing and at the most insensitive when faced with students who do not have the disposable income, or whose families do not have working conditions for such pleasures. Many people do not earn sufficient money to exchange into a currency that would afford them a holiday abroad. Even those with the economic capacity may not necessarily have the ease of travel due to visa, passport, and entry restrictions. There are also differing ideas of travel which may not equate with pleasure or rest, besides the economic and political barriers to the possibility of travel, that may reduce the likelihood of having such experiences. Some topics can also contribute to an assumption that Eurocentric practices are the 'norm', that they should be emulated, or that everyone has the same kind of life experiences.

5   Equity in an Unequal World

In any kind of teaching, language or otherwise, we cannot assume that all students share the same life experiences and context, or learn the exact same thing at the exact same time simply because it has been taught. If students are only exposed to images and ideas that they cannot associate with, then it is going to interfere with the extent to which they can engage with the material. Therefore, it is a disservice if all language students of English are offered the same kind of material that is primarily aimed at white, European audiences (Victoria & Sangiamchit, 2021).

Major ELT publications are commonly revised to suite cultural and religious tastes in the Middle East, which illustrates that it is not an impossible task. These are not textbooks designed for specific needs of a state school curriculum, but rather well-known publications in the ELT world such as (New) Headway or Q Skills by OUP and Life Series by National Geographic. Although it may seem a perfectly sensible approach to respectfully consider certain traditions, situations, while avoiding sensitivities, an ELT author contended that restrictions on topics made ELT bland. "All we're left with is the environment as a topic, or eating in a restaurant – but then you could never have a wine bottle on the table" (Flood, 2015). A British right-wing tabloid newspaper reported how a Conservative Party member of parliament (MP), who is known for being anti-woke and anti-feminist, complained that making such changes to textbooks was nonsensical and blamed it on political correctness.

The author's viewpoint of 'restrictions', and the MP's argument about 'political correctness' illustrate very clearly a privileged perspective of having the right (and power) to be able to promote a way of life that seems 'normal' in the UK to wherever one wishes. It implies that British culture is unconditionally tied to the English language, with the assumption that if one is to use the language, one also needs to know about the culture of English-speaking countries. Such perspectives may be considered as imposing one's culture on all the rest and are termed ethnocentric. In other words, ethnocentrism occurs when someone is unable to visualise things outside of their culture and they describe their world as being organised into 'us' and 'them', "where one's own culture is superior and other cultures are inferior" (Hammer et al., 2003, p. 424). Dervin and Jacobsson (2021) suggest that the 'us' and 'them' duality tends to emphasise the "mysteries of the Other" (p. 27). The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) visually illustrates how people may interpret cultural differences (see Fig. 1; Hammer et al., 2003, p. 424).
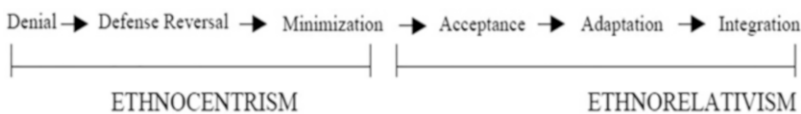
Denial → Defense Reversal → Minimization → Acceptance → Adaptation → Integration

ETHNOCENTRISM   ETHNORELATIVISM

Fig. 1   The developmental model of intercultural sensitivity

The assumption that the only place you could practise speaking 'real' English is in the UK, or in another 'native' speaker country, is one such example of an ethnocentric perspective. It is also a view that supports the acclaimed musician, Nirtin Sawney's description of his schooling in the UK, "I went through school with an uneasy suspicion that I was inferior" (2003, p. 34). According to Hammer et al.'s model, ethnorelativism accepts that a culture is one of many that are all equal and together they form a complex worldview. This is the reality today, where apart from the countries using English as a primary (Inner circle) or an official state language (Outer circle), much of the rest of the world (Expanding circle) requires the study of English language to enter the global market, access engineering, medical, or scientific publications, present their ideas on the global stage, compete in the sporting world, or work in tourism or business. There needs to be a greater acceptance of alternative worldviews, values, and beliefs with a corresponding respectfulness towards such differences. While not denying that we all have essentially the same universal needs and basic values, as enshrined by the UN, it cannot be ignored that different groups have developed in different contexts, and thus have developed a characteristic flavour of culture – rather like differing accents have been formed over time by communities of people that were limited to different regions because of the geographical lay of the land, resulting in distinct accents, but all of them still speaking the same language.

It is perhaps worth questioning if methodologies, images, topics, culture, and attitudes suit the taste of the Global North because it is in control of the ELT market. Nero (2019) highlights the fact that many TESOL graduate programmes, research projects, policy making, and teaching methods and materials emanate from the US and UK. She states that the ELT industry is "run by mostly White professionals, even though English around the world is more widely used by people of color" (p. 28). In the same vein, Kiczkowiak (2022) analysed 28 coursebooks published by Oxford University Press, National Geographic Learning, Macmillan, Pearson, and Cambridge University Press. His research of 'nativeness' and ethnicity revealed how out of 133 authors, "the vast majority of CBAs [Coursebook Authors] (94%) are white 'native speakers' from the UK or the US" (p. 14).

Hence, ethnorelativism means that ELT publishers need to ensure that authors of English language textbooks are more diverse and able to produce teaching materials that are acceptable to all of their audiences, not only to learners from the Anglocentric contexts. Dervin and Jacobsson (2021) believe that an "un-rethink" (p. 7) is necessary when it comes to a critical look at language and interculturality, and an exploration of how varied centres of knowledge can be represented. However, Kiczkowiak (2022) believes that little will change until coursebook editors are less white and Eurocentric. Publishers therefore not only need to ensure that their materials promote ethnorelativism and are less Eurocentric, but also need to ensure their writers and editors are chosen from a more diverse and international pool.

6   Intersectionality in Language Use

Intersectionality is the individual experience on a daily occurrence that is influenced by a number of factors that coexist within society's perception of that individual. As Collins and Bilge (2020) stated, it can be used as an analytical tool in that

> intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age – among others – as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. (p. 2)

Therefore, social inequality does not equally affect women, children, people of colour, those with disabilities, transgendered people, undocumented populations, or Indigenous groups. The complexity of social context (e.g., having brown skin, being a woman, but speaking English fluently) has given me pause for thought on numerous occasions, both in and out of ELT contexts. It is plain to see that certain assumptions are made about me before I speak, be it in multicultural Britain or elsewhere. For example, outside of the UK, I am often asked several times and in different ways where I am originally from because my interlocutor does not consider the UK to be a satisfactory answer. On one occasion, while I was the director of a British Council teacher training project for Peruvian state school English teachers, a visiting colleague from the UK asked me where I had learnt my English because it was very good for a Peruvian! Usually, the act of speaking, depending on whether it is in English or not, can easily reveal my nationality. However, on this occasion it did not. Kubota explains that "English language is traditionally linked to Whiteness due to its origin and spread through settler colonialism. Native speakers of standardized varieties of English are often imagined as White people" (2021, p. 239).

Such experiences highlight how power relations influence social interaction in societies, whether they are diverse or not. Being born in the UK provides me the privilege of being able to use English as a first language, allowing me a profession in ELT that has taken me to several countries, which many non-native ELT professionals might not have the advantage of visiting. Therefore, my presence as a language expert in non-English speaking countries places me in a higher position than local non-native speaker (NNS) professionals due to the variety of English I am able to speak. However, I am often not the expert they have envisaged and when being 'judged' by, or compared to, a White ELT professional abroad my position in the hierarchy is assumed to be below them. It is, therefore, fair to say that the perception of an ELT professional is mostly of a white individual and that perception automatically places me in a lower position of 'nativeness' when it comes to being 'an expert' in the field.

Hence, in the ELT world we can add location, colonial thinking, citizenship, situation, and the contextual environment to the already complex layers of intersectionality. ELF is used by many people who constantly need to navigate such intricacies of intersectionality to try to improve their human experiences and opportunities. Myers describes an Implicit Association Test which was designed to measure people's unconscious bias. It has been completed by millions online and revealed that

for most respondents' "default is white. We like white people. We prefer white" (2014, YouTube, 05:51). Just as Aguilar (2012) suggested that systems can oppress peoples' identities and experiences, it can also be argued that ELT publishers can do likewise by the choices made to depict some cultures and exclude others from textbooks. This is something that Sahlane and Pritchard have written about at length in this volume (Chapter "Assessing Perspectives on Culture in Saudi EFL Textbook Discourse"). Thus, it is important to cast a critical eye on the choices and use of topics around or related to culture, for it can be one of few themes that bring diversity into the limelight, regardless of the culture the students are part of.

7 An Alternative Representation of 'Otherness'

It could be argued that the power of white western English language students is exacerbated by limiting race, culture, and traditions to that of holidays, travel, or food. Such representations can exoticize, or worse, denigrate the only depictions of 'other' cultures in ELT publications. A positive development would be for the ELT publishing industries to give more prominence to World Englishes. If the very existence of other varieties of indigenised and localised Englishes were acknowledged in ELT textbooks, it would send the strong message to English language learners that they are part of a global community of English speakers. It would also signal to those who speak a variety of Englishes, that theirs is a valid form of communication in English and that the so-called 'native speaker' (NS) model of English is not the only one to aspire to. To understand the linguistic undertones of the NS concept, one must appreciate their specific linguistic and cultural identity. The same can be argued for World Englishes; to understand one another on a global scale, while using ELF, one needs some understanding of the cultural context of the people with whom one is expected to communicate. Thus, more than merely acknowledging the existence of World Englishes is required; an interest in those who use English around the world also needs to be cultivated and explored in textbooks. As stated by the CoE (2008), the European Court of Human Rights has recognised that pluralism is built on "the genuine recognition of, and respect for, diversity and the dynamics of cultural traditions, ethnic and cultural identities, religious beliefs, artistic, literary and socio-economic ideas and concepts" (p. 13).

Therefore, recognising and placing a focus on cultural traditions, identities, beliefs, ideas, and concepts should not simply be viewed as engaging topics, but as a means of promoting human rights that can help to construct inclusive societies and lessen the tendency to marginalise and exclude some from mainstream society. Consequently, the subconscious 'othering' of people can give way to recognising one another as fellow citizens of a world – which we need in order to strive to make it more equitable. Thus, limiting, or at least questioning, why people are treated differently depending on their assumed social background (Dervin & Jacobsson, 2021) can encourage changes to occur in one's interactions; this may combat discrimination and social injustice.

8 Intercultural Skills and Citizenship

For those who might consider human rights to be the domain of political studies and not ELT, it must be emphasised that some years earlier, climate change was viewed in the same light, yet it is now a common topic found in many textbooks. It is also worth highlighting that when learning a language, qualities such as being open-minded, willing to enter into discussion and dialogue, and carefully listening to others' points of view are all simultaneously important to develop. In addition, if English language students are using ELF, they will find themselves in a range of positions along the scale of power relations. They will manifest either "inferiorization, denigration, marginalization, and exclusion" (Kubota, 2021, p. 239) or else the 'privileged' syndrome of prejudices, stereotypes, bullying, and intolerance.

Hence, English language teachers are in very strategic roles to enable students to become more curious about the wider world; to question cross cultural divides; to unite religious communities; and generally, to become resilient to conflicts by using dialogue to resolve them whilst preparing them with the necessary linguistic skills. In short, ELT can be used to nurture ethnorelativism. In today's world of internet exchanges, students have ample opportunity to engage with different perspectives and worldviews. Thus, their time spent on the internet could be exploited by the ELT teacher by getting them to review the websites they most visit and reflect upon whether their interactions practise open-mindedness and if they value others' comments and opinions, while being willing to respectfully disagree with their interactants. Through using their interactions, not those artificially created by their teacher, students can autonomously develop intercultural skills and citizenship for a real purpose.

As Schleicher (2018) affirms:

> Engaging with different perspectives in world views requires individuals to examine the origins and implications of others and their own assumptions. This, in turn, implies a profound respect for and interest in who the other is, their concept of reality and their perspectives. Recognising another's position or belief is not necessarily to accept that position or belief. (pp. 31–32)

9 The Teaching Materials

If there is to be equity in the teaching materials used in language teaching, then there needs to be a serious review of representation and the narratives given to the differing power relations that exist in societies both in the Global North and in the Southern Peripheries. Seburn (2021) considers the usualisation approach as one possible solution for balancing representation. It is an approach which, at its basic level, makes the images and characters ordinary and nothing special. Thus women, diverse ethnicities and genders do not necessarily have to only be famous leaders, successful, or generally high achievers. In other words, usualisation is a way of

normalising the representation of marginalised communities, who are only marginalised by the majority in societies. Outside of the western world where diverse ethnicities are the global majority, students would become accustomed to seeing people like themselves being represented in their ELT textbooks and would feel more included in the world of English language learning. This would allow such students to have exposure to representations of people who, instead of being your regular Joe Bloggs, are your regular Jamila Bibis.

As Seburn (2021) points out, the increased presence of wider groups of otherness increases the narrative and variety of voices, which result in a subsequent broadening of perspectives that students are exposed to. That does not mean we must become politically correct, rather it would mean that students receive a fairer representation of the world and the people that live in it. Teaching materials may go some way toward lessening the probability of having fixed stereotypes about people and countries, and deconstructing "the Eurocentric and oftentimes racist history of our field" (Dervin & Jacobsson, 2021, p. 37). Myers said, "diversity is being asked to the party; but inclusion is being asked to dance" (Women's Leadership Forum, YouTube, 2015, 05:22.)

This illustrates the difference between simply having diverse people's images in textbooks and actually engaging in the topic of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Simply having a quota for the number of times 'other' faces appear in a textbook does not suffice; how they are characterised is just as important. It is important to represent fairly without feeding existing biases or negative narratives about different groups, while being conscious of the language used. As Adichie underlines,

> If I had not grown up in Nigeria, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner. (TED Global, 2009, 05:56)

If the ELT publishing industry accepts the fact that the majority of English speakers in the world are using the language as a lingua franca, then they need to take on the responsibility for preparing them for use of ELF in the real world. Therefore, it is unsatisfactory to focus on only the images used in teaching resources; textbook designers and publishers also need to reassess cultural dimensions in textbook design, such as the dialogues, scenarios, names used in texts, listening activities, their associated exercises, the assumptions made, and the unconscious biases fed through the focus of topics discussed and explored. Such activities can question what is and is not socially or personally acceptable, as well as encourage reflection and introspection of why those views are held; it can help to address the "fluidity of culture while delinking from Eurocentric structures" (Dervin & Jacobsson, 2021, p. 47).

10 Culture in ELT

As culture and language have always been intertwined, culture is the perfect vessel to provide some reflection about one's own perspectives while learning about those of others. As Adib (2021) reminds us, contact and communication are easier than they have ever been between people with different linguistic and cultural traditions. Subsequently, the increased access to digital technology and social media provides a greater relevance for students to consider their cross-cultural communications. Educators can therefore assist students to reflect on their experiences and online intercultural exchanges in English through the lens of culture (Victoria & Sangiamchit, 2021).

Authors and publishers of ELT books need to ensure that culture is taught in a relevant manner that piques interest so that students truly engage and learn from the content matter. I once, while observing a class, witnessed a teacher in rural Nepal struggle with teaching a lesson about computers. Neither the teacher nor his class had ever seen a computer, as they lived in a region without electricity, yet they were expected to be able to decipher what a cursor, central processing unit, and monitor were. When the teacher reached the part about the 'mouse,' he was completely at a loss, and frustratingly asked a student to look it up in the dictionary. It was 2002 and the dictionary would have been from the 90s at least, so it only defined the furry kind of mouse with a pointed snout and long tail!

The textbook in question was a state secondary school English book that had been written for the Nepali Ministry of Education by a western ELT author. Those who worked in the ministry should clearly have been more aware, but the ministry as well as its employees are based in the capital city of Kathmandu and rural life is almost as unfamiliar to many of its city dwellers as it perhaps was to the writer, who had either been commissioned to write the book or adapt it. However, it illustrates how privilege and bias are not the bastions of white western Europeans, but the intersectionality of urban/rural, gender, religion, class/caste, and consequent economic power go beyond linguistic power relations.

One would suppose, if books or resources are being designed and written for a specific learning group, such as secondary level education in a particular country, it is relatively easier to produce materials that are better suited to one cultural context than an international textbook for various regions of the world. Because of the economics of publishing, the reality is that books and resources are used by the greatest number of students from the greatest number of regions possible. However, instead of books or resources being suited to one culture or another, they should be made appealing to all. It is just as valuable for students in Hungary or Hong Kong to learn about life in the Swat Valley as it might be to learn about life in Silicon Valley. If students had such an awareness they could reflect on and question why life should be so distinct depending on where they are born; they would be able to develop a high level of empathy – an essential human and language skill.

ELF users should not consider their own culture as superior to anyone else's, or other people's culture as being strange. Thus, intercultural sensitivity involves

respecting differences and tolerating 'otherness' without assuming any single culture to be one of a 'default setting'. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) emphasises the need to include citizenship alongside interculturalism.

> [S]chooling today needs to be much more about ways of thinking … and about the capacity to live in a multi-faceted world as active responsible citizens … as well as individual academic achievement, enabling students both to think for themselves, and to act for and with others. (Schleicher, 2018, p. 31)

Topics such as climate change could be viewed from differing economic perspectives, which would help foster a sense of responsibility and motivation to act on behalf of and in collaboration with others, while using ELF. This would provide a rich set of concepts around responsibilities, rights, and power relations as the backdrop to the language taught, thus producing what Carter (2005) calls 'cultural straddlers' and suggests they are the most successful in intercultural situations. Future ELF users, therefore, need to be global citizens (i.e., be able to manage themselves respectfully in intercultural situations), therefore it is essential to challenge the status quo of textbooks, resources, and teaching materials as they currently stand because, to some extent, they are helping to exaggerate the assumed rights we hold to live life in a certain way. The world is finally becoming aware of the fact that lifestyle choices of a few can have direct consequences on the lives of many in low economy societies who may suffer the devastating effects of climate emergencies. By inaction, we risk perpetuating the existing, lingering powers of colonialism, while simultaneously supporting the current hierarchy that exists and ignoring the intersectionality of power among global societies. Hence, as Kubota argues, "teachers and learners should think beyond linguistic plurality and critically reflect on how English users' race and other identities, such as gender, class and religion, shape particular power relations, which influences the nature of interactions" (2021, p. 241).

The ELT industry has a collective responsibility to ensure that students are curious about other parts of the world, other cultures and traditions, and are ready to establish relationships to get to know people from 'other' cultural backgrounds. As Myers (2014) points out,

> It's the empathy and the compassion that comes out of having relationships with people who are different from you. Something really powerful and beautiful happens … we cease to be bystanders, we become actors, we become advocates, and we become allies. (TED talk, 13:02)

11   A Way Forward

The Covid-19 pandemic has pushed us beyond our comfort zones in the world of education in a short space of time, resulting in a difficult period for many teachers who had to retrain overnight as online teachers. Educators were forced to become

accustomed to and proficient in the use of a variety of digital technologies as teaching tools to deliver their classes. Such technological aids used to be viewed as 'good ideas' because few teachers could afford the time to develop the necessary skills, whereas today they have become part of the norms of online teaching. We are now in a world where hybrid classes are the 'new normal', and many institutions have developed some kind of virtual learning platform to manage announcements, distribute information, provide access to learning material, and where students can upload their work. With these platforms have come transparency and better coordination. This improved administrative system of teaching has led to teachers being (not only willing, but also) able to work more innovatively while also being more conscious of their students' economic situations, mental health, and learning needs. During such a period of adjustment, the situation is optimal for other changes to also take place, possibly the kind that Maley (1998) outlined which would provide teachers with the flexibility to choose their teaching materials and the pace at which activities are completed. The idea was to produce materials that could be picked and mixed by teachers, that together would constitute a course – rather more of a manual than a book. This kind of design enables a greater choice of directions that the teacher could take to cover the same topic, thus different teachers might choose different materials to cover the same points on the curriculum, without the fear that something had been omitted.

In today's digital reality, such ideas no longer seem quite so revolutionary because there can be a readily available bank of resources made available to teachers. Once an institution 'invests' in the 'bank' they could also buy the rights to reproduce pages and share digital versions. Schools in the Global South might prefer to produce hard copies of the teaching materials for their students to use, whereas those in the Global North might opt for digital resources. However, both sets of students would be able to cover the same topics, with possible slight variations to meet the demands of differing curricular needs, governmental policies, and cultural sensibilities. Similarly, for students who do not have internet access at home, screenshots of websites and social media interactions can be used to discuss and facilitate ideas and language that would be required to respond in the equivalent imagined digital interaction. With a differentiation of materials, differing teaching needs can be met, while ensuring a uniformity in teaching aims. Likewise, teachers may use differentiated activities to meet diverse learner needs.

If publishers supplied such options for materials, then they could monitor which resources were being used by specific institutions in certain parts of the world and obtain helpful, immediate user behaviour that could help inform them of the regional preferences, and thus assist in future materials design. The schools on different parts of the planet could even be virtually united to work on particular activities together, through digital platforms that the publishers could provide as part of the package of the materials, such as the EU-funded TEACUP Project discussed in this volume (Chapter "Teacher – Culture – Pluri: An International Initiative to Develop Open Educational Resources for Pluralistic Teaching in FL Teacher Education"). What is more, teachers across the world could observe each other and further their professional development through their interactions with each other. Simultaneously held

global classes would allow students to have real, purposeful conversations with peers of different cultural backgrounds, using ELF. This would prepare them well for the real world and their future use of English.

12 Conclusion

With the advent of digital technology, it is time to reassess the assumption that 'one size fits all' when it comes to ELT teaching materials and the transition to online teaching. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers are more willing to accept that digital technology can be of value and welcome online materials that also save paper-based physical resources. They are therefore likely to continue using digital materials at a greater frequency than in pre-pandemic times, so this could be the perfect opportunity to ensure that teaching practices do not revert to those prior to 2020.

Thus, we should work together with publishers who wish to lead the way in the twenty-first century and shape how materials are created, produced, used and exploited, whilst building diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into conversations. English language teachers can use dialogue and respectful exchange of opinions in classrooms and be supported to lessen the effects of intersectionality by raising awareness of its presence. They can also encourage students to question and reflect on the effects of imperialism, rather than ignore its existence. As Kubota (2021) confirms, "Critical antiracist pedagogy is about fostering awareness, knowledge, and attitudes regarding the intricate nature of racial inequities and approaches to challenge them" (p. 243).

When people from different cultures know one another, it is easier to have conversations and comprehend differences that exist without a sense of superiority or inferiority. ELF helps us to form relationships with people we may not normally mix with, so it can help broaden our perspectives. Such dialogue can build strong relationships and understanding, which may help to prevent or mitigate conflicts. Through English, we can get to know each other, and by getting to know each other, we can remove our biases. "Biases are the stories we make up about people before we know who they actually are" (Myers, TED Talk, 2014, 11:06). ELT could, therefore, play a leading role in promoting harmony, understanding, unity, and combatting hate crimes, which requires action at individual, institutional, and governmental levels. ELT publishers have a key role and responsibility to undo the associations that are made, both intentionally and unintentionally, with the colonial past of English. What we must not do, is do nothing.

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