

## **Developing intercultural communicative competence: An example of the *New College English* textbook series**

Tamas Kiss

*University of Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, P.R. China*

### **Abstract**

The development of intercultural communication has received renewed attention in the professional literature in the past decade. In response to changes brought about by a globalizing world and educational industry, our understanding of culture – and its role in language teaching - has changed. This is clearly indicated by the emerging 21<sup>st</sup> century educational frameworks that put inter- and cross-cultural skills as one of the core competencies for students to be successful in a rapidly changing world. Research on language teaching materials has found that there has been a shift in cultural representations, moving from mono-cultural portrays to more dynamic, inter-cultural, even hybrid cultural depictions. Yet, two areas need further consideration: a) While the above might be true for materials developed for international markets, how is culture represented in locally produced English language textbooks? b) What tasks are used in the materials to develop the skills, attitudes, and knowledge needed for successful intercultural communication? This paper set out to examine a widely used and locally published English language textbook series by using Byram's (1997a) framework and found that although the material has a *potential* to develop intercultural competence, it does not provide tasks that would engage students in such learning.

**Keywords:** Intercultural communicative competence, globalization, local published teaching materials

### **Introduction**

Language is one of the ways to express one's membership in a particular cultural group, or rather groups, in any given social setting. When students learn to communicate in a foreign language, they do not only learn grammar and vocabulary, but means by which they can portray their various – and chosen - identities. There is no surprise, therefore, that language educators have been long interested in the interwoven nature of language and culture. In the past four decades, research on the interconnectedness of culture and language learning has come a long way from seeing culture as a 'target language' national culture concept (Risager, 2007), to accepting

cultural variety, sub-cultural and even hybrid cultural representations (Weninger & Kiss, 2013; Kiss & Weninger, 2017). English being a global language also means that its users have to acknowledge how it is used in various contexts and between communities which may not share a common cultural background. Thus, developing learners' intercultural communicative competence as a goal in English language teaching contexts cannot be emphasized enough.

## **Language and culture**

Language is more than a simple transfer of information between a speaker and a listener. As early as the 1970s, scholars, for example Sacks (1975), recognized that communication is a sophisticated demonstration of identity. Successful communicative partners not only exchange information and thoughts in a clearly and sufficiently, but they do it in a socially expected (and usually accepted) manner. That - as Carey (1989) puts it - is a cultural behavior shaped by the norms and habits of members that share the same or a similar cultural background, and not only linguistic rules that govern syntax or lexis. Therefore, when communication takes place between people that represent different (sub)cultural groups, we should look at language as a social process of adaptation, compromise, and negotiation (Shohamy, 2006) in a particular communicative situation.

When teaching intercultural communication, one should recognize that culture is not static; it is dynamic and often hybrid - a significant contribution of the complexity that comes with globalization and mobility in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Culture, therefore, is not constant and it cannot be taught or learnt as facts (Kiss & Weninger, 2013, 2017; Weninger & Kiss, 2013). A teaching approach which simply aims to transfer facts of a target culture (which in itself is an epistemological impossibility in the case of the English language) limits the potential of learning (Liddicoat, 2002), and the construction of (inter)cultural knowledge and understanding in the classroom.

Therefore, I would argue that cultural learning should start from the individual by discovering their own beliefs in connection to culture, then continue in open discussions and meaning-making at the group or whole class level where cultural awareness is created. Learning that follows this pattern would recognize that culture changes over time, location, gender, religious belief, age, etc. (Norton, 2000), and thus cultural learning is unique, individual and collective at the same time, in every language classroom it occurs. Since there is an inevitable overlap between culture and language, language teachers need to help students understand how linguistic

forms contribute to the formation of cultural meanings (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

## **Intercultural communicative competence**

Although the term intercultural competence has been used in diverse fields and contexts, ranging from language education, healthcare, human resources management to business communication, there appears to be little consensus as to its meaning (Deardorff, 2006a). Nevertheless, certain key ideas are underscored in most definitions. Whether researchers talk of the need for intercultural or cross-cultural competence – terms that seem almost interchangeable in the literature – they agree that they are dependent on certain cognitive, affective and behavioral elements (e.g. Gudykunst & Kim, 1984; Hill, 2006).

Deardorff (2006b, pp. 247-248) defines intercultural communication as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes”. Her definition is based on the work of Byram (1997b) who identified knowledge, skills, and attitudes as the building blocks to gaining critical cultural awareness.

Byram’s (1997b) *Five Savors* model, also known as the Intercultural Competence Model, started off from a criticism of models that described communicative competence. The work of Hymes (1972) – as a criticism of Chomsky’s (1965) distinction of linguistic competence and performance – led to the concept of communicative competence. His ideas were further developed by Canale and Swain (1980) who identified communicative competence including several competencies: grammatical competence, strategic competence, discourse competence, and sociolinguistic competence. Byram (1997a; 1997b) felt that the sociolinguistic competence, which determined how one used language in a particular socio-cultural context, was based on communication where members shared the context and thus did not guide conversations between intercultural speakers who may interpret communicative acts according to their own cultural understanding. Hence, he proposed an intercultural communication model in which he identified knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for successful communication across cultural boundaries. These are the following:

- a) *Savoir etre* (Intercultural attitudes and beliefs): Activities and materials should have the capacity to encourage the students “to relinquish ethnocentric attitudes towards and perceptions of otherness and a cognitive ability to establish and maintain a

- relationship between” (Byram, 1997a, p. 60) their own and other cultures;
- b) *Savoir apprendre/faire* (Intercultural discovery and interaction): Strategies and resources need to facilitate the development and use of an “interpretative system with which to gain insight into hitherto unknown cultural meanings, beliefs and practices (Byram, 1997a, p.60) and offer opportunities to employ intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills in real life communicative activities (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002).
  - c) *Savoir* (expert knowledge): Strategies and resources must help the acquisition of a “system of cultural references which structures the implicit and explicit knowledge acquired in the course of linguistic and cultural learning” (Byram, 1997a, p.60) and encourage learners to “understand what it means to know something about other people with other multiple identities” (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002, p. 8).
  - d) *Savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating): Strategies and resources should help learners “to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one’s own” (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002, p. 8).
  - e) *Savoir s’engager* (critical cultural awareness): The ability to critically analyse, interpret and evaluate ideas, practices, and products. This often calls upon the other four savoirs, but expects language users to have the ability of objective engagement with the phenomena they are looking at, let that be from their own or from a different culture. Byram (2003) argues, that the intercultural speaker plays the role of a mediator between cultures, capable of negotiating and keeps an open and inclusive mind to integrate the multiple cultures in performance.

## **Intercultural learning and textbooks**

Language teaching textbooks are usually heavily criticized for not preparing learners for intercultural communication and offering a rather distorted representation of culture. Several critical evaluations have been conducted focusing on the representativeness of cultural features in language textbooks and their effectiveness of satisfying the learners’ intercultural communicative needs (see e.g. Canagarajah, 1993 etc.; Nguyen, 2011; Siegel, 2006; Yuen, 2011, etc.). Most found textbooks ridden with prejudices and oversimplifications, depriving learners of opportunities for intercultural learning. It is without doubt that a textbook’s effectiveness of

developing its learner's communicative competence is in positive correlation with the inclusiveness of its sociocultural identities and values (Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004). Therefore, research should focus on to what extent modern 21<sup>st</sup> century materials meet this requirement.

Furthermore, with the current theories of culture, it is not enough to focus on a 'target' culture; teachers need to prepare learners for living and communicating in a global world. In other words, students should achieve 'intercultural citizenship' (Byram, 2011) in order to be competent language users. As Kumaravadivelu (2008, p. 189) notes,

The task of promoting global cultural consciousness in the classroom can hardly be accomplished unless a concerted effort is made to [...] prompt learners to confront some of the taken-for granted cultural beliefs about the Self and the Other.

Part of this concerted effort is the use of language teaching materials which need to support learners and teachers alike in acquiring the skills, attitudes, and knowledge which they need to become competent intercultural speakers.

In the following, the findings of a research project will be presented which aimed at examining one of the most widely used English language teaching textbooks in China to find out how it develops its users intercultural communicative competence.

## Research Methodology

Having discussed the importance of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in the previous section of the paper, now we turn to present the findings of a research project which aimed to investigate how ICC is developed with the help of a locally produced language teaching material in the Chinese EFL context. More specifically, the research aimed to answer the following research questions:

- a) To what extent does the *New College English* textbook series develop Chinese university students' intercultural communicative competence?
- b) Does the material – with appropriate adaptation and supplementation – have the potential to develop intercultural communicative competence?

The textbook we chose for our analysis comes from the *New College English: Integrated Course* (Li, 2014). This course book series is one of the most widely used material in the Chinese higher education context, and is used by millions of students who prepare for the College English Test exam

as part of their degree requirements. The series contains six textbooks, of which the first four offer general language skills training that takes students to the upper intermediate level, while the final two books (5 and 6) target more advanced skill levels and language knowledge. According to the introduction, the textbooks were designed based on “an in-depth analysis of the problems Chinese learners face in English language learning and intercultural communication” (Li, 2014, p. ii), which makes the material an ideal choice for the research.

Interestingly, the series does not seem to have an author but only a chief editor, Li Yunhua; editors for each volume, and an editorial committee which includes numerous consultants and editors.

Before the textbook was analysed, the material had to be prepared for coding. The spine of the textbook was cut off and it was scanned page by page as a series of jpeg images. This was necessary for the coding was done with the help of the qualitative data coding software, NVivo 11. The coding of the material was done in two stages. In the first cycle *a priori* codes were used, developed from Byram’s (1997b) *savoirs* as discussed earlier. However, a new one by Houghton (2013) was added to the list. This was *savoir se transformer* (identity-development), which highlights the need of identity development as an important outcome of intercultural learning. It acknowledges how one’s intercultural competence should be a vehicle for personal growth, ultimately transforming attitudes, values and beliefs for the positive development of identity. In other words, learners are encouraged to establish their own ‘cultural indexical origo’ (Weninger & Kiss, 2013) from which (inter)cultural meaning-making stems. *Savoir se transformer* thus requires that resources allow learners to discover their own cultural values and beliefs and reevaluate and transform them alongside those of others (Houghton, 2013).

Since the above *savoirs* are mainly skill-based, the unit of coding for the analysis was the *activity*. Therefore, we did not only focus on the content of the material but also the *tasks* that accompany them. This coding thus follows what Kiss and Weninger (2013) suggest for studying the cultural content of EFL materials.

For the second cycle of coding, materials not coded in the first cycle – i.e. which were not found adequate to develop Byram’s (1997b) *savoirs* - were examined again, looking for their potential for developing intercultural communicative competence or awareness. This coding involved looking beyond what the textbook offered in terms of tasks and activities, and reimagining the use of the textual and visual information in the framework of new language tasks. Therefore, this coding aimed not only at the ‘*what is*’, but the ‘*what could be*’ of the material.

The textbooks were coded by a team of four researchers, as part of a

Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship project at the Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China, in order to ensure inter-coder reliability and validity. The first unit was coded together to discuss the possible interpretations of codes and brainstorming a variety of language task examples that could develop each savoir. The coding was also checked at different stages of the process to ensure the mutual understanding of the coding protocol and standardization among the coders.

## **Findings and discussion**

The findings section will be divided into two parts – attempting to answer the research questions that the study sought to explore. First, it will offer a discussion of the findings in connection with the tasks and texts that are presented in the textbooks to demonstrate how, and to what extent, intercultural communicative competence is developed in the material. Then the next section will look at how the potential for intercultural learning – implicitly present in the texts – could be exploited with appropriate tasks and activities.

### ***Tasks and texts that develop intercultural communicative competence***

First of all, the task types each unit contains will be discussed. The units have four major parts: Listening Task, Reading Task A, Home Reading Task, and Comprehensive Language Practice. Each unit starts with an 'Overview' section, which introduces the theme of the unit in one short paragraph. There is no task attached to this section; the learners presumably need to read but how the information is discussed is left to the teacher's discretion.

Next, a 'Part 1: Listening Task' follows in which the learners first need to listen to a text, and then they do a gap-filing activity, e.g. "Complete the following statements according to what you have heard".

'Part 2: Reading Task' is the next section in the textbooks. There is no task at the beginning of the text, usually an extract from a Western source. The book however offers a very detailed glossary of new words and expressions in the margin in the form of a bilingual word list. The text is followed by a 'Notes' section that offers some explanation on what the students have read. These often contain cultural references and practices, and also guidance on the pronunciation of proper names included in the text.

The reading text is followed by two types of activities: *Content questions*, and *Text organization*. The content questions are to be answered in pair work, where student A asks the first half of the list of questions and student B answers, then they change roles and continue with the rest of the

questions. The textbook warns them that the teacher may check their progress by asking some of the questions themselves. The text organization section requires individual work and the students here need to focus on paragraph and text structure, main ideas, and how these are expressed in the text.

The following section of the book is called '*Language sense enhancement*'. The section contains a poem, some famous quotes from notable people, and a joke. The part offers the same four tasks in every book:

1. Read aloud paragraphs x-y (specified differently in each unit) until you have learned them by heart. Then try to complete the passage from memory.
2. Read aloud the poem written by xy (usually an American or British poet, different in each unit).
3. Read the quotations. Learn them by heart if you can.
4. Read the humorous story for fun. You might need to look up new words in a dictionary.

The next section of the book is the '*Language Focus*' part, containing several tasks on vocabulary, a section named 'comprehensive exercises' that still focuses on vocabulary, and a translation part where students need to translate sentences from Chinese into English.

'*Part 3: Home reading task*' is the next major section of the units. It contains another reading text – similar in nature to the one in Part 2, also accompanied with a vocabulary list and some notes. Other activities in this section are comprehension check that focuses on the content of the reading text, translation (this time from English to Chinese), and language practice, again predominantly vocabulary focused.

The final section in the units is '*Part 4: Comprehensive language practice*', which has two tasks: speaking practice and essay writing. Without exception, the speaking task is a group discussion posing a few questions that the students need to talk about. No specific task is set, so it is not clear whether they need to reach a consensus, or whether disagreement is acceptable. It is also not certain what happens when the students finish the task, if they would share their discussion and answers with the rest of the class, or if the task stops at the small group level. The other task in the section is the essay writing which not only gives the learners a topic and some background information, but also offers writing strategies, and encourages self- and peer-correction of drafts.

Appendix A offers a summary of the activities and the tasks the students have to complete, based on New College English 3 (NCE3), Unit 1 (pp. 2-31). It also offers a suggestion which savoir the task might develop. It



is clear that the textbook not only presents tasks that are difficult to defend from a language pedagogy perspective, but it generally lacks activities that could contribute to the development of intercultural skills and attitudes. Since the learners' attention is not directed to the cultural aspects of the materials, it is very unlikely that they would develop intercultural communicative skills or awareness.

The first round of coding using Byram's *savoirs*, therefore, revealed very few activities – only a handful of the speaking and writing tasks – that could be classified to contribute to the learners' intercultural development. What is more, these may not have intercultural communicative competence development as their primary purpose. One such example is a speaking activity in New College English 3, in *Unit 1: Growing up*. Learners have to tackle the following task (p. 25).

In small groups talk about the following:

1. Who played a major role in your development from a child into a well-educated young person? Your parents, your grandparents, your teachers, or other people?
2. Tell about some of the things they did or said that has a good influence on the shaping of your character, behavior or attitude.
3. Suppose you are Baker's classmate. Brainstorm how to write him a letter of congratulations on his success in essay writing.

This task requires the learners to share with each other what they think about the influences of family and others on their personal development. The task could easily lead to the discussion of beliefs and values students hold about the role of education and family in a person's life and make them more aware of the differences that could be present in Western (as presented in the reading text) and Oriental values on these issues. In other words, the task has the potential to target and develop *savoir s'engager* (critical cultural awareness) and/or *savoir etre* (intercultural attitudes and beliefs). However, it is only a possibility; teachers can choose different ways to exploit the material and since there are no explicit instructions on how to discuss the cultural relevance of the topic, it can only be assumed that the discussion will contribute to a better understanding of Self and Others.

Another speaking task, on the other hand, approaches intercultural communication and discovering different cultures values in a more explicit way. In this activity the students need to explicitly discuss differences between Chinese and American views of creativity (NCE2, p. 27).

Discuss the following in small groups:

1. Do you agree with Gardner that both Chinese and Americans take an extreme view of creativity? What do you think would be a more rational approach to fostering creativity and basic skills?
2. What do you know about different approaches to learning in China and the West? Are some approaches superior to others? Explain.
3. Suppose Professor Howard Gardner will be giving a lecture on your campus sometime next week. Brainstorm how to design a notice to inform teachers and students of the event.

It is interesting to note that this task – whether intentionally or not – successfully addresses (inter)cultural learning at different levels. First of all, it asks the learners to compare and critically discuss ideas originated from two different cultural spheres: America and China. By doing so, the students have a chance to develop *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), and, assuming that not all of them are familiar with Gardner’s work on multiple intelligences and creativity, *savoir* (expert knowledge). Furthermore, especially by answering the second part of question 2, they can work on *savoir s’engager* (critical cultural awareness), hopefully objectively examining educational practices in their own, and in another cultural context.

A more typical presentation of cultural information in the text is in the form of explicit and implicit representation of cultural practices – mainly from BANA (British, Australian, North American) contexts. Explicit information, albeit in a rather simplified form, is presented in the notes sections about cultural practices. For example, in NCE2, there is an explanation about Roll Royce, “any of the large, expensive, comfortable cars made by the British company Rolls-Royce (p. 52), or an equally simple definition of *The Simpsons* in NCE3 (p. 27) that presents the show as “a cartoon comedy that focuses on the life of the Simpson family”. For anyone not familiar with the car brand or the TV show, the descriptions will not reveal neither the essence of these iconic brands, nor their cultural significance in everyday life.

The implicit presentation of cultural knowledge necessary for effective intercultural communication is more typical in the textbook series. There is no denial that the reading texts – exclusively borrowed from non-Chinese sources – contain abundant cultural information, not just at the national culture level (which was probably the textbook editors’ intention when they included these in the material), but at the sub-cultural level since

they portray different text types and characters from a variety of sociocultural backgrounds. These may include a taxi driver (NCE1, pp. 30-33) in the reading text 'All the cabbie had was a letter', or Rosa Parks, the American civil rights activist (NCE3, pp. 53-56), or the rich entrepreneur, Sam Walton (NCE2, pp. 49-51). Since there are no specific tasks assigned to the readings that would encourage discussion on the cultural information presented in the texts, it is not certain to what extent the learners would engage with such content.

Based on the above, we can assert that the textbook *New College English* course does not significantly contribute to the development of the learners' intercultural communicative competence. If such learning happens, it is mainly accidental and depends on the extra preparation and value teachers bring to the material.

### ***Intercultural learning potential of the material***

It is beyond doubt that the *New College English* course has a high potential for (inter)cultural learning. This is especially true if we accept the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis which could be incorporated into a language course, as explained by Wallace (2003, p. 102), who holds, that:

- ) no texts are ideologically neutral;
- ) texts arise out of social relationships, in particular relationships based on power;
- ) texts relate to each other intertextually; they have a history as do the discourses embedded within them.

Therefore, the texts included in the *New College English* series contain not only cultural information, but they have the potential to inform the readers of the discourse practices of the contexts in which they were written. In order to exploit the cultural information, teachers and learners need to accept the following principles about reading:

- ) reading is a social process;
- ) interpretations are negotiated within communities;
- ) interpretations may or may not be aligned with the model or expected reading (Wallace, 2003, p. 102).

Such reading would assume that texts are interpreted in many different ways, based on the experience, knowledge, values and beliefs, and the language level of the reader. Therefore, activities in the classroom should encourage active meaning making by discussion and negotiation of ideas, rather than accepting the teacher's (or the textbooks's) authoritative

and unquestionable ‘correct’ answer. When texts are exploited in this way the language focus is shared between the ‘what’ the text says, and the ‘how’ that meaning is communicated to the reader.

There are three major text types in the *New College English* series, which have high potential to be exploited for intercultural learning with appropriate tasks. These are i) the reading texts, ii) poems, and iii) jokes. In the following section, examples will be given on how these reading sources could be supplemented to promote meaningful intercultural learning.

### ***Reading texts***

The reading texts can be extremely rich in cultural references and examples of how people communicate in different social situations. However, the textbook does not make any attempt at making students aware of the rich subtext they provide and thus opportunities for cultural learning are lost. Cultural learning in this sense means learning that reaches beyond the nation culture level; it is learning that addresses intercultural communication at the subcultural, sociocultural levels that exist in every society. It should be emphasized that there is a need for learners to understand their own communication - either in L1 or in English - with people who come from a different social status, who may have cultural values that are not necessarily shared by them, and who could have different communication strategies.

One possible example for this kind of text is the story of a taxi driver in *New College English 1* (pp. 30-33) in a text titled ‘All the cabbie had was a letter’. The story tells the reader about the conversation between a taxi driver and his passenger about friendship and how the taxi driver wanted to get in touch with an old friend he had not seen for a long time. However, by the time he got himself to write a letter, his friend had passed away and he was not able to post the letter in which he said sorry for losing touch with his friend.

The activities which follow the text focus on reading comprehension and general understanding of the reading by asking questions like “What was the cab driver doing when the author wanted to take the taxi? Did the cab driver have a cold? Whom did the cab driver talk about with the author?” (NCE1, p. 35).

The story is unusual even for a Western reader, since this level of openness is not usually seen in real life. Therefore, some other questions could be asked that would focus on the communication, rather than the literal content of the text. For example, there could be a discussion on what you are expected to do in a taxi. Should you talk to the driver? Should you not? What do people do in China? What would you talk about in the car?

What is expected of you to talk about? Are there any particular topics that would be welcome by both parties? Would what the reading suggests be a typical behaviour in the US (where the story is set)? Another possibility would be to discuss how much personal information you are supposed to share with a stranger. Would what the taxi driver shared with the author be something that you would talk to with someone you had met for the first time? Would it be different if he was a cabbie (many believe people talk more freely to bartenders and cabbies)?

Questions like the ones above would get students to think about (intercultural) communication and how people in different social context might behave and what they might talk about. Therefore, a discussion like that would contribute to improving students' speaking skills as well as develop intercultural communicative skills like *savoir apprendre/faire* (Intercultural discovery and interaction) or *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), depending on the focus of the question prompts.

### **Poems**

Another potentially rich intercultural learning source are the poems that feature in each unit. Ironically, there is no sound pedagogic task that would accompany them. For example, one particular instruction states: "Read aloud the poem written by the eminent American poet Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)" (NCE2, p. 39). A Chinese translation is also offered on the same page. The original task does not attempt to offer any cognitive or affective engagement with the poem and focuses on only the pronunciation of the lines. There is no denying that the topic of the poem aligns with the theme of the unit in which they appear. However, they do not – in their present form – offer any learning opportunities for the students. One may argue, that they are *savoir*, i.e. knowledge as they represent an example of the arts from a particular culture; yet, this knowledge, without an appropriate task, is not exploited.

A possible task, which could develop *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), may ask the students to find a poem written by a Chinese poet who expresses similar emotions, ideas, or feelings. They could then discuss the differences in how the authors express their meanings, and to what extent those are due to cultural, temporal (e.g. poets living in different centuries), or linguistic factors.

### **Jokes**

Jokes are generally loaded with cultural messages and they also make use of combining unexpected ideas and "things that do not normally belong together" (Maley & Kiss, 2018, p. 9). They work on the

interlocutors' shared framework of reference, without which their humour would be lost. Therefore, they are perfect for cultural discussion and exploration. Unfortunately, the jokes included in the material are not exploited at all. The only instruction the textbook provides is the following: 'Read the humorous story for fun. You might need to look up new words in a dictionary'. This is a pedagogically weak task – perhaps it would be best categorized as extensive reading the students should do in their free time, although the length of the texts is not appropriate for that purpose.

A further problem is that the textbook editors' own cultural sensitivity and understanding is highly questionable. For example, they included a joke which features Hitler and Goebbels in a bar talking about killing 14 million Jews and a bicycle repair man. The punchline features Hitler saying: "See, I told you no one would worry about the 14 million Jews!" (NCE4, p. 13). The sheer cultural insensitiveness and apparent racism is shocking, especially since the 'joke' appears in an education material.

On the other hand, one of the vocabulary activities (NCE2, p. 197) has a gap-filling task which reads: "There is clear evidence that Japan committed many serious crimes against the Chinese people when it \_\_\_\_\_ China during the Second World War". It seems that the editors of the materials adopt a very ethnocentric view of culture (and intercultural communication) and portray two equally hideous events in completely different ways. Thus, the question must be raised: if materials writers do not have intercultural communicative competence, then how can the materials they create encourage learners to develop their own competence and awareness?

The jokes could be exploited for (inter)cultural learning by allowing the learners to discuss what makes them funny and asking them to relate the content or pun to existing jokes in the L1, should there be any available. The lack of similar jokes would require further discussion and exploration to unearth why certain concepts would be considered funny in one particular context, but not in a different one.

## Conclusion

This paper examined to what extent a popular and widely used Chinese published ELT textbook, the *New College English Integrated Course*, supports the development of the learners' intercultural communicative competence. There are two main research findings: a) the material only minimally develops the users' intercultural communicative competence, and when it does, it happens mainly accidentally; and b) the

texts (reading texts, poems, and jokes) have the potential to be used for developing intercultural communicative competence, but the currently available tasks do not require the learners to notice culture, and/or acquire skills, attitudes, and knowledge that would enable them to become intercultural citizens of the world (Byram, 2011).

It has been confirmed that texts (or visuals) alone will not contribute to the learners' cultural awareness if there are no tasks that would require them to notice and discuss content and linguistic elements. The fact that the material uses culturally rich texts is not enough for learning to take place. It is indeed a precondition, but it is equally important to have tasks that guide the learners in their cultural discovery and meaning making process. As Weninger and Kiss (2013) argue, language teaching materials use guided semiosis, i.e. they limit the meaning making processes in which learners can engage, thus, the assumption that students will notice and learn from texts which implicitly present cultural learning opportunities is highly unlikely.

The lack of tasks that would direct the students' attention to cultural learning necessitates that the material is adapted and supplemented by teachers. The amount of such modification depends on the awareness of the individual teachers, and in an exam-centred educational context, like China, is unlikely to be significant. Yet, this could only be uncovered by a systematic observation of how the material is used in actual classroom situations and what teachers and students think about the learning opportunities it presents, which could be the focus of a follow-up research project.

## **Acknowledgement**

This research was supported by the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship fund from Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University. Fellow researchers who contributed to data collection and analysis were: Yi Dai, Jiahui Huang, and Shaoyu Xu.

## **The author**

Tamas Kiss works as an Associate Professor at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University in Suzhou, China, where he teaches courses on the MA TESOL programme. He has been involved with language teacher education in Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, Latin America and South East Asia. He delivered one-off talks and directed two-week intensive workshops in more than 18 countries including Romania, Lithuania, Pakistan, Iraq, Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines, Germany, etc. by invitation of

universities, language teacher organizations, cultural institutions, or international publishing houses. His main research interests include language pedagogy, language teacher education, intercultural communication, the link between complex dynamic systems and education, and the role of culture in language teaching materials. One of his latest projects has been on creativity in language teaching which resulted in a co-authored book: Maley, A. & Kiss, T. (2018). *Creativity and English Language Teaching: From inspiration to implementation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

## References

- Byram, M. (1997a). Cultural studies and foreign language teaching. In B. Susan (Ed.), *Studying British cultures* (2nd ed., pp. 53-64). London: Routledge.
- Byram, M. (1997b). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. (2003). Cultural studies and foreign language teaching. In B. Susan (Ed.), *Studying British cultures: an introduction* (pp. 57-69). London: Routledge.
- Byram, M. (2011). Intercultural citizenship from an internationalist perspective. *Journal of the NUS Teaching Academy*, 1(1), 10-20.
- Byram, M., Gribkova, B., & Starkey, H. (2002). *Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching: A practical introduction for teachers*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Canagarajah, S. (1993). American textbooks and Tamil students: Discerning ideological tensions in the ESL classrooms. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 6(2), 143-156.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1-47.
- Carey, J. W. (1989). *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Deardorff, D. K. (2006a). Assessing intercultural competence in study abroad students. In M. Bryam & A. Feng (Eds.), *Living and studying abroad: Research and practice* (pp. 232-256). Clevedon: Multilingual Matter.



- Deardorff, D. K. (2006b). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of studies in international education*, 10(3), 241-266.
- Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (1984). *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Hill, I. (2006). Student types, school types and their combined influence on the development of intercultural understanding. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 5(1), 5-33.
- Houghton, S. A. (2013). Making intercultural communicative competence and identity-development visible for assessment purposes in foreign language education. *The Language Learning Journal*, 41(3), 311-325.
- Hymes, D. (1972). Models of the interaction of language and social life. In J. Gumperz & D. Hymes (Eds.), *Directions in sociolinguistics: The ethnography of communication* (pp. 35-71). New York: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston.
- Kiss, T., & Weninger, C. (2013). Exploring cultural potential in EFL textbooks: Fostering cultural reflexivity in the classroom. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 9(1), 19-28.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2008). *Cultural globalization and language education*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Li, Y. (Ed.) (2014). *New college English integrated course 1-6*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Liddicoat, A. J. (2002). Static and dynamic views of culture and intercultural language acquisition. *Babel*, 36(3), 4-11.
- Liddicoat, A. J., & Scarino, A. (2013). *Intercultural Language Teaching and Learning*. London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Maley, A., & Kiss, T. (2018). *Creativity and English language teaching: From inspiration to implementation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nguyen, M. T. T. (2011). Learning to communicate in a globalized world: To what extent do school textbooks facilitate the development of intercultural pragmatic competence? *RELC Journal*, 42(1), 17-30.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity, and Educational Change*. London: Longman.
- Risager, K. (2007). *Language and culture pedagogy: From a national to a transnational paradigm*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Sacks, H. (1975). Everyone has to lie. *Sociocultural Dimensions of Language Use*, 57-80.
- Shohamy, E. (2006). *Language Policy: Hidden Agendas and New Approaches*. London and New York: Routledge.

- Siegel, J. (2006). Language ideologies and the education of speakers of marginalized language varieties: Adopting a critical awareness approach. *Linguistics and Education*, 17(2), 157-174.
- Wallace, C. (2003). *Critical reading in language education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Weninger, C., & Kiss, T. (2013). Culture in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks: A semiotic approach. *TESOL Quarterly*, 47(4), 694-716.
- Yuen, K. (2011). The representation of foreign cultures in English textbooks. *ELT Journal*, 65(4), 458-466.

## Appendix A

### Summary of task types with examples from the New College English textbooks

Unit Part	Section	Task	Savoir
Overview		No specific task	-
Part 1: Listening Task		'Complete the following statements according to what you have heard'.	-
Part 2: Reading task	Reading text	No specific task	-
	Proper names and notes	No specific task	-
	Content questions	'Pair work. One of you asks the first six questions and the other answers. Starting from question 7, change roles. When you have finished, the teacher may want to put some of the questions to you to check your progress'.	-
	Text organization	'The text can be divided into four parts. The paragraph numbers of each part have been given to you. Now write down their main ideas'.	-
	Language sense enhancement	'Read aloud paragraphs 12-15 until you have learned them by heart. Then try to complete the passage from memory'. 'Read the poem by the renowned American poet Robert Frost (1874-1963)'. 'Read the quotations. Learn them by heart if you can'. 'Read the humorous story for fun. You may need to look up new words in a dictionary'.	Savoir (knowledge) - -
Language focus		'Fill in the gaps with words or phrases given in the box. Change the form where necessary'.	-
		'Now use the verb in brackets to form an appropriate phrasal verb you have learned and complete the sentence with it.'	-
		'Rewrite each sentence with the word or phrase in brackets, keeping the same meaning. The first part has been written for you.'	-

		<p>‘Complete the sentences, using the words or phrases in brackets. Make additional changes where necessary.’</p> <p>‘Now put into each gap in the sentences the proper word from the alternatives offered.’</p> <p>‘Now study the words in the box and choose one to fill in each of the gaps in the sentences, changing the form when necessary.’</p>	- - -
	Comprehensive exercises	<p>‘Complete the passage with words chosen from the ‘Words and Phrases Drill’ box. Change the form where necessary.’</p> <p>Read the passage carefully until you have got the main idea, and then select one appropriate word for each gap from the box following the passage.’</p> <p>‘Translate the sentences into English, using the words or phrases in brackets.’</p> <p>‘Translate the passage into English, using the words and phrases given below.’</p>	- - - -
Part 3: Home reading task	Comprehension check	‘Choose the best answer for each of the following.’	-
	Translation	‘Translate into Chinese the underlined sentences in the essay’.	-
	Language practice	<p>‘Match the definitions in Column B with the words and phrases in Column A’.</p> <p>‘Fill in the gaps with words or phrases chosen from the text box. Change the form where necessary’.</p>	- -
Part 4: Comprehensive language practice	Speaking practice	<p>‘Discuss the following in small groups:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What do you know about family life in your parents’ childhood?</li> <li>2. What is home life like in your family today?</li> <li>3. What are the forces that have helped bring about changes in Chinese family life?</li> <li>4. What would you suggest as a way of improving our family life?’</li> </ol>	Savoir etre (Intercultural & beliefs) / Savoir s’engager (critical cultural awareness)

	Essay writing	'Based on the discussion, write an essay entitled 'Recent Changes in Chinese Family Life'. The questions listed above may serve as a framework'.	Savoir etre (Intercultural & beliefs) / Savoir s'engager (critical cultural awareness)
--	---------------	--	--