

Critical content analysis of English textbooks used in the Iranian education system: Focusing on ELF features

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This study examines the listening and speaking activities of ELT textbooks adopted in Iranian junior and senior high schools, namely the *Prospect* and *Vision* series, with reference to English as a lingua franca (ELF) features. To do so, the researchers analysed the textbooks' activities against ELF criteria adopted from Caleffi's study (2016). The results of the critical content analysis revealed that the textbooks do not provide sufficient exposure to a variety of situational contexts, characters, and cultural elements, and do not provide sufficient opportunities for English teachers to implement the socio-linguistic and socio-cultural realities of the English language in their English classes. This seems to have resulted in unrealistic and unauthentic presentations of English in the textbook series. The findings can encourage national and international ELT textbook designers to eschew a fixed and monolithic approach to the English language and make more extensive use of ELF-informed materials in ELT textbooks.

Introduction

The widespread use of the English language across the world by those using English as an additional language has made it a unique global lingua franca; no lingua franca to date has received such wide currency among its users (Jenkins, 2018). Basically, English as a lingua franca (ELF) is characterised by creativity and diversity rather than fixed features (Jenkins, Cogo, Dewey, 2011). ELF does not refer to any variety of English nor does it approve of a fixed pedagogical model. Specifically, it deals with English users coming from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds using English for different purposes (Blair, 2015; Cogo, 2015). In mainstream English language teaching (ELT), English used by language learners is considered corrupt and deficit and they are encouraged to eliminate all traces of their first language to get closer to native speakers of English, something which is frowned upon in ELF research (Ranta, 2018). In essence, ELF research does not support the elimination of a native speaker model or replacement of this model, as ELF is not viewed as a coded variety. In fact, it exerts emphasis on movement from monolithic to pluralistic approach to ELT (Grazzi, 2017).

Crystal (2003) asserted that one of the consequences of a global language is that either no one can be considered as its owner, or all its users can be regarded as the owners. Approximately a quarter of the world's people are using English to communicate with one another and this proportion is increasing. Consequently, this international status of English has led to four implications for English language teaching (ELT). First, non-native speakers of English are considered legitimate users of English. Second, English is no longer considered a fixed and monolithic language. Third, linguistic and cultural diversity characterise its setting. Fourth, emphasis on accuracy is being replaced by emphasis on communication strategies and mutual understanding (Marlina & Xu, 2018).

Vettorel and Lopriore (2013) pointed out that despite the fact that the plurality of the English language can no longer be overlooked, British and American English have dominated ELT textbooks and few activities, if any, raise learners' awareness of ELF interactions. Moreover, even though the majority of English language users come from non-English speaking countries, English classes focus mainly on native speakers and native speakers are regarded as the legitimate users of the English language (Seidlhofer, 2005). The integration of ELF in English classes provides a more realistic picture of the English language in today's world as students no longer need to be imitators of normative rules; in addition, hegemonic cultural rules practised in English speaking communities will not be considered the only point of reference (Siqueira, 2018). In essence, any change in the traditional curriculum and the orthodox approach to English language teaching can be achieved partly through modifications to current ELT textbooks. However, even though much research in the field of linguistics has shown that language is continuously changing, ELT industry continues to depict the English language as fixed and monolithic, resisting any kind of change (Galloway, 2018). In the present study, attempts were thus made to illuminate to what extent the current ELT textbooks for the Iranian junior and senior high school students are informed by findings of research on ELF, and to what extent the textbooks can encourage English language teachers to focus their attention on socio-linguistic and socio-cultural realities of English.

Theoretical framework

ELT textbooks and ELF

Technological advances and the emergence of the Internet have not diminished the significant role of textbooks in teaching. Textbooks can determine a range of activities and procedures in the classroom and can act as a syllabus for teaching. Teachers can also gain advantages from textbooks which can free them from the burden of developing materials for their classes, and allow them to focus their attention on other aspects of teaching and save their time and energy (Richards, 2014). ELT textbooks are both input provider and guide to how materials should be taught (Yu, 2018). The significance of textbooks in language teaching and learning was also emphasised by Tomlinson (2008), who held that textbooks can play a significant role in helping students to develop their communication skills, and that textbooks should present authentic materials which engage learners affectively and cognitively. Further, textbooks can provide the language content and present a balance between language skills and sub-skills taught in ELT classes, and highlight the pedagogical model that is being used. In addition, they can present the main language content students are exposed to, and they can help teachers to decide on planning and teaching their lessons (Richards, 2001). The ELT textbooks can show clearly the connections between language use, curriculum and lesson planning in the classroom. More precisely, a textbook can reflect an intended curriculum based on which teachers plan their teaching and students develop their learning.

Since the emergence of debate over the monolithic model of ELT informed by the findings of research on ELF, English as an international language (EIL), and World

Englishes, ELT textbooks have been evaluated more critically with respect to their focus on multilingualism and multiculturalism. Yu (2018) believed that the majority of the published ELT textbooks are not neutral and they propagate and indoctrinate linguistic norms practised by those whose first language is English. This ignores the sociolinguistic reality of English and deludes language learners into the misconception that English is used for communication only with native speakers of English. Further, Cavalheiro (2013) stated that language is intrinsically flexible and subject to change; however, ELT materials shows the English language as an immutable and a fixed tool for communication, which disregards its varieties used by individuals with different socio-cultural and socio-linguistic backgrounds. Caleffi (2016) advised that materials developers for English language learners develop ELT textbooks which can represent the variation of contexts, and enable learners to develop a good command of communicative competence in heterogeneous contexts. According to Sifakis et al. (2018), there are a set of factors that English teachers need to take into account when using a textbook. Teachers may neglect to consider the real-life communication taking place outside the classroom as they are engrossed in a textbook which does not present the real use of English in today's world. Further, as ELT textbooks are published for a large audience, they may not reflect students' interests, and the contents may look tedious to the target students.

Lopriore (2017) placed emphasis on the widespread mismatches existing between students' linguistic needs, teachers' views on students' needs, and materials published for language learners. She believed that locally-designed materials can bridge the gap between classroom and outside world. Communication breakdowns can take place in ELF interaction, which can be resolved through communication strategies. These strategies need to be emphasised in English classes to prepare students for possible interactions in ELF contexts. Intercultural communication which is a main element of ELF communication is also neglected in ELT textbooks designed for language learners in expanding circle contexts. English language teachers should be empowered to develop their own complementary, locally-designed materials, as they are the only individuals who are in direct contact with their students.

In ELF contexts, language learners should be exposed to diverse discourses in which non-native speakers use English as a means of communication, and mutual intelligibility should be given a special attention (Sifakis, 2004). ELF is not summarised simply into variation and creativity in interaction. Variations in cultural elements also need special attention. Xu (2013) believed that language learners' exposure only to native speakers of English can mislead them into believing that English is exclusively for communicating with native speakers of English. Thus ELT textbooks should to expose language learners to diverse linguistic and cultural elements, raising language learners' awareness of ELF. McKay (2012) also emphasised that curricula should be culturally sensitive to increase language learners' awareness of other cultures, with the aim of encouraging them reflect on their own cultural values and beliefs. In traditional cross-cultural studies, boundaries were drawn between people with different nationalities, and cultural elements of each community were compared with each other as if individuals in each community are homogeneous in terms of their cultural values.

However, contemporary studies on intercultural studies have eschewed this essentialist view and have focused on the dynamicity of culture and negotiation of cultural elements. ELF is more compatible with the contemporary and post-structuralist view of culture and ELF is not considered culturally neutral. It is a fallacy to consider intercultural communication between people to be a neutral social practice, as in intercultural communication, cultural and meaning negotiation are very important. However, this does not mean there is a fixed culture associated to ELF; rather, in ELF users may keep moving across and between local, national and global cultures in a more dynamic fashion (Baker, 2018). EIL scholars (e.g. McKay, 2018) believe that EIL cannot be associated with any culture and is culturally neutral; however, this premise is rejected by the majority of their ELF counterparts who believe that ELF possesses the culture and language of its users in a dynamic fashion.

In summary, according to Llorca (2018) in today's world it is of high importance to evaluate ELT textbooks in the light of ELF, to ascertain whether they take ELF into account, whether the characters in the textbook are relevant to ELF, how culture and English ownership are presented, and how language learners' L1 is viewed.

Review of studies on ELT textbook evaluation from an ELF perspective

Non Iranian contexts

ELT materials can be evaluated in light of ELF and World Englishes by considering text book presentation features such as awareness raising activities, characters and contexts presented in listening and speaking activities, communication strategies used in ELF interactions, cultural diversity and intercultural communications (Vettorel, 2018).

With the above-mentioned factors in mind for textbook evaluation and content analysis, some studies have been conducted in a range of contexts. Regarding internationally published ELT textbooks, for example, Naji Meidani and Pishghadam (2013) examined four different textbooks to ascertain which one best demonstrated the status of English in today's world. Among *New American Streamline*, *Cambridge English for Schools*, *Interchange Series* (third Edition) and *Top Notch*, the most in line with EIL features was *Top Notch*. That is, *Top Notch* exposed language learners to more diversity of English speakers using English for international communication. A number of studies on nationally-designed textbooks were also conducted in non-Iranian contexts. Si (2018), for example, carried out a study in the Chinese context to evaluate textbooks designed for business English programs in light of ELF and World Englishes. The results revealed that the socio-cultural and socio-linguistic reality of the English language was partly neglected in the textbooks. Further, Vettorel (2018) examined communication strategies, common in ELF interactions, in Italian English textbooks published from 1990 to 2015. Findings indicated that insufficient attention has been paid to ELF communication strategies. Moreover, in some cases in which communication strategies were presented, they were not contextualised and provided little, if any, opportunity for students to practise them in conversation.

Caleffi (2016) also investigated the listening and speaking parts of textbooks recently-published by native speakers of English for secondary school students and adult learners,

to ascertain to what extent they are compatible with ELF features. The results of content analyses of the textbooks revealed that the target parts did not represent the reality of the English language in today's world. In the same vein, Vettorel and Lopriore (2013) also evaluated a total of ten ELT textbooks published in Italy for secondary school students, to examine to what extent the textbooks had been informed by the findings of research on ELF. Although significant changes had taken place in the textbooks with respect to intercultural communication, no significant modification was observed in terms of ELF-aware activities. In addition, Syrbe and Rose (2018) evaluated three ELT textbook series adopted in the German schools and based on ELF approaches to language teaching and learning. The results also corroborated those of previous studies, as the textbooks presented British English as an appropriate pedagogical model.

Iranian contexts

ELT textbooks designed for Iranian junior and senior high schools have been examined in a number of studies (e.g. Ahmadi Safa & Farahani, 2015; Asadi, Kiany, Akbari & Samar, 2016; Asakereh, 2014; Rezaei & Latifi, 2015; Salehi & Amini, 2016; Soodmand Afshar, Ranjbar, Yousefi & Afshar, 2018), with results generally showing that the textbooks offered little emphasis, if any, on intercultural communication and confined students mainly to local cultural elements. No study seems to have explored the textbooks thoroughly in the light of ELF features. Even though the effect of improved teacher training programs on teachers' attitudes toward ELF may become more helpful, textbooks and classroom materials need to help pave the way for implementation of ELF in the classroom (Yu, 2015). In particular, ELT textbooks can be one of the elements which can impinge upon teachers' beliefs and attitudes (Dewey, 2015), as textbooks can be regarded as a roadmap and a framework which can assist learners in orienting their learning both inside and outside the classroom, and can provide direction to lessons, provoke discussions and organise teaching (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994).

Content analysis of textbooks from an ELF perspective can therefore show whether the textbooks encourage teachers to perceive the socio-linguistic and socio-cultural reality of the English language, which in turn can raise their awareness of multiculturalism and multilingualism. This issue can be of paramount importance in English teaching, as one of the elements which can orient teachers' practice and beliefs toward ELF is ELT materials (Vettorel & Lopriore, 2013). The noted gaps in the literature have motivated the conduct of the present study with the aim of providing further impetus for the implementation of ELF in the Iranian education context. The following research question was thus formulated:

To what extent can the ELT textbooks (*Prospect* and *Vision* series), designed for Iranian junior and senior high school students, encourage English language teachers to take ELF into account in the classroom?

Method

ELT in the Iranian education system

In the Iranian education system, English is offered to the Iranian students in junior and senior high schools, while English teaching is banned in elementary and pre-elementary schools. In junior high school, around two hours is allocated to English teaching per week and in senior high school the time is extended to three hours. All ELT textbooks are locally-designed and heavily culture-bound (Mokhtarnia & Samar, 2015).

Prior to the Islamic revolution, Iran developed a good relationship with Western countries, especially the US and the UK, something which contributed to the establishment of two main English language centres in the country, namely the British Council and the Iran-American society. However, following the Islamic revolution in 1979, attempts were made to exclude Western cultures from the education system in general and from ELT textbooks in particular, and to highlight Islamic and local cultures instead (Borjian, 2013). Moreover, the two English centres were closed down, and English language teaching experienced many ups and downs after the Islamic revolution. However, in 2012 a significant reform occurred in the ELT textbooks adopted in public schools, with the aim of exerting increased emphasis on communicative aspects of English language and Islamic and local culture; something which had been neglected in previous ELT textbooks. This reform seemed promising; however, owing to some factors such as lack of time, inappropriate assessment system, and unsatisfactory classroom settings, it seems that no significant change in practices has yet taken place (Moradkhani & Asakereh, 2018).

The selected ELT textbooks

The newly locally-developed textbooks by Iran's Ministry of Education, selected for the present study, comprise the *Prospect* series (including three textbooks offered during the three years of junior high school) and the *Vision* series (including three textbooks offered during the three years of senior high school) (see Appendix). The two series of textbooks were selected as the authors of the textbooks emphasised strongly that these two series are interconnected, and that researchers and practitioners need to consider them as a connected series rather than separate ones, something which has been neglected in the previous studies. The researchers found the textbooks to be an appropriate case for content analysis in light of ELF for two reasons: first, in the prefaces of the textbooks, the importance of international communication and Islamic and national culture and identities were emphasised. Second, as the textbook series were newly-developed, it could be illuminating to ascertain to what extent they were informed by recent findings about contested topics such as ELF.

Content analysis

In the current study, the researchers analysed the listening and speaking activities of *Prospect 1, 2 and 3*, and *Vision 1, 2, and 3* and their respective teacher's guidebooks in

detail, with respect to ELF criteria adopted from Caleffi's study (2016). Almost similar ELF criteria were proposed in other studies (e.g. Vettorel & Lopriore, 2013); however, the researchers found the ELF criteria proposed by Caleffi more concise and appropriate for the present study. Moreover, as in current multilingual and multicultural contexts around the world, research in the realm of ELF has focused mainly on oral interactions (Caleffi, 2016), only speaking and listening activities of the textbooks were addressed. That is, all the audio files related to the listening, pronunciation and conversation sections and the speaking activities were analysed against the criteria presented in Table 1. Specifically, the first researcher listened to the audio files several times and wrote down the relevant points, which were the main focus of the study, and the speaking activities were extracted from the textbooks and analysed in detail. To ensure interrater reliability, the data were checked by two experts who were well-versed in textbook content analysis and ELF and any discrepancies in the findings were discussed to reach an agreement.

Table 1: Overview of criteria for content analysis of the ELT textbook series

Activities	Criteria
Listening	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exposure to authentic non-native accents in authentic interactions 2. Exposure to authentic non-native/non-native interactions 3. Exposure to authentic interactions in a variety of international contexts
Speaking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing opportunity for students to use their linguistic resources and communication strategies 2. Focusing on global and cross-cultural issues and topics 3. Engaging students with real-life ELF interactions and experiences

Prospect 1 comprises eight lessons each of which has two conversations (16 conversations, 96 minutes in total) and two listening sections (16 sections, 9 minutes in total) as well as two speaking activities (16 in total). In *Prospect 2* there are seven lessons each of which has one conversation (7 sections, around 7 minutes in total), one spelling and pronunciation section (7 sections, around 4 minutes in total), and two speaking activities (14 in total). *Prospect 3* comprises six lessons each of which contains one conversation (6 conversations, 9 minutes in total), one intonation section (6 sections, 5 minutes in total) and two listening sections (12 sections, 19 minutes in total).

Vision1 has four lessons each of which has one conversation section (4 sections, around 5 minutes in total), one pronunciation section (4 sections, around 5 minutes in total) and two listening sections (eight sections, around 6 minutes in total) and two speaking activities (eight in total). *Vision 2* comprises three lessons each containing one conversation section (3 sections, around 5 minutes in total), two pronunciation sections (6 sections, 4 minutes in total), two listening sections (6 sections, around 7 minutes in total) and two speaking activities (six in total). *Vision 3* comprises 3 lessons each having one conversation section (3 sections, around 7 minutes in total), two listening sections (6 sections, around 6 minutes in total) and 2 speaking activities (six in total). It should be noted the textbook series have further sections including grammar, vocabulary and writing and reading section, which were not the main focus of the study; thus, they were excluded from the study.

Results

Listening activities

The content analysis of the textbook series indicated that the listening activities do not expose the students to sufficient and appropriate ELF interactions in genuine contexts, something which can encourage teachers and students alike to turn a blind eye to the real use of English in today's world. The detailed analyses are presented in the following sub-sections.

Exposure to authentic non-native accents in authentic interactions

In *Prospect 1*, all the characters in the textbook attempt to use native-like accents and one cannot observe variation in native accents, or in non-native accents. Only one example of a British accent was observed, and there were not any examples of non-native accents common among English users from Expanding Circle countries (e.g. China, Turkey, Iraq, etc.) or Outer Circle ones (e.g. India, Singapore, Malaysia, etc.). Only a few examples of communication breakdowns were presented (e.g. say it again); however, one of the communication strategies which was rampant in the textbook was asking for help (e.g. how do you say in English?, what is چادر in English?, and how do you spell that?). Moreover, there were some communication strategies which were not contextualised and were introduced only at the end of each conversation. Additionally, in one example in the textbook, a teacher attempts to correct a student to pronounce the first letter of "work" as W rather than V. Although all the consonant sounds are considered as lingua franca core except for /ð/ (e.g. this /ðIs/ can be intelligible when pronounced as 'dis, zis, and vis), /θ/ (e.g. think / θInk/ can be intelligible when pronounced as tink, sink, fink) and dark L which can be substituted by clear L (Jenkins, 2000), in this example it seems the word sounds intelligible in this context and its correction seems unnecessary.

In *Prospect 2*, variations in accent were also scarce and the characters attempted to use native-like accents, preferably American accents, without any examples of other native or non-native ones. However, in lesson 5 (p. 42) there is a conversation in which a tourist using a strange accent speaks to an Iranian. In the textbook, no information was provided about the identity of the tourist; however, in the teacher's guide, the tourist is introduced as Indian. Surprisingly, this cannot be identified from his accent, as it seems the accent was simulated by a non-Indian speaker. Additionally, although the accent is unintelligible to a large extent, no breakdowns or communication strategies were observed.

In *Prospect 2* a new section is included, entitled "spelling and pronunciation" in which some core (e.g. vowel quantity, initial consonant clusters, consonants like ch/sh) and non-core (e.g. ð, θ) lingua franca pronunciations are introduced. However, these features are not included in genuine and authentic conversations, which can show how the core pronunciations can cause communication breakdowns or problems in intelligibility. "Asking for help", a commonly used communication strategy, was adopted to ask about the pronunciation features introduced in this section, which cannot raise students' awareness of how these features can block communication.

Compared to *Prospect 1* and *2*, in *Prospect 3* it seems attempts were made to introduce further variation in accents in the textbooks; however, the content analysis shows that this variation was mainly in characters and some strange accents. On page 30, for example, there is a conversation between a tourist and a receptionist; however, in the introduction section nothing is presented about the nationality of the tourist and the situational context of the conversation. His nationality, something, which is not disclosed by his accent, becomes clear from the body of the conversation when the tourist introduces himself as a German tourist visiting Iran. Although the conversation takes place between two non-native speakers, which can be a perfect example of ELF communication, no communication breakdowns and strategies are observed and the conversation flows very smoothly. The same issue is also repeated on page 64 (conversation section); however, in this conversation the problem is even worse as neither from the tourist's accent nor from the body of the conversation, can the reader ascertain the nationality of the tourist.

Further, on page 38 in the introduction section of the listening part, nothing is noted about the identity and nationality of the speakers and the situational context; however the picture shows the context of a hotel where there is a receptionist and the flag of Iran. In the conversation the caller introduces herself as a British lady who wants to reserve a room, but faces a problem. Two further non-native accents, namely English with Chinese and Turkish accents were used in two monologues. However, as the speakers simulated the accents, they sound strange. In addition, these accents were not introduced in authentic interactions to present real-life ELF communications. What is more, *Prospect 3* presents a new section entitled language melody, the focus of which is on rising and falling intonation, something which does not affect intelligibility (Jenkins, 2000).

The content analysis of *Vision 1* also revealed that accent variations are rarely used and mainly native-like accents (i.e. American and British accents) are adopted by the characters. Communication breakdowns and strategies are also rare (e.g. on page 47, conversation section, using "Umm" as a gap-filler). Only one character in conversation section of lesson 4 was introduced as a Spanish tourist; however, he uses a native-like accent and his accent never represents his identity. Furthermore, the listening section includes interactions between two persons on topics which are not connected to the theme of the lesson and they provide mainly an opportunity for students to be exposed to the structures of the lessons, and little attention is paid to authentic and genuine interactions containing communication strategies and breakdowns. In the pronunciation section, rising and falling intonations and word stress are presented without providing any authentic interactional discourse.

Vision 2 also suffers from the same deficiencies which were observed in *Vision 1*. The characters attempt to adopt native-like accents, although in some cases exaggerated intonations were observed. Word stress which is not considered as lingua franca core (Jenkins, 2000) was emphasised in the pronunciation section, and in the conversation section of lesson 3 in which the only communication between a tourist and a seller is presented; they both use native-like accents. However, some communication strategies such as prefabricated phrases (e.g. how much is it?) and gap fillers (e.g. well) are used. All the listening sections except for the second listening of lesson 2 do not have any

connection with the themes of the lessons. It seems they are included in the textbook to provide students with further exposure to the structures of the lessons, as the listening sections revolve mainly around the intended structures rather than authentic interactions.

In *Vision 3*, the same features noted in *Vision 1* and *2* were observed. More specifically, the focus was mainly on native-like accents, and accents commonly used in non-English speaking countries are ignored. Further, in this textbook for the first time idiomatic expressions and proverbs were introduced and emphasised, something which is not recommended in ELF communication as they may cause confusion and communication breakdowns (Jenkins, 2009). Only a few examples of communication breakdowns were observed (e.g. conversation section of lesson 3, p.75):

- Emad: These wind turbines remind me of what I read about using wind power in Yazd's buildings.
 Father: You mean wind towers?

Exposure to authentic non-native/non-native interactions

In *Prospect 1*, all the conversations represent two-way interactions; however, all the interactions take place between Iranian characters. Although the textbook provides no information about their nationality, one can find out from their names, appearances, and the contexts that Iranian characters are engaged in the conversations. This makes the interactions sound strange and unnatural, as students may wonder why two Iranians sharing the same language use the English language to communicate with each other. For example, in lesson 6 (p.32) in the conversation section a boy, named Farid, talks with his mother in English at home.

The content analysis of *Prospect 2* also revealed that almost all the interactions in both the conversation and listening sections are between Iranian characters, except for the conversation of lesson 5 (p.42), which is between an Iranian and a tourist from India. Further, in lesson 1 on page 12, an Iranian trilingual boy, who can speak English, French and a little Persian, is introduced, which can be a good case of a multilingual speaker in today's multilingual and multicultural contexts.

Unlike *Prospect 1* and *2*, *Prospect 3* presents 12 listening sections of which 6 are monologues, in which no two-way interactions take place. Moreover, lesson 2 (p. 30) includes a conversation between a tourist from Germany and an Iranian hotel receptionist, in which no communication breakdowns occur and the communication moves smoothly. In addition, on page 64, lesson 4, there is conversation between an Iranian character and a tourist; however, no information is provided about the nationality of the tourist in the textbook or in the teacher's guidebook. What is more, in *Prospect 1*, *2* and *3*, the majority of the conversations are between friends, family members or students and teachers. This feature of the *Prospect* series does not allow students to have a clear understanding of international use of the English language in today's world.

One feature of the *Vision* series which distinguishes some of its conversation sections from those of the *Prospect* series is related to the provision of sufficient information about

the characters and situational contexts of the conversations. However, this feature was rarely available in the listening sections. Moreover, like in the *Prospect* series, almost all interactions in the *Vision* series also take place between Iranian characters, namely friends, teachers and students, family members, etc. Having said that, in *Vision 2* (p. 85) there is a conversation between an Iranian character and a tourist whose nationality is not presented, and in another case, *Vision 1* includes a conversation between a Spanish tourist and a travel agent in Madrid, in which the two characters use the English language although they have the same nationality and no information was provided about the reason behind their use of the English language.

Surprisingly, in both the *Prospect* and *Vision* series, non-Iranian characters were represented as tourists from some countries, the names of which were not noted in some cases. Furthermore, in all the interactional cases Iranian characters were not represented as international tourists, as if Iranians never travel abroad. Strangely enough, all the tourists in the textbook series were males, which indicates a false reality of tourism in today's world.

Exposure to authentic interactions in a variety of international contexts

In *Prospect 1, 2* and *3*, neither in the conversation sections nor in the listening sections, is sufficient information provided about the situational contexts. Students are asked only to listen to the conversations and complete some tables or incomplete sentences, and they are not encouraged to figure out the situational contexts (see Figure 1).





Listening and Reading

Listen to the conversations and check (✓) the correct items.

Conversation	Height	Clothes	Color
1	tall <input type="checkbox"/> short <input type="checkbox"/>	suit <input type="checkbox"/> T-shirt <input type="checkbox"/>	brown <input type="checkbox"/> blue <input type="checkbox"/>
2	tall <input type="checkbox"/> short <input type="checkbox"/>	chador <input type="checkbox"/> manteau <input type="checkbox"/>	black <input type="checkbox"/> grey <input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 1: Listening section of *Prospect 1* (p. 31)

However, in the conversation sections, pictures can make the situational contexts clearer. All the conversations in *Prospect 1* take place either at school or at home. Moreover, five out of seven conversations in *Prospect 2* occur in the classroom and the other two conversations seem to take place outside; however, there is not sufficient information to

ascertain the situational contexts of the conversations. In addition, except for a couple of listening parts which seem to occur in a stadium and a game show, apparently, the conversations in the listening sections also do not provide a variety of situational contexts. *Prospect 3* also does not provide a wide range of contexts; the conversations seem to happen in limited contexts such as school and home (see Figure 2) except for lesson 2 (p.30) and 4 (p.64), for which the pictures show a hotel and a street context. However, in some cases, such as the monologues and the conversations in the listening and conversation sections, one cannot identify the exact contexts in which the conversations take place, as no detailed information is provided about the contexts.

✿ Listen to the conversation between two friends.

Elham: I just love New Year holidays!

Nasrin: Oh, yes, me too. It's really great.

Elham: We normally visit our relatives in Norooz. It's fun!

Nasrin: Do you get New Year gifts too?

Elham: Sure! We usually get money. I really like it.

Nasrin: Well..., We always go to my grandparents' houses.

Elham: That's nice! Does your grandmother cook the New Year meal?

Nasrin: Actually, she doesn't. My mother makes it.



Figure 2: A conversation in *Prospect 3* (p.50)



Alireza is visiting an observatory. He is talking to Ms. Tabesh who works there.

- Ms.Tabesh:** Are you interested in the planets?
- Alireza:** Yes! They are really interesting for me, but I don't know much about them.
- Ms.Tabesh:** Planets are really amazing but not so much alike. Do you know how they are different?
- Alireza:** Umm... I know they go around the Sun in different orbits.
- Ms.Tabesh:** That's right. They have different colors and sizes, too. Some are rocky like Mars, some have rings like Saturn and some have moons like Uranus.
- Alireza:** How wonderful! Can we see them without a telescope?
- Ms.Tabesh:** Yeah..., we can see the planets nearer to us without a telescope, such as Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. We can see Uranus and Neptune only with powerful telescopes.
- Alireza:** And which planet is the largest of all?
- Ms.Tabesh:** Jupiter is the largest one. It has more than sixty moons. Do you want to look at it?
- Alireza:** I really like that.

Questions

Answer the following questions **orally**.

1. How are the planets different?
2. Can we see all planets without a telescope?
3. Do you know the names of the planets in Persian?



Figure 3: Conversation section of *Vision 1* (p.47)

Regarding the *Vision* series, although some of the conversations take place in some new contexts (e.g. an observatory, a medical centre, a museum, and so on) and some of them are provided with sufficient information about the situational contexts, the conversations occur mainly within an Iranian context, which cannot raise students' awareness of lingua franca situations (see Figure 3). Additionally, in the *Vision* series, the listening sections fail to present the situational contexts, something which can be observed in *Prospect* series as well (see Figure 1).

Speaking activities

The examined textbooks revealed that the speaking activities also do not provide the opportunities for students to become engaged in hypothetical ELF interactions, to raise their awareness of real-life ELF interactions, and to encourage teachers to take ELF into account in their English classes. The following subsections provide a further analysis of the textbooks.

Providing opportunities for students to use their linguistic resources and communication strategies

Prospect 1 includes two main speaking activities, namely a group work and a pair work. The group work is an open activity providing students with opportunities to use their linguistic resources and communication strategies, while the pair work is a controlled activity, as students are provided with a conversation model which they are supposed to follow as it is emphasised in teacher's guidebook (see Figure 4).

Prospect 2 also offered two speaking activities, namely group work, mainly a controlled activity, and pair work (i.e. role play), in which students have opportunities to make use of their communication strategies and linguistic resources. The speaking section in *Prospect 3* follows the same structure. More specifically, it includes two speaking activities, one being a guided activity for practising how to use some related structures in the lesson, for example 'WH' questions, to enhance accuracy, which does not allow students to have a free interaction. Moreover, in this activity the offered questions seem strange and unnatural (e.g. Is your father kind? Are your family members neat?), and students are not convinced why they should ask such questions. Although the second activity is role-play and allows for more free interactions, in the teacher's guidebook teachers are asked to encourage students to develop a conversation based on the conversation model provided in the textbook. In addition, almost all the speaking activities in *Vision* series more or less have the same characteristics. There are two speaking activities, which cannot be considered free speaking activities. They are not relevant to the theme of the lesson as they can be regarded mainly a practice for the structures of the lessons, there being little attention, if any, paid to role play during which students can imagine a role for themselves and perform real-life tasks (see Figure 5).

Speaking and Writing



Group Work

Ask your classmates about their family members and fill out the table below.

Name	Relationship	Age	Height
Rahman	Ali's uncle	42	tall

Your Conversation

Pair Work

Ask and answer with a friend about other classmates.

You: Who is that

Your friend: Which one?

You: He's/She's wearing

Your friend: He's/She's

thirty one


Figure 4: Speaking activities in *Prospect 1* (p. 31)

Pair up and ask your friends about the things they were doing last weekend in the afternoon. You may use the verbs in the box.

talk to someone, read a book, watch TV, play in the yard

Figure 5: Speaking activity of *Vision 1* (p.88)

Focusing on global and cross-cultural issues and topics

The *Prospect* and *Vision* series are heavily culture-bound; therefore, they cannot raise students' awareness of cultural elements common in other countries. Additionally, they fail to help students develop their meta-cultural competence. In the speaking tasks, global issues are not referred to and very little connection, if any, between local and global issues was presented in the textbooks. They deal mainly with language practice and the prompts or instructions present very little opportunity for students to focus on global issues. These speaking activities ignore cultural elements altogether and do not refer to any

communication problems common in ELF. Moreover, no references to cultural differences are noted. For example, in lesson 3 of *Prospect 1* focusing on asking a person's age and birthday, both the textbook and the teacher's guidebook do not note that age can be a very sensitive issue in some cultures. Asking people's age can make them feel uncomfortable, which implies that the textbooks do not attempt to raise students' awareness of cultural differences. Further, in the same textbook lesson 4, focusing on family members, no comparison was made between families in other cultures and no reference was made to nuclear, extended or single-parent families common in some other cultures, that could give students a better understanding of family differences that may occur in other cultures or contexts. Surprisingly, lesson 3 of *Prospect 2*, dealing with weekdays, does not present any information about holidays and weekend in other countries, which may have different calendars.

With respect to global issues, lesson 1 of *Prospect 2*, for example, deals with different nationalities and countries. In the speaking activity section, asks only students to play the role of a tourist who is greeted by someone else. This lesson would be more connected with global issues, if it focused on issues such as migration and its potential problems.

Although the conversation sections of the *Vision* series deal with some global issues such as endangered animals, healthy life styles, saving nature and so on, the speaking activities do not make any connection with the themes of the lessons as they focus mainly on the structures of the lessons. That is, they provide only opportunities for students to practise the structures of the lessons, without giving sufficient attention to global issues.

Engaging students with real-life ELF interactions and experiences

Almost all the activities in the evaluated textbooks seem not to make any connection with the students' ELF experiences out of class. They focus mainly on classroom communications, and little is mentioned about communication breakdowns, or ELF interactions which are full of communication strategies. Students are expected to use English to complete tasks without any reference to their first language, although in the teacher's guidebooks, teachers are not discouraged from using Persian in the classroom. The speaking activities do not provide sufficient prompts and enough information about the characters and situational contexts to allow the students to imagine themselves in real ELF interactions, something which can lead to a lack of preparation for future ELF interactions (see Figures 1 and 2). For example, in the speaking section of lesson 3 of *Prospect 3*, students are asked to talk about national and international festivals, but the prompting and scenario settings are weakened as the students' roles and the situational contexts are not specified. Students are asked to talk with their classmates, but not with others (see Figure 6). This activity would represent a more real-life communication, if for example one character was given the role of an Iranian tourist in China, talking with her Chinese friend about one of their costumes for New Year.

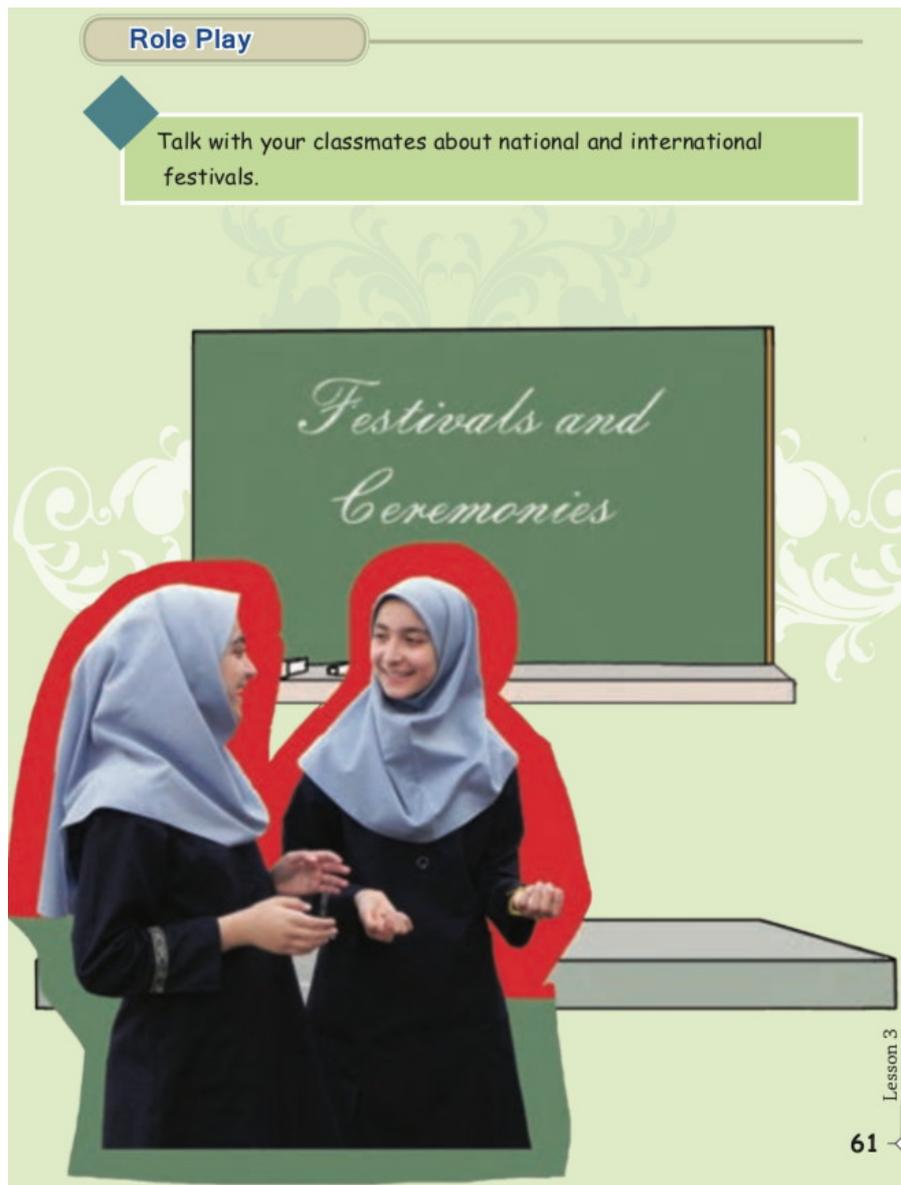


Figure 6: Speaking section of *Prospect 3* (p.61)

Discussion and conclusion

The findings of the content analysis revealed that the *Prospect* and *Vision* textbook series published locally for Iranian students do not provide a clear picture of how English is used in today's world. They have adopted a narrow approach to the presentation of the English language, and failed to focus on the features of ELF interactions, which are characterised by variation in contexts, characters and cultural elements. The findings are

more or less in line with those of previous studies (e.g. Caleffi, 2016; Si, 2018) in other educational contexts where textbooks have presented a monolithic approach to English language teaching.

Whilst the ELT textbooks adopted in Iran are heavily culture-bound, they are also excessively concerned with developing students' linguistic accuracy, and tend to give insufficient attention to the features of real-life interactions in multilingual and multicultural settings. A lack of linguistic and cultural variations in the textbook series can delude students into assuming a limited role for the English language, and they fail to consider its lingua franca role in today's communications. It seems policymakers and textbook designers may have gone to extremes by presenting very localised situational and cultural elements, which cannot help students to understand how English can be used regionally or worldwide. Lack of sufficient ELF interactions and excessive emphasis on local interactions between Iranians in limited contexts can distance students from the main aim of language learning in today's multilingual and multicultural settings.

The inclusion of ELF interactions in the ELT textbooks is intended to raise students' awareness of the socio-linguistic and socio-cultural reality of the English language and to provide them with further choices (Cogo, 2012). A single standard variety is viewed as a fallacy, which can act as a springboard for exposing students to a range of English users using English in different contexts (Nur Raihan & Deterding, 2018). Teachers willing to integrate ELF in their teaching need to consider students' needs and wants, the school curriculum, the target context and the textbooks, to name a few. They cannot implement ELF in their teaching contexts unless they enjoy sufficient autonomy in their classes (Sifakis et al., 2018). Lopriore and Vettorel (2015) maintained that English language teachers should design tasks which assist students to become competent English users for international communication purposes. More specifically, in ELF contexts, language learners should be exposed to diverse discourses in which non-native speakers use English as a means of communication, and mutual intelligibility should be given special attention (Sifakis, 2004).

The findings of this study have some implications for international and national ELT settings. In current multilingual and multicultural settings, ELT materials need to provide language learners with ELF contexts in which English is used by a range of English speakers, in order to raise students' awareness of real status of the English language. Listening and speaking activities need to reflect authentic real-life interactions, in which communication strategies and communication breakdowns between non-natives are frequent. This cannot happen unless policymakers and materials developers give more attention to the findings of research on ELF, EIL and World Englishes, in order to improve the design of ELT materials. However, in such a context English teachers should not be left unsupported as they are accountable for presenting ELF materials in the classroom. Teacher training programs need to raise teachers' awareness of the plurality of the English language and train them how to implement ELF in their English classes. Further, pre-service and in-service teacher training programs need to provide teachers with sufficient skills to assist them with the evaluation of linguistic and cultural elements

presented in ELT textbooks, with the aim of illuminating the extent to which multilingual and multicultural settings are taken into account in ELT textbooks (Sifakis et al., 2018).

In addition, to address the current dominance of ELT textbooks that tend to distance students from the socio-linguistic reality of English, and help evolution towards greater flexibility at the classroom level, ELT teachers can select supplementary listening activities from websites such as IDEA – *International Dialects of English Archive* (<http://www.dialectsarchive.com>) and *The Speech Accent Archive* (<http://accent.gmu.edu>). These resources present diverse English accents and interactions, which can help ELT classes to attain a better accord with ELF principles, and raise students' awareness of variations in the English language.

Although a couple of studies (e.g. Asakereh, Yousofi, Wesi, 2019) have examined Iranian English teachers' attitudes toward ELF, English teachers' views on the textbooks in light of ELF could be examined further. Future researchers could examine how flexibility in ELT classes, allowing ELT materials with increased tolerance towards variations in accents, characters and actions to be adopted, could benefit teachers' practices and improve students' ELF interaction skills.

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Appendix: ELT textbooks analysed for the present study

Junior secondary (3 years)	<i>Prospect 1</i>	http://www.chap.sch.ir/sites/default/files/lbooks/92-93/555/C110.pdf
	<i>Prospect 2</i>	https://www.roshd.ir/DesktopModules/Barrizon/LArticle/api/File/Get/4e2c7dda-9b0c-42b9-8b87-057f64cd6616?download=true
	<i>Prospect 3</i>	http://www.chap.sch.ir/sites/default/files/lbooks/97-98/556/001-136-C140.pdf
Senior secondary (3 years)	<i>Vision 1</i>	http://www.chap.sch.ir/sites/default/files/lbooks/97-98/692/001-128-C110230.pdf
	<i>Vision 2</i>	http://www.chap.sch.ir/sites/default/files/lbooks/97-98/44/001-112-C110230.pdf
	<i>Vision 3</i>	http://www.chap.sch.ir/sites/default/files/lbooks/97-98/710/001-104-C112230.pdf

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