THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH IN AZERBAIJAN: TEACHING LANGUAGE THROUGH CULTURE

Abstract

A language is a system of communication that consists of a set of sounds and written symbols that are used by the people of a particular country or region for talking or writing. Intercultural communicative competence is defined to be at the heart of foreign language education more than communicative competence nowadays. In the Soviet Union, the teaching of English as a foreign language was based on ‘grammar-translation’, also called ‘the classical method’. This method focused on learning grammar rules, memorizing vocabulary in isolation, translating from English, the foreign language, into learners’ first language (L1), and vice versa. After a while, intercultural communication started to be used when communication was not sufficient, as students needed to learn about the cultures of different countries. This study is expected to contribute to the discussions about cultural and intercultural analysis of ELT coursebooks used in middle schools in Azerbaijan. The study aims to find and discuss cultural and elements in ELT coursebooks used in middle schools in Azerbaijan.

In this study, content analysis will be used. After reading textbooks, all passages, exercises, stories will be analyzed. Then they will be analyzed and discussed. In the study, it was investigated which aspects of culture are presented in ELT textbooks and whether idioms and proverbs are taught through culture.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Culture, Cultural Elements, Intercultural Elements, Language.
Nowadays, everyone can communicate with people from all around the world by using English as a foreign language. Therefore, the English language as a lingua franca plays a sizable function in every non-native speaker's life. Each person has special reasons to learn English. It is utilized in all international activities, including communication, science, trade, aviation, entertainment, radio, and diplomacy. It shows how important English to follow events and developments in the world. English has turned out to be more commonly used language in Azerbaijan due to Eurovision, Baku 2015 European Games, and Baku 2017 Islamic Games last 6 years. A lot of tourists visited Azerbaijan, so it became a more commonly used foreign language. All these activities encouraged the students to learn the English language.

2. The Relationship Between Culture and Language.

Language and culture are inextricably linked with each other. Language is a part of a culture, and culture is a part of the language, the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture.

Ritlyova (2009: 105) defines culture as customs, values, typical behavior, attitudes and the overall approach regarding the way of life reflected in movies, songs, fashion, literature, and numerous products of art, but also in everyday use of the particular language, e.g. recognized proverbs, common idiomatic expressions or phrases which are characteristic for certain members of society and which significantly differentiate these people according to their age, level and specific area of education, as well as their position in the society, etc.”. It means that culture is an indispensable and crucial part of daily life communication.

Peterson and Coltrane (2003), state that it is important to be aware of culturally appropriate ways of addressing people, expressing gratitude, making requests and agreeing or disagreeing with someone and also intonation patterns and behavior are important facts since they might be different in the target language speech community than their speech community. It is impossible to communicate effectively in a foreign language without learning its culture.

Language teaching includes more than grammatical patterns and linguistic items. Students should grasp communicative competence to achieve language proficiency. Communicative competence is an individuals’ ability to communicate with people of different social and cultural identities. To achieve such competence, students should learn shared cultural understanding and tolerance of people from different cultural backgrounds. When it comes to culture teaching in EFL context, Bada (2000, p.101) states that “Cultural literacy, or awareness, must be given a room in any language teaching syllabus not only for its broad contribution to bridging gaps between cultural differences and building an atmosphere of tolerance and confidence among societies, but also for its significance in communicating simple needs and expressing meaning in ideas between individuals.”

Briefly, culture is a crucial component of language teaching and it is not possible to teach it without referring to the cultural content. To integrate culture in the language teaching process, teachers should have cultural awareness and reflect their knowledge to their classrooms.

Language and culture are closely linked to each other. For many years, it has been considered that culture is a significant and indispensable part of language teaching. However, every teacher has a different perspective and application of culture teaching (Bucholtz et. al., 2017).

Children and also young learners need to learn about their own culture, the culture of others and culture in general because the students will get to know other people and learn a new way of life. People
can learn how to interact with others, how to behave properly in a new society to appreciate and understand others’ cultures (Srivastava & Goldberg, 2017).

Foreign language teaching has several components including grammatical competence, language proficiency, communicative competence, cultural knowledge, etc. For many years, the integration of culture into foreign language teaching has been a polemical issue all over the world. On the one hand, some educators think that teaching another culture may cause cultural corruption of the first culture or may have an assimilation threat for students (Rangriz & Harati, 2017). On the other hand, especially in recent years, many foreign language teachers aware of the importance of teaching the culture of the target language in the foreign language teaching process. First of all, in 6th grade’s cultural elements have been searched. Book’s authors are Farida Guseynova and Naila Bagirova.

Different countries’ cultural elements are also mentioned, if we look at page 31 we can find information about Azerbaijan. Novruz is our national holiday, about national pastries, eggs, traditions are given on this page, but idioms, phrases, sayings are not taught through culture; grammar, and new words are taught.

About “Independence Day” there is the phrase “red-letter day” (important memorable, a happy day), this is taught in that text.
Solidarity day of the world Azerbaijanis, Ramadan, Sacrifice Holiday, Pomegranate Holiday is taught on page 32. First of all, students should know about their holidays, special days, about their meanings and it is good that this important information is given.
The degrees of adjectives are taught through these holidays and special days.

On page 35 there are texts about holidays, parties in Great Britain. There are some expressions and idioms in these texts. These expressions and idioms are taught, but the meaning of the expressions is not given.

Students can get more information about London, common and proper nouns and adjectives are taught through these texts.

Pronunciation is taught through teaching countries, in this page mainly the information is given about Azerbaijan.

**Figure 2**: English Textbook Unit 2, Page 35.
UNIT 2  
FREE TIME

3. Read and give the meanings of the words and expressions.

In Great Britain children like to celebrate a Teddy Bear birthday party and a football birthday party. They make lovely things for these parties. They make a cake in the shape of a ball, a bear and a ship. Children make a lot of things: fancy dresses, party masks, party hats, name badges, invitations, and posters. Most children like to celebrate birthday parties and Christmas parties.

September, 9th is Teddy Bear Day. Teddy Bear Day is not an official holiday. In 1883 a German woman invented Teddy Bear [tedi bea] as a toy animal. Her name was Margarete Steiff. She was polio* and used a wheel chair. She had innovative mind. She sewed clothes in animals shape. Her little animals were popular and she made more toys. One of them was a bear. It was her hobby to make animal toys. These toys were elephants, pigs, dogs and cats.

Halloween is on the 31st of October. Children dress in the costumes of witches, ghosts, skeletons. Children go in costumes from house to house, asking for treats such as candy or sometimes money, apples with the question: “Trick or treat?” and give them to poor people. They carve pumpkins and put candles into them, light bonfires, tell scary stories each other and watch horror films.

On Balloon party children make different colourful decorations. Children like to blow up a lot of balloons, decorate them and put them in the corner, on the ceiling and at the doorway. There are a lot of interesting games in this party.

4. Match the halves.
1. September, 9th is ...
2. A German woman was ...
3. She couldn’t walk and ...
4. She sewed clothes ...
5. It was her hobby ...

   a) in animals’ shapes. 
   b) Teddy Bear Day. 
   c) to make toys of animals 
   d) Margarete Steiff. 
   e) used a wheel chair.

*polio [´pɔli] it is an infectious disease

Figure 3: English Textbook Unit 2, Page 69.

In the unit “Countries and People”, information is given about Italy, Brazil and Japan. The music, food and sports of these countries are given in the texts. Explaining lexical traditions, sharing ideas, developing speaking skills are discussed in this unit. Greetings, national holidays are also explained in this unit.

To learn our flag, emblem, symbols of flag, territory, population are important factors. That is why all this information is given on page 69 and all of them are also shown with pictures. Countries’ flags are also given, but there are only a few questions about the passage.
Figure 4: English Textbook Unit 5, Page 70.

On page 70 there are some interesting listening and speaking activities for students. Event “What are countries famous for?” relates to the subject. Different pictures are given and students try to find out which country is famous.
Figure 5: English Textbook Unit 5, Page 76.

On page 76 there are two texts about “Carnival” and “Chinese Lantern Festival” and “Happy Holidays”. Students learn about carnivals, festivals, traditions, etc. They get information about. Then, various exercises related to the texts are done. It is an important activity in terms of getting to know cultural elements.
6. Read and say the meanings of the words and expressions.

Carnival

Carnival is the most popular national holiday in Brazil. Brazilian people celebrate it in February. All people go to the musical parades in Rio De Janeiro. They wear costumes and colourful masks, dance to the beats of drums and music. Carnival means «no meat». This is a tradition not to have meat on some days. This means to keep away bad things from their life.

Chinese Lantern Festival

During this spring festival, people visit each other. They give different gifts on this day. People have fun on this festival.

Children go out into streets with paper lanterns and guess riddles on the lanterns. Lanterns are often in the shape of animals. People watch lions or dragons dancing. A typical food is tangyuan*. They make it from rice balls with sweet fillings.

Happy Diwali

Indian people celebrate Diwali, the festival of lights. This festival is 7000 years old. Before the holiday people clean and paint their houses. They wear new clothes. At night people light special small lamps and candles and put them around the home and garden.

They believe that bad spirits that walk around the house are afraid of the light. People also give special sweet to their friends.

Tangyuan [táng yuán] - Chinese food

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**Figure 6**: English Textbook Unit 5, Page 75.

Everyday expressions, traditions of British people, their behavior rules are taught on page 78.
UNIT 5  
COUNTRIES AND PEOPLE

LESSON 4. BRITISH WAY OF LIFE

You are going to:
• make up dialogues
• speak about behaviour rules
• discuss traditions in your country

HOW DO ENGLISH PEOPLE FOLLOW THEIR TRADITIONS?

LISTENING-SPEAKING

1. How do English people behave in public?
2. Why is it important to follow traditions?

1. Make up your own dialogue using the expressions.

A: Can I have tea?
B: How would you like your tea, with milk or sugar?
A: With milk, please!

Everyday expressions
With great pleasure! I am so sorry! Don’t worry!

2. Read and put questions.

«Excuse me». If someone stands on your way, he says «Excuse me» and they will move out of your way.

Say «Sorry!». If you do something wrong say «sorry.

Don’t ask lady her age. It is rude to ask about her age.

Cover your mouth. When yawning or coughing they always cover their mouth with a hand.

Don’t greet people with a kiss. People do not greet each other with a kiss. They only kiss people who are close friends and relatives.

«Please» and «Thank you». It is a good manner to say «please» and «thank you». It is impolite if you don’t do it.

Smile. A smiling face is a welcoming face.

Shake hands. When you greet someone, shake your right hands.

Don’t pick up your nose in public. They use a handkerchief to pick nose.

Don’t stare: It is impolite to stare at anyone in public.

Figure 7: English Textbook Unit 5.

Nouns, adjectives, and verb phrases are taught with the helping of short texts. What do they eat, drink, what type of foods do they have, which cards do they use, and for what, how the houses look like are mentioned. If we look through all passages, exercises, we notice that expressions, nouns, adjectives, phrases are mentioned, but there are no idioms, proverbs in this unit.

As far as I researched the 6th-grade textbook, there are several cultural elements, passages about different cultures. It is important and good that Azerbaijan’s culture, traditions are given as the main factor. Students first should know about their own culture, traditions, behavior rules, because everybody always represents their country with everything. Then, several countries’ cultures, traditions, manners are mentioned. The British way of life, cultures of London, Italy, Japan, Brazil, Chinese festivals are given. Their meals, music, sports are given.
In this book, we have researched that, students can get information about different countries, language is taught through culture, actually I can’t find the answer to my most questions, but cultural elements are given.

The second textbook was written by Giztamm Guliyeva and Khalida Rustamova. In this book, we can find several cultural elements but there are not so many proverbs, idioms, phrases.

If we look at page 47, we can find some facts about countries. Texts are about serving tea in different countries. What countries love tea, how do they serve, what country prefers green tea, etc.

Figure 8: English Textbook Unit 5, Page 47.

I am trying to find out proverbs, phrases, idioms in all passages. Different countries’ cultures are given, some grammar exercises, phrases, expressions are taught through culture, but it is difficult to
find proverbs, idioms, sayings in passages that cultural elements are given. It can be better if students learn also proverbs, idioms, sayings through culture.

“Health is Wealth” in this unit Azerbaijan’s traditional Novruz holiday, people’s hospitality is put forward more. I think, both our national holiday and hospitality teach students our culture, how people should behave to one another, what does Novruz holiday means, etc.

Vocabulary are given but there are not any exercises about phrases, idioms.

There is a topic about “Birthday traditions”. How do people celebrate birthdays in Denmark, Argentina, India, Netherland is mentioned.

In my opinion, birthday congratulations, phrases should be given, but there are not any exercises about them.

**Lesson 3. Birthday Traditions**

**Getting ready for the task:**
- What is birthday for you?
- What birthday traditions do you know?

**Key words:**
- to hang - to attach smth
- honour - great respect for smth/ to show great respect
- to encourage - to give smb support
- to survive - continue to live or exist
- waltz - a dance performed by a couple

**1** IW. Look at the pictures and talk about them.

**2** IW. Look through the postcard and try to make your own.

Dear friend!
Please come to my Birthday Party! On 21 May at 6. At Nizami Street 12.
From Tunar.

Come to my Birthday Party!
We’re honoured to see you among us! It’s my pleasure to have you there!

**Figure 9:** English Textbook Unit 5, Page 65.
On page 65, we can find customs in different countries on New Year’s Day. What do people eat on New Year’s day, what are the meanings of these customs are given. There is a research exercise that, students should research by themselves, they should write facts on “How we celebrate New Year in our country”

![Image of customs on New Year’s Day](image)

**Figure 10**: English Textbook Unit 6, Page 90.

Are flowers included in culture?

Every country has its national flower that has special meaning. Most flowers have a symbolic meaning, often one with a history of use that stretches back over the years. Various cultures around the
world have employed flowers and blossoms for different uses in their societies including religious rituals, wedding ceremonies, simple decorations, or any special meaning.

On page 90 and 91 different flowers are given. It was mentioned what countries the flowers belong to and what country they symbolize. Khari Bulbul, which grows in Azerbaijan, Tulip is a symbol of Holland, Red poppy is the national flower of Albania, Lotus is the national flower of India, etc.

In every culture in the world, art has a great role.

Music plays an important role in culture, as we know countries’ have musical instruments. Azerbaijan’s national instruments are mentioned on page 110,111. First of all, students should know about their national musical instruments, their music, composers, then about different countries.
On page 114, a famous French singer, great Azerbaijani singer, famous composer, mugham singer, American singers are given.

Everybody knows that dance has an important role in every culture. Every nation’s dances express different meanings. On page 117, different countries’ dances are given, Azerbaijan’s also is included. Dance is also part of the culture. It shows characteristic features, feelings of every nation.
In 7th grade textbook, cultural and intercultural elements were researched, but it was so difficult to find exercises about phrases, sayings, idioms, they are not taught through culture.

The last book also was written by Giztamam Guliyeva and Khalida Rustamova. There are not so many cultural elements, it is difficult to find any proverbs, sayings, idioms, even there are not. All exercises are given for teaching grammar. Most cultural elements are written about Azerbaijan’s culture.

On page 24, there is a unit about “Communication”. Dada Gorgud’s name is mentioned in this text. Dada Gorgud is the most important proof that the Azerbaijani Turk nation has lived on its lands since ancient times. The exact meaning of his name is uncertain, since it can mean “father’s father(grandfather), but can also refer to a “saggar”. The language of “Dada Gorgud” is our native language.

Students should know about their values, books. It is good that the information is given about “Dada Gorgud”. Idioms, phrases are not taught through culture.

Figure 13: English Textbook Page 114.
There is a text about “Animals” on page 39. As mentioned, Americans love pets. It is also a part of the culture. Not all countries keep animals at home, some people like animals, some of them afraid of them.

There are several interesting facts, phrases, and sayings about animals. Exercise 6 requires to find the meanings of verbs and phrases. There are four sayings about dogs, so it is good that phrases and sayings are taught through culture.

We can find information about ceremonies/events on page 47. Keywords are given. On this page, there are not any exercises about the text.

Every civilian should know about their past. 20th January is National Mourning Day of Shahids. On page 49 information is given about 20th January. The importance of this day, the meaning of “martyr”, the meaning of flowers are taught.
Phrasal verb “to look” is given and there are several examples about “to look”.

Azerbaijan has national objects, richest ornamental elements, handicrafts, decorative applied arts. Students should learn about national values, meanings of those objects.

It is also important for students to know famous artists to develop their worldview. On page 54 there is information about two famous painters. One of them is from Azerbaijan and the other one is a Spanish painter.

About Azerbaijan’s famous painter Sattar Bahlulzadeh (1909-1974) is given on page 54. What type of colors had he use, what is “The Wish of the Land”, what is his inspiration etc.

The second one is about famous Spanish painter Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). His methods, works are mentioned.
We can find several expressions that are required to find their meaning. Exercise is only about them.

As we know films are also included in culture. Every country has its films. The films shaping our beliefs and values, for example, people copy fashion trends from movie stars and musicians. It is also common these days to find societies using figures of speech that are inspired by the film industry.

There is a unit about “My favorite film star” that gives information about Azerbaijan’s national films on page 106.”The Gypsy Girl” and “The Mystery of a Tower” is Azerbaijan’s national films. The film “Gypsy Girl” and “The Mystery of a Tower” are described with new words. Keywords are given at the beginning of the unit.

Proverbs are taught through teaching films. Eight proverbs are given as an exercise. Students should look and find out what films those pictures are from and say which proverbs refer to them and
they should give their comments. Some of the films are Azerbaijan’s national films and some of them are different countries’ films.

If students do not have any information about their national films, it is a good opportunity to learn, because probably they watch films, they get information then do the exercises.

There is also information about movies on page 113. New words are given. Students should research actors and write about their ages, where are they from, their roles, the name of the films on page 114. As a grammar, conjunctions are taught through teaching culture.

Every nationality has its greetings."Like most cultures in the world, Azerbaijanis like warm and friendly greetings. Men greet each other with a handshake, a kiss on both cheeks, and “salam” (hello).
Official greeting in Azerbaijan is a meeting when Presidents, officials leaders shake hands to greet each other”

All this information is given on page 139, it is only about Azerbaijan’s greetings, but on page 141, there is interesting information about different countries that what are the meanings of greetings and body languages.

- The bow is a mark of respect and greeting in Japan
- Crossing your fingers means good luck in England
- Raising your thumb shows that everything is OK or you are lucky
- Raising your hat is a sign of greeting in Europe
- Taking off a cap was a sign of respect in our country in old times

Figure 18: English Textbook Page 25.
The students are given exercises like research to find different information or facts about greetings in different countries. I think it is a good way that, if students research by themselves, it can be interesting for them and they can learn more.

In this book, there were also cultural and intercultural elements, grammar, proverbs, sayings, phrases are taught.

Figure 19: English Textbook Page 115.
3. Conclusion

In conclusion, each student should first know their own culture and then know different countries. Each country has its own culture and it should be taught in ELT textbooks. Through culture grammar, idioms, sayings, idioms, phrases can be taught. According to my research, grammar is taught through culture, but in three textbooks, there are not enough idioms, proverbs, sayings. Not only through culture, but also with different ways it should be taught. In my opinion, students should learn them besides grammar, and it is not difficult to teach them, but in general, our culture and different cultures are taught, and if there are not proverbs, sayings, phrases, idioms, teachers can find by themselves and teach.

It should also be taken into account that even though textbooks are the main material in the classroom, textbooks or textbooks alone may not be sufficient for visual presentation and recognition of cultural issues as the best opportunity to get to know a culture. and, accordingly, gaining experience makes it possible to experience them on the spot.

References


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The author do not have any interest-based relationship.

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