

Study of Cultural Presentation in New Standard English

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Abstract

This study conducted a quantitative statistical analysis of the cultural presentation in the 2019 edition of the English textbook of the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, which based on the framework of cultural presentation analysis of English textbooks proposed by Zhang Hong and Li Xiaonan. It is found that the intensity of cultural presentation in the textbook for different regions is, in descending order, the culture of the target language countries, Chinese culture, other national cultures, and international culture; at the forms of cultural presentation, cultural practices account for the highest proportion, followed by cultural products, cultural figures, cultural communities, and cultural ideas; at the styles of cultural presentation, the English textbook emphasizes on cultural discourse presentation. Finally, this study explores the implications for the development of English textbooks and the teaching of culture in high schools.

Keywords

Cultural Presentation; High School English; Teaching Materials Research.

1. Introduction

General Senior High School Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition, 2022 Revised Edition) states that cultural awareness embodies the value of the core competence of the English subject and emphasizes the need to develop students' cultural awareness and competence in three areas: cognition, attitude, and behaviour. As an important carrier of cultural content and an important resource for implementing curriculum objectives (Gray, 2013), high school English textbooks should value the diversity of world cultures, present diverse cultural content, and cover cultural attitudes and awareness from different perspectives (Wu & Feng, 2019). Different cultures are embedded in the teaching materials, and teachers who want to explore the materials carefully, need to conduct in-depth research on the cultural content of the materials to better use them to develop students' cultural awareness. Given this, this study adopts the research methods of documentary analysis and textual analysis, drawing on previous research designs and theoretical foundations, to conduct an in-depth analysis of the cultural presentation in the three compulsory textbooks of *New Standard English*.

2. Literature Review

In terms of the framework for the analysis of teaching materials, scholars have classified culture in teaching materials from different perspectives. Wen Qiufang (2016) divides culture into two categories: cultures that use language as a vehicle; cultures that do not use language as a vehicle. In terms of the country of culture presented in the textbook, the culture in the textbook can be classified as source culture, target language culture, and international culture (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). In terms of the cultural content of textbooks, Moran (2004) argues that culture can be divided into "five elements", namely cultural products, cultural practices, cultural perspectives, cultural individuals, and cultural communities. In foreign countries, research on the cultural

analysis of foreign language textbooks began in the 1960s (Risager, 2022), and there are two main types of research related to English language textbooks. Keles and Yazan (2020) show that *The New Headway*, an English textbook published by Oxford University Press, focuses on the culture of the target language and European countries, and rarely presents non-European cultures. Yuen (2011) found that two sets of junior high school English textbooks in Hong Kong, China, contained far more culture from Western English-speaking countries than from Asian and African countries.

There are two similarities between domestic textbook cultural presentation studies and foreign studies. Firstly, most of the studies in China focus on the content of the cultural presentation, and the textbooks studied are not newly published textbooks based on *General Senior High School Curriculum Standards*. Secondly, not enough attention has been paid to cultural presentation methods, and the current classification of cultural presentation methods is more general, for example, into reading materials, pictures, and exercises (Guo, 2014).

To sum up, there are two problems with the previous study: firstly, the analysis of cultural presentation ignores the styles of presentation; secondly, there is a lack of empirical research on the cultural presentation of newly published *New Standard English*. Given this, this study analyzes the cultural presentation of Compulsory Book 1-3 of *New Standard English*.

3. Research Design

3.1. Analysis Framework

This study refers to the analytical framework of cultural presentation developed by Zhang hong and Li Xiaonan (2022) to identify the cultural points in each module of the compulsory textbooks and then coded them in three dimensions: cultural country or region, cultural presentation form and cultural presentation style. The cultural country or region includes Chinese culture, the culture of the target language country, other national cultures, and international cultures. The forms of cultural presentation include cultural products, cultural concepts, cultural practices, cultural figures, and cultural communities. Cultural presentations include cultural discourse, cultural knowledge sections, pictures or backgrounds, activities, and exercises (cultural understanding, cultural expressions, language practice). The most important feature of this analytical framework is that it assigns different weights to each presentation vehicle, i.e. different scores (ranging from 1-10) depending on the cultural presentation vehicle. This score is called intensity ($\text{intensity} = \text{weight} \times \text{frequency}$).

3.2. Research Questions

- 1) In terms of cultural countries or regions, which countries or regions are covered in the selected compulsory textbooks?
- 2) What are the characteristics of the selected compulsory textbooks in terms of cultural presentation?
- 3) What is the distribution of cultural products, cultural practices, cultural ideas, cultural figures, and cultural communities covered by the selected materials in terms of cultural presentation?

3.3. Selection of Teaching Materials

In this study, three volumes of compulsory textbooks from the series of *New Standard English* were selected as the samples for analysis. The set consists of three compulsory textbooks, four optional compulsory textbooks, and three optional textbooks. Each book contains six units and each unit contains seven modules which include starting out, understanding ideas, using language, developing ideas, presenting ideas, and reflecting. The modules are starting out, understanding ideas, using language, developing ideas, presenting ideas, and reflection.

4. Results

By coding, extracting, and counting the cultural points in each module of the three textbooks, it can be found that this set of textbooks highlights the construction and development of cultural awareness, with each module incorporating cultural elements to varying degrees.

4.1. Cultural Country and Region

Table 1. Intensity and proportion of cultural presentation by country and region

Type	Chinese culture	Other national cultures	target language countries culture	International culture	Total
Intensity	209	130	405	163	907
	23.1%	14.3%	44.7%	17.9%	100%

Through coding analysis, it was found that the high school English textbooks of 2019 FLTRP placed more emphasis on the culture of the target language country and Chinese culture, with their intensity percentages of 44.7% and 23.1% respectively. Among the target-language cultures with the highest intensity, British and American cultures were particularly significant. This finding is consistent with the results of Zhang hong and Li Xiaonan's (2022) cultural analysis of high school English textbooks and Li Jiajun and Zhang Mingyu's (2022) cultural analysis of *Advance with English* (Yilin Edition). This indicates that the English textbook pays enough attention to the integration and presentation of the cultures of the target language countries, presenting not only the English-speaking countries of the UK and the US but also the cultures of other English-speaking countries such as Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. Chinese culture, which is the second in intensity, is also emphasized in the English textbook, with both modern and traditional cultures presented, such as traditional Chinese cuisine, traditional Chinese festivals, and modern science and technology. Third and fourth in intensity are other national cultures and international cultures respectively. International culture accounts for 17.9% and can help students to understand what the world has in common, the culmination of common human cultures. Other national cultures accounted for 14.3% of this coding analysis and specifically included countries such as Belgium, Japan, France, the Netherlands, and Italy. Within these countries, it was possible to find a larger proportion of European national cultures overall than African and Asian national cultures.

4.2. Forms of Cultural Presentation

Table 2. Intensity of presentation of cultural forms by country and region

Form	Country or region				Intensity
	Chinese culture	Other national cultures	target language countries culture	International culture	
cultural product	57	46	113	23	239
cultural figure	39	26	57	0	122
cultural idea	10	3	14	35	62
cultural practice	89	41	173	105	408
cultural community	14	14	48	0	76

According to Zhang hong and Li Xiaonan's framework for analyzing cultural presentation, the forms of cultural presentation are divided into cultural practices, cultural products, cultural figures, cultural communities, and cultural ideas. Overall, cultural practices have the highest intensity, followed by cultural products. The culture of the target language countries and

Chinese culture are both dominated by cultural practices and cultural products. The reasons for this are that, on the one hand, cultural practices are more closely related to students' daily lives, and the new standards also require teaching activities to create problem situations about real-life situations. On the other hand, cultural products are mostly expressed in material form and are the most direct content of cultural teaching. Other national cultures attach equal importance to cultural products and cultural practices and rank third in intensity in terms of cultural figures, including Picasso, Van Gogh, Madame Curie, and Verne. International cultures also place a strong emphasis on cultural practices, with cultural practices including cloning technology and green lifestyles, and cultural products including mobile phones and smart bracelets, but cultural figures and cultural communities are hardly addressed.

4.3 Styles of Cultural Presentation

Cultural presentation styles include cultural discourse, cultural knowledge sections, pictures and backgrounds, and practice activities, which are subdivided into practice activities focusing on cultural expressions, practice/activities focusing on cultural comprehension, and cultural activities focusing on language practice. Overall, the cultural discourse (intensity 553) is the most intensive style of cultural presentation, followed by the cultural knowledge sections (intensity 98), cultural expressions (intensity 82), pictures/backgrounds (intensity 62), cultural comprehension (intensity 56) and language practice (intensity 56). Discourse is the most important segment of the English textbook. *General Senior High School Curriculum Standards* advocates that teachers should develop students' cultural awareness in the discourse; language knowledge is the surface information presented in the discourse, and cultural knowledge is the deeper meaning presented in the discourse. Cultural knowledge, however, is the most direct way of presenting culture and therefore comes second in intensity in the coding analysis. In the practice activities, the new textbook of FLTRP focuses on whether students can understand the relevant culture and be able to describe and express their own opinions in English, etc.

Table 3. Intensity of presentation of cultural styles by country and region

Styles	Country or Region				Intensity	
	Chinese culture	Other national cultures	target language countries culture	International culture		
cultural discourse	116	76	268	93	553	
cultural knowledge sections	14	16	41	27	98	
pictures/backgrounds	14	18	18	12	62	
Practice/activities	cultural expressions	38	6	30	8	82
	cultural comprehension	7	8	29	12	56
	language practice	20	6	19	11	56

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the following conclusions are drawn from the above analysis. Firstly, the country and region presentation ratios of the cultural contents permeated in *New Standard English* conform to the General Senior High School Curriculum Standards, with the highest intensity of the culture of the target language country and the second highest intensity of Chinese culture. Secondly, in terms of the forms of cultural presentation, cultural practices, and cultural products have the highest intensity, and in terms of countries and regions, they conform to the

trend of decreasing intensity of cultural practices, cultural products, cultural figures, cultural communities, and cultural ideas. Thirdly, in terms of cultural presentation, the English textbook places great emphasis on presenting cultural knowledge from a discourse-dependent perspective, supplemented by cultural knowledge sections, pictures and background, and activity exercises.

The findings show that the cultural presentation of English textbooks is consistent with the concept of the new curriculum, systematically and organically integrating Chinese and foreign cultures so that students can fully understand the diverse cultures of the world and spread Chinese culture. The above findings also have certain implications for English textbook writers and English teachers. Firstly, in the context of promoting cultural confidence and cultural self-improvement, editors can appropriately increase the proportion of Chinese culture and focus on the importance of Chinese revolutionary culture. At the same time, teachers should also be good at tapping into the various cultural knowledge in the discourse and adopting appropriate teaching methods to cultivate students' cultural awareness. Secondly, the selection of cultural forms should not only incorporate cultural practices and cultural products but also focus on presenting deeper cultures such as cultural ideas and cultural communities, to guide students to recognize and understand the ideological, spiritual, and moral wealth accumulated by different cultures. Thirdly, cultural understanding and cultural expression practice activities should be added as appropriate. Students not only need to recognize and understand the culture in question but also need to be able to describe that culture and present their views and opinions to develop their thinking quality.

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