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**'BIG C' AND 'SMALL C' CULTURE IN EFL MATERIALS USED WITH SECOND
YEAR STUDENTS MAJORING IN ENGLISH AT THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH,
UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE**

Original scientific paper
UDC UDC 811.111'243
UDC 811.111'371.3

The paper explores cultural content in EFL materials used at university level in Belgrade. The materials were examined with the purpose of establishing if they differ in the extent to which they represent big 'C' culture and small 'c' culture, and also what topics predominate. Statistical analysis revealed that there are more occurrences of small 'c' cultural topics than big 'C' topics. The most common specific topic referring to culture with a big 'C' was literature, followed by education and institutions, while the most prominent topic regarding small 'c' culture included values, beliefs and attitudes, followed by everyday living and interpersonal relations.

Key words: *cultural content, big 'C' culture, small 'c' culture, EFL materials, university level*

1. Introduction

Culture can be divided into two distinct groups: big 'C' and small 'c' culture. Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) explain that big 'C' culture or 'achievement culture' comprises history, geography, institutions, literature, art, and music. On the other hand, small 'c' culture or 'behaviour culture' has been broadened to include "culturally-influenced beliefs and perceptions, especially expressed through language, but also through cultural behaviours that affect acceptability in the host community." (Tomalin and Stempleski, 1993: 6)

Clearly identified topics to be covered and units from textbooks that deal with them, undoubtedly, help to present 'achievement' culture. By contrast, it is difficult to identify a detailed curriculum for the study of 'behaviour culture' although some aid can be found in Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which includes a section on sociolinguistic appropriateness.

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Current trends in published EFL² materials show that there is a similarity between new coursebooks from different publishers. Not only do modern textbooks now resemble each other in terms of glossy design, but also in terms of content. They are expected to reflect a variety of cultural contexts and to include intercultural elements in order to raise learners' awareness of intercultural issues and enable them to communicate effectively and appropriately in a wide range of communicative contexts (Hinkel 1999:198). With these points in mind, big 'C' culture waned in importance while the small 'c' culture of attitudes, mind-sets and lifestyles became crucially important to successful communication in EFL.

2. Literature review

It is now increasingly recognized that language learning and learning about target culture cannot realistically be separated (Valdes 1986, Byram 1989, Kramsch 1993).

Learning about target cultures is integrated with communicative competence (CC), which is divided into the four aspects of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences (Canale & Swain 1980, Canale 1983). This list was expanded to include intercultural communicative competence (ICC) which was made popular by Byram (1997) and his colleagues (Byram & Zarate 1998). It is defined as social effectiveness and appropriateness.

Both ICC and CC give course designers some basis for making decisions about what to include in a curriculum. It has been accepted in the field of applied linguistics; the European Council on Modern Languages Section adopted it as a goal of foreign language learning, and it is currently being used in research on the teaching of foreign languages in Europe (Hall 2002: 110).

There are several recent studies that have examined and evaluated cultural content in EFL materials and textbooks around the world. Olajide (2010) assessed the cultural content of two primary English textbooks used in Nigeria by applying Kilickaya's checklist. Both coursebooks were published by Longman. Next, Wu (2010) analysed the cultural content of four textbooks used at college in China by the means of Byram's criteria. The textbooks were published by a local publisher. Similarly, Xian researched cultural contents in a university EFL listening textbook in China where she focused on big 'C' and small 'c' culture, specifically if small 'c' culture in the textbook can facilitate learners' intercultural communicative competence. She designed a

² English as a Foreign Language

checklist consisting of nine big 'C' cultural themes and seven small 'c' cultural themes.

Bearing in mind these studies as well as the fact that the concept of 'culture' has changed over time from big 'C' culture to small 'c' culture, the author of the paper wanted to explore the EFL materials used at the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade.

3. Research questions

The present study was designed to seek answers to the following questions:

1. Do the EFL materials used in the second year of English studies at the Belgrade Faculty of Philology differ in the extent to which they represent big 'C' culture and small 'c' culture?
2. What topics in these EFL materials predominate in big 'C' culture and what in small 'c' culture?

4. Method

Three basic methods can be discerned in the literature on textbook evaluation: the impressionistic method, the checklist method and the in-depth method.

'Impressionistic overview' (Cunnigsworth 1995: 1) is relatively superficial since it involves glancing at the publisher's 'blurb'³ and at the contents page, and then skimming through the book looking at organisation, topics and visuals. On the other hand, the in-depth method includes a focus on specific features, and close analysis of one or more extracts. In contrast to these virtues, it gives only a partial insight into what the material offers. The checklist method, in its most literal sense, consists of a list of items which is "referred to for comparison, identification or verification" (Collins English Dictionary 1992), the items being 'checked off' (or ticked) once their presence has been confirmed.

McGrath (2008: 27) claims that the checklist has at least four advantages. It is systematic, cost effective, explicit and the information is recorded in a convenient format. McGrath (2008: 42) also states that "there is no logical reason why a checklist should have any specific number of questions or, if it consists of sections, why these should be of equal size".

³ the brief description of the book on the back cover

Numerous checklists have been devised for the systematic evaluation of coursebooks. For the purpose of this study we have consulted the lists in Chastain (1988), Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) and Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001). To begin with, Chastain (1988:304) gives a list of 37 items as one possible categorisation of cultural topics. Some of them (e.g. education, economic system, politics, geography and commonly known history) have become a part of our checklist for culture with a big 'C' while others (e.g. family, home, eating, social interaction, money etc.) contributed to the list referring to small 'c' culture. Next, Tomalin and Stempleski (1993:6) presented the elements of a big 'C' culture: history, geography, institutions, literature, art and music, which were used for compiling our list. Finally, the list of sociocultural knowledge in CEFR (2001:102) represents a detailed description of small 'c' cultural topics, to which we referred to.

In order to count cultural topics in the EFL materials, the author of this paper devised checklists both for big 'C' and small 'c' culture.

The list of big 'C' cultural topics⁴ is based on Chastain (1988:304) and Tomalin and Stempleski (1993:6).

1. **Art** (paintings, sculpture, architecture)
2. **Economy** (economic system)
3. **Education** (schools, universities, curriculum)
4. **Geography** (national geography = 'geographical facts seen as being significant by members' (Byram, 1993)
5. **History** (national history = 'historical and contemporary events seen as markers of national identity' (Byram, 1993)
6. **Institutions** (government, politics, state institutions)
7. **Literature** (novels, plays, poems, proverbs)

On the other hand, the list of small 'c' cultural topics⁵ is based on Chastain (1988:304) and Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001:102).

1. **Everyday living, e.g.**

- Food and drink, meal times, table manners
- Public holidays

⁴ The order is alphabetical

⁵ The order is as in CEFR

- Working hours and practices
 - Leisure activities (hobbies, sports, reading habits, media)
2. **Living conditions, e.g.**
- Living standards (with regional, class and ethnic variations)
 - Housing conditions
 - Welfare arrangements
3. **Interpersonal relations** (including relations of power and solidarity) e.g. with respect to:
- Class structure of society and relations between classes
 - Relation between sexes (gender, intimacy)
 - Family structures and relations
 - Relations between generations
 - Relations in work situations
 - Relations between public and police, officials, etc.
 - Race and community relations
 - Relations among political and religious groupings
4. **Values, beliefs, attitudes** in relation to such factors as:
- Social class
 - Occupational groups (academic, management, public service, skilled and manual workforces)
 - Wealth (income and inherited)
 - Regional cultures
 - Security
 - Tradition and social change
 - Minorities (ethnic, religious)
 - National identity (language)
 - Religion
 - Humour
5. **Body language** (nonverbal communication)
6. **Social conventions**, e. g. with regard to giving and receiving hospitality, such as:
- Punctuality
 - Presents
 - Dress
 - Refreshments, drinks, meals

- Behavioural and conversational conventions and taboos
 - Length of stay
 - Leave-taking
7. **Ritual behaviour** in such areas as:
- Religious observances and rites
 - Birth, marriage, death
 - Audience and spectator behaviour at public performances and ceremonies
 - Celebrations, festivals, dances, discos, etc.

4. 1. The materials

The EFL materials in this paper are used in Integrated Skills classes in the second year of English studies at the Belgrade Faculty of Philology. Being a part of the Contemporary English 2 Course, Integrated Skills cover the following eleven topics: Rich Kids, Education, Family, Science and Technology, Literature, The News, The Environment, Language, Cross-cultural Communication, Law and Economics. The EFL materials dealing with these topics are taken from:

1. *New Progress to Proficiency* by Leo Jones, Cambridge University Press, 2002
2. *Objective Proficiency* by Annette Capel and Wendy Sharp, Cambridge University Press, 2002
3. *Proficiency Masterclass* by Kathy Gude and Michael Duckworth, Oxford University Press, 2002
4. *Advanced Gold* by Richard Achlam and Sally Burgess, Pearson Longman, 2001

There are seven units from *New Progress to Proficiency*, two from *Objective Proficiency*, one from *Proficiency Masterclass* and one from *Advanced Gold*. Language instructors at Belgrade University teaching Integrated Skills 2, chose the EFL materials from different textbooks in order to get a comprehensive coverage of the topics set by the curriculum.

4. 2. The procedure

Document analysis in our study involved selecting occurrences of big 'C' and small 'c' cultural topics in the EFL materials and classifying them.

The author of the paper collected data from *New Progress to Proficiency* first, since it contained the largest number of units for research. Seven units were examined. They are: Unit 4 – 'Let's talk', Unit 7 – 'Spending your money', Unit 8 –

'Have I got news for you', Unit 9 – 'A learning curve', Unit 10 – 'Mother nature', Unit 12 – 'The cutting edge' and Unit 13 – 'Just good friends'.

The researcher read the text and exercises of each unit and looked at the pictures, as well. Consulting the checklists for big 'C' and small 'c' culture, any occurrence of either big 'C' or small 'c' cultural topic was recorded. For example, if there were three short poems in a unit, that was noted as three occurrences of Literature. Or, if different types of families were discussed, each would be an occurrence of Interpersonal relations. In addition, at this phase of collecting data, every occurrence of the sublevels of small 'c' topic was also noted. So, in our previous example, it was written as an occurrence of family structures and relations.

Although there were elements of international culture, such as Japanese department stores 'Mitsukoshi' or 'dancing bears' on the Balkans or news items from Italy, the present study focused on the cultures of the Inner circle countries according to Kachru's model (Crystal 1997:54): the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada and Australia.

The two units from *Objective Proficiency* : Unit 10 - 'Globalisation' and Unit 16 - 'Hidden nuances' - were analysed in the same fashion. Finally, Unit 10 - 'Taking liberties' from *Proficiency Masterclass* and Unit 3 - 'The root of all evil' from *Advanced Gold* were looked at.

Afterwards, the numbers of all the instances of the seven big 'C' and seven small 'c' cultural topics from each of the units were recorded. At this point, the researcher did not emphasize the sublevels of small 'c' culture.

4. 3. Data analysis

Using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), the statistical analysis was conducted to determine if there was a difference between big 'C' and small 'c' culture in the EFL materials and what topics predominated. Also, a chi square test was employed.

5. Results

Now we offer the results for research question one, which asked if the EFL materials used in the second year of English studies at the Belgrade Faculty of Philology differ in the extent to which they represent big 'C' culture and small 'c' culture?

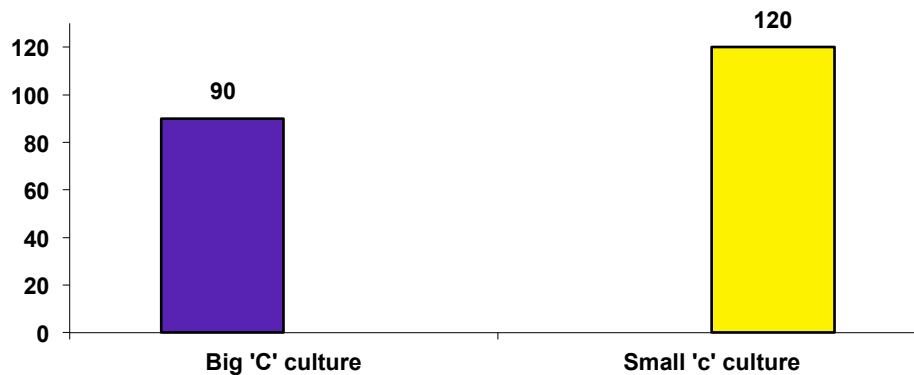


Fig.1. Instances of big 'C' and small 'c' culture in the EFL materials

The graph in figure 1. shows that there are more occurrences of small 'c' cultural topics than big 'C' topics in the researched EFL materials. To be precise, there are 120 instances of small 'c' culture in all the units used in the Integrated Skills 2, which is by 30 more than big 'C' culture in the same materials.

Culture with a big Count 'C'	90
%	42.9%
Culture with a Count small 'c'	120
%	57.1%
Total Count	210
%	100.0%

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on big 'C' and small 'c' culture in the EFL materials

Table 1. illustrates that the total number of cases is 210. There are 90 examples of big 'C' culture, which makes 42.9% and 120 occurrences of small 'c' culture or 57.1%

In addition, Pearson chi square value is 6.798^a and exact significance (2 sided) is .08, which suggests that within every unit there are more instances of small 'c' cultural topics than big 'C' themes.

The results for research question two, which asked what themes in these EFL materials predominate in big 'C' culture and what in small 'c' culture follows.

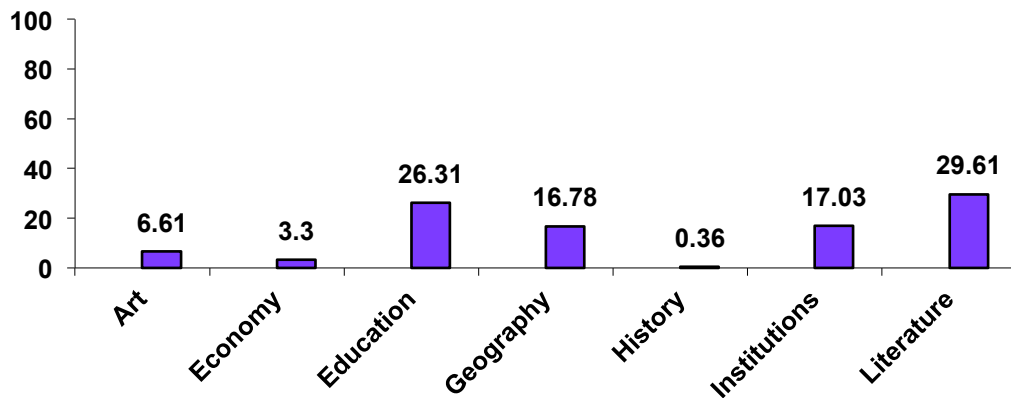


Fig. 2. Distribution of big 'C' cultural themes in the EFL materials

The graph in figure 2. illustrates the distribution of specific topics, referring to big 'C' culture in the EFL materials which were researched. The most prominent topics were Literature (29.61%) and Education (26.31%). Institutions (17.03%) and Geography (16.78%) were ranked next, followed by Art (6.61%) and Economy (3.3%). Ultimately, it is notable that History (0.36%) scored very low.

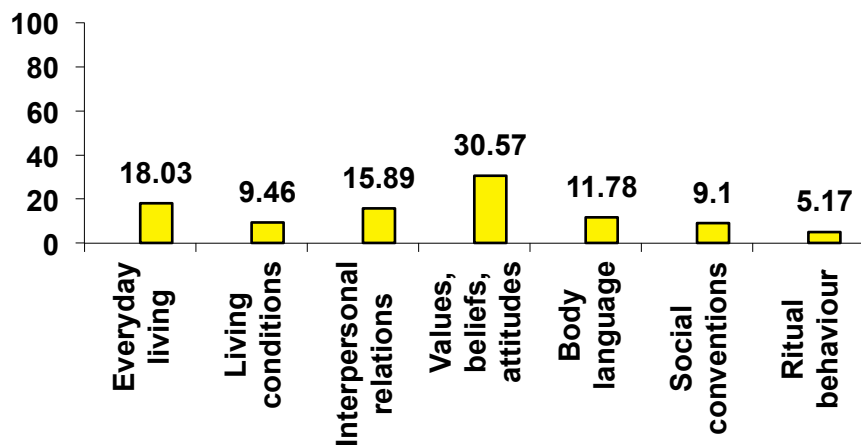


Fig. 3. Distribution of small 'c' cultural topics in the EFL materials

The graph in figure 3. shows the distribution of small 'c' cultural topics in the researched EFL materials. Values, beliefs and attitudes (30.57%) are ranked highest, far above Everyday living (18.03%) and Interpersonal relations (15.89%), which are followed by Body language (11.78%), Living conditions (9.46%) and Social conventions (9.1%). Finally, Ritual behaviour (5.17%) is ranked the lowest.

6. Discussion

With reference to our first research question, clearly there are more occurrences of small 'c' culture than big 'C' culture in all the researched EFL materials. These results support the goals discussed by Kramsch (1993: 205) who says that the learning of culture is more than just 'a transfer of information between cultures'. Language learners need to be aware, for example, of the culturally appropriate ways to address people, express gratitude, make requests, and agree or disagree with someone. They should know that behaviours and intonation patterns that are appropriate in their own speech community may be perceived differently by members of the target language speech community.

In addition, students being exposed to cultural content with more small 'c' elements, can gain greater intercultural competence. They can 'appreciate fully the sociolinguistic and sociocultural implications of language used by native speakers and can react accordingly'. (CEFR 2001:122)

With reference to our second research question, literature seems to be the most popular of all big 'C' cultural topics, followed by education and then institutions. This is in concordance with what was said earlier in the paper. Contemporary English 2 Course is topic based and these are exactly the topics which need to be discussed in classes where these EFL materials are used. On the other hand, history is not one of the topics covered in the course, consequently, that was a big 'C' topic which was ranked lowest.

Within this study, it is apparent that the most popular small 'c' topic was the one which included values, beliefs and attitudes, followed by everyday living and then interpersonal relations. This observation strengthens the position of Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) that target language culture can be learnt best through 'behaviour culture' which includes culturally influenced beliefs and perceptions. In our paper, the sublevels of this topic that scored high are national identity (language), humour, tradition and social change, wealth (income and inherited) as well as occupational groups (academic, management, public service, skilled and manual workforces). Everyday living referred mostly to leisure activities and food and drink while interpersonal relations highlighted family structures and relations between generations more than class structure of society and relations between classes.

Applied linguists and language teachers (Valdes 1986, Byram 1993, Kramsch, 1993, Hinkel 1999, Hall 2002) have become increasingly aware that a foreign language can rarely be learned or taught without addressing the culture of the

community in which it is used. The concept of communicative competence emphasizes that language learners need to acquire not just grammatical competence but also the knowledge of what is 'appropriate' language. In stressing this small 'c' culture approach, the students will have a functional knowledge of the second-culture system just as they have of the second-language system.

7. Conclusion

The study has shown that the EFL materials used in Integrated Skills classes in the second year of studies at the Belgrade Department of English contain more small 'c' cultural topics (57.1%) than big 'C' topics (42.9%), which is pedagogically appropriate (Tomalin and Stempleski 1993, Kramsch 1993, Hinkel 1999).

Also, the present research illustrates the distribution of topics referring to big 'C' culture, on the one hand, where literature (29.61%) was the most prominent, followed by education (26.31%) and institutions (17.03%), and small 'c' culture, on the other hand, where values, beliefs and attitudes (30.57%) ranked much higher than everyday living (18.03%) and interpersonal relations (18.03%).

However, the topics that were ranked lowest, such as history (0.36%) and economy (3.3%) were not included in the curriculum for Contemporary English 2 Course.

This study can be relevant for conducting further research in Contemporary English Courses in the first, third and fourth year of English studies at the Faculty of Philology as well as in similar courses at other schools of the University of Belgrade. Evaluating EFL materials for cultural content is, undoubtedly, worthy of scientific attention due to its pedagogical implications.

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