

Investigating Local Identity Attachment in Iranian EFL New Series Prospect: A Sociocultural Study

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Abstract – The aim of present paper is to investigate the local identity attachment in the newly compiled textbook series named *Prospect*. The identity-related aspects including the characters, locales, apparel, foods, drinks, and professions presented in the textbook series were studied. To this end, a five-point Likert scale questionnaire ranging from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (5) was developed by the researchers. The participants were 110 English teachers working in different cities of Iran, namely Tehran, Shiraz, Kazeroun, Marvdasht, Nur Abad and Qom. The questionnaire content validity was confirmed by language experts in Islamic Azad University, Torbat-e Heydariyeh branch in Iran. The reliability index of the questionnaire was estimated through Cronbach's alpha as .71. Composed of five components including ethnic, social, national, personal and religious aspects of identity, the questionnaires contained 30 items. The findings of the study indicate that the personal aspect of identity ranked first ($m=4.84$), whereas the religious aspect of identity received the lowest score ($m=3.85$).

Keywords: Local identity, Iranian EFL, New series prospect

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, English textbooks designed for Iranian EFL students have included a variety of issues with a particular focus on an Iranian identity. Poorebrahim (2012) conducted a study on the socio-cultural identity in EFL textbooks of Iranian high schools and found that the creative dimension of language (culture) and socio-cultural theory is not emphasized in the materials instructed in Iranian EFL settings. Then, there was a shift and new textbooks were designed. As Bagher Mousavi and Nabifar (2016) mention, "All English textbooks in junior high schools have undergone revisions in Iran since 2013 and new English books named *Prospect* came in to play. These books are being used in the junior high schools; Prospect 1 for the first grade, Prospect 2 for the second grade and Prospect 3 for the third grade". Therefore, the researches tried to analyze new series of Prospect in terms of social semiotics. Common semiotics is mostly used for analyzing images. Along the same lines, image analysis is the main attention of the present paper. Textbooks are actually essential in today's world of language teaching and learning because textbooks are usually reflected to be an essential element of teaching and will therefore have a great impact on a teacher's methods of education (Long, 2005).

Identity is a "socially constructed self that people continually co-construct and reconstruct in their interactions" (Partridge, 2006, p.38). There are a number of essential

features in the process of creating one's identity e.g., a common set of values and beliefs, religion, cultural understanding and principles (Paltridge, 2006). The main purpose of this study is to investigate the local identity attachment in Iranian EFL new series Prospect. This paper evaluates and analyzes the afresh-published English book of Iranian EFL new series prospect which is supposed to be a progress over the previous English books studied in the former educational system. As an English teacher who has taught the old book series for more than eight years and is teaching the present books to five classes at the moment, we believe that the change is effective and productive and it is a great period for teaching English for practical and communicative purposes. However, during the three months of teaching the book, we have observed certain limitations. The book suffers some problems in the teaching procedure and/or understanding for the students. Local identity is a set of common beliefs and values which carry positive ideological orientations (Wodak, 2011). Local identity is mostly presented to the students by educational and academic settings like universities, institutes and schools. In order to achieve the above aim, curriculum designers do their best in providing the new series Prospect with religious issues. As Rodriguez (2011, p.1) stated "We must look at the ways in which identity can benefit our educational system and textbooks, not harm them".

As Zohrabi, Sabouri, and Kheradmand (2014) mention, "textbooks are one of the elements that may promote or discourage learners depending on their materials. They are a kind of support for both teachers and learners "(p.95). In this study, the revealed EFL textbooks were scanned by the researchers to see if their writers employed religious values/beliefs or concepts in the contents of textbooks. Also, in this study, the content analysis has been carried out to find out the level of comprehensiveness of the textbooks. Moreover, the contents were analyzed in terms of identity-related issues in order to see how much local identity has been attached to the book. Richards (2001) states that textbooks can help as an instrument to train the EFL teachers. According to Richards (2001), without textbooks a program may have no path, hence they provide syllabus and a structure. In addition to the use of a textbook in a program, it makes it possible that learners in different classes will receive a similar content and therefore can be evaluated in the same way. He concludes that textbooks are effective in that they allow much time for the teacher to increase his motivation of teaching and use his initiatives as well as material's development.

1.1. Research Question

To achieve the goals of the present study, the following research question was posed by the researcher:

1. To what extent, do English text books developed for Iranian students (Prospect series) emphasize on their local identity?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Amini and Birjandi (2012) studied the level and types of gender bias in two of the greatest used EFL textbooks at the high school level in Iran. Sadri and Tahririan (2013) investigated the analysis of images in Iranian high school EFL course books. The materials used in the study were three high school EFL course books (new series prospect) used in Grades one

to three in Iranian secondary schools. The old series had been developed in the 1980s and reviewed in the 990s. Now, they are not taught any more, and instead, the new series has been replaced wherein, males are characterized as having different professions, whereas females are shown as being engaged in a very limited number of professions that are usually believed more as feminine. Bagher Mousavi and Nabifar (2015) analyzed English 1 (the book which is taught in the first grade of junior high school up to 2013 in Iran). The publication of new book in Iranian educational setting has been accompanied with a section for assessing the quality of the book series (Prospect) for research purposes, consequently, the researchers tried to study them for analyzing and talking about their advantages and disadvantages.

Iranian EFL textbooks (Prospect 1 and 2) are based on the principles of CLT. Conversely, the new series has not paid attention to speech act analysis; the textbooks are used nation-wide. Another study "Prospect 2" written by Alavi, Forozandeh Shahraki, Nikoopoor, Khadir Sharabian and Kheirabadi was published in 2014. The series contains a work book, a student book, an audio CD and a teacher's guide. It involves 7 main units and 4 reviewing units, followed by a photo dictionary. The series is based on all language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). They give a different role to the teacher and the students, as compared to the old books. The role of the teacher in these textbooks is planned based on the communicative approaches and therefore; the role of the teacher is seen as a coordinator and supervisor in language learning process and the role of the student changes from implementer of teacher's training to an active role in every feature of language learning process.

As Zohrabi (2011, p. 216) argues, "Materials, especially course books, need to be evaluated at every stage of the course in order to find their weaknesses and improve them." As Tomlinson (2006) states, no textbook is perfect, since it can be used by different learners in different environments. In assessing a textbook, we require to identify how it meets students' needs. Evaluation might vary from one context to another based on the goals, wants, and capacities of the evaluators. Assessment of textbooks is a valuable way of teacher improvement and gives useful insights to teachers. Teachers' perceptions and experiences play essential roles in the procedure of book evaluation. (Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2015).

There is a great body of investigations in the field of book evaluation. The subsequent paragraphs report some of the works done in Iranian EFL new series prospect. Zohrabi, et al (2012) reported the advantages and disadvantages of English text books in Iranian EFL context from the viewpoints of teachers and students. They paid attention to seven sections of layout and design, vocabulary, topics and content, exercises, skills, pronunciation, function, and social and cultural activities. "The results of the investigation pointed out that the book was grammar-oriented and more emphasis was placed on reading as compared to three other skills; sufficient practice was not provided for pronunciation; with respect to target culture, no social and cultural activities were included; and the layout of the book was believed to lack beauty (Jamalvandi, 2014)".

Another study was performed by Vellenga (2004) "learners hardly compared EFL and ESL textbooks. She argues that learners hardly acquire pragmatic competence due to the lack of information in textbooks". She determined that EFL/ESL textbooks did not offer enough metalinguistic and explicit meta pragmatics information. In spite this lack, the contrast shows that most of EFL textbooks like pragmatic information. In another studies, Yar Mohammadi

(2002) stated that there is not validity in Iranian ELT books. He also added that there is not any significant relationship between the contents and students' needs. According to Litz (2000), ELT textbooks were shown to be positive in reaching their desired aim. In his case study on ELT textbooks he not only took into account skills, content, tasks, but also evaluated price, availability, authors, publisher' identifications, layout, design, letters and websites related to the book evaluated. The textbooks enjoyed far more positive features and they were able to suit the needs of the Iranian learners. Multi-skills syllabus, logical organization and clarity of the book, attachment of education strategies, and vocabulary skills were among the positive characteristics of the book.

With reference to Iranian EFL context, Ansary and Babaie (2002) studied a corpus of 10 EFL/ESL textbook analyses plus 10 EFL/ESL textbook assessment checklists suitably sampled while presenting a summary of common-core characteristics of standard EFL/ESL textbooks in their studies, too. They expected at looking for some universal, theory-neutral, and broad consensus-reached structures of EFL or ESL books, and draw up some procedures for the generation as well as systematic assessment of EFL or ESL books.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 110 male and female Iranian EFL teachers of junior high schools in different cities of Iran, e.g. Tehran, Shiraz, Kazeroun, Marvdasht, Nur Abad and Qom. Their ages ranged from 24 to 50. Their teaching experiences ranged from five to 28 years. Their mother tongue was Farsi, and none of them had experienced teaching or learning English in an English-speaking country.

3.2. Instrumentation

To collect the required data, An NSHQIQ questionnaire (Noormohammadi's and Shojaei's Prospect Series' Identity-related questionnaire (2016)) was distributed to the participants. The questionnaire was measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Content validity of the research instrument was approved by committee members at Torbat-e Heydariyeh Islamic University. Questionnaire reliability was checked by using SPSS (19.0). The reliability for the questionnaire was estimated through Cronbach's Alpha as .71. Composed of five components including Religious (items 1-5) Ethnic (6-10) Social(11-17) , Personal (18-23) and National (24-30), the questionnaire has been developed based on the materials included in Prospect series developed for Iranian students (Alavi, Forozandeh Shahraki, Nikoopoor, Khadir Sharabian, & Kheirabadi, 2014). The time allocated for the participants to complete was 30 minutes.

3.3. Procedures

To conduct the study, sample selection was carried out and participants were selected from among EFL teachers in different cities of Iran. Participants' informed consent was achieved at the outset of the study and they were ensured that nobody will have access to their private information in the future. The questionnaire distribution was carried out among 110

EFL teachers by e-mails or by hand. They were asked to mark their real responses to help the researcher arrive at logical findings. The time allocated for completing the questionnaire was 30 minutes. The data analysis was conducted by using SPSS (19.0).

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was conducted by using SPSS (19.0) to provide relevant statistics to address the research questions. Both descriptive and inferential data were obtained.

4.1. Results of reliability

To make sure that the test was reliable, an analysis was conducted by using Cronbach's Alpha to estimate the reliability index of the questionnaire developed by the researchers. Results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Results of reliability*

Cronbach's	N of Items
.711	30

As Table 1 shows the 30-item instrument used by the researchers to collect the required data enjoys a relatively high reliability ($\alpha=.711$).

To see the participants' performances in every subscales of the questionnaire (e.g. Religious, Ethnic, Social, Personal, National), one sample t-test was conducted. The following show the results.

4.2. Results of Religious factor

One-sample t-test was conducted to show the mean of the participants concerning their beliefs about the status of the L1 religion (Islam) in Prospect Series.

Table 2: *Results of one-sample t-test for religious (Test Value=3)*

Subscale	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig	Mean difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Religious	110	3.85	.558	16.04	109	.000	.855	.75	.96

As Table 2 shows mean score is 3.85 which is significantly ($\text{sig}=.000$) higher than the hypothesized mean ($M=3$), therefore this finding indicates the participants' agreement with the items considered for the first factor (religious). It is deduced from the finding that the book has devoted specific attention to Islamic issues. On the whole, the researchers can conclude that the book series prospect sufficiently attended to the issue of religious identity. As an example, on the introductory page a4 in book 1, we can see the 22nd ayah of Surah Rom from the HOLY

QURAN. Or as another example, we have religious names such as **Ahmad** and **Ali** in book 1 page 6.

4.3. Results of Ethnic factor

Then, the next factor was investigated by conducting one sample t-test (Table 3).

Table 3: Results of one-sample t-test for ethnic (Test Value=3)

Subscale	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig	Mean difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Ethnic	110	4.50	.477	32.95	109	.000	1.498	Lower	Upper
								1.14	1.59

According to Table 3, mean is 4.50 with a mean difference of 1.498 suggesting that there is a significant difference (sig=.000) between the obtained mean and the hypothesized value (test value=3.0). It is deduced that the participants' mean is significantly ($p < .05$) higher than what considered for the population. Accordingly, participants had positive beliefs about the status of the ethnicity in Prospect series. On the whole, the researchers can conclude that the book series prospect sufficiently attended to the issue of ethnic identity. For example, on page 29 of student book 1, we have pictures of different types of Iranian clothes in which Islamic covering (Hijab) have been observed such as shirt, trousers, jacket, suit, chador, manteau, scarf and shoes. Or on page 59 in student book1, we can see the photo of people of different ethnic groups and jobs such as farmer, florist, policeman, employee, postman and waiter.

4.4. Results of social factor

Again, one sample t-test was conducted to investigate the participants' beliefs about the social factor included in Prospect series (Table 4).

Table 4: Results of one-sample t-test for social (Test Value=3)

Subscale	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig	Mean difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Social	110	4.04	.986	11.10	109	.000	1.04	Lower	Upper
								.85	1.23

As Table 4 shows, mean obtained is 4.04 which is significantly (sig=.000) higher than the hypothesized mean (test value=3.0) which indicates participants' positive attitudes towards the social factors included by developers of Prospect series. Mean difference according to the Table is 1.04. Page 69 of workbook 3 gives us an example of social aspect of identity which helps the students in their process of socialization. It's about attending an International Children Film Festival which is a social activity.

4.5. Results of personal factor

To scrutinize participants' attitudes towards personal subscale of the whole questionnaire, one sample t-test was used. Data are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Results of one-sample t-test for personal (Test Value=3)

Subscale	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig	Mean difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
Personal	110	4.84	.43	44.63	109	.000	1.84	Lower 1.76 Upper 1.92

Table 5 shows participants' performance in items related to personal subscale. It is manifested that their mean is 4.84 which is significantly (sig=.000) higher than the hypothesized value (3.0). Mean difference as Table 5 shows is 1.84. An example of personal factor which shows the personal relationships of two students with each other is from page 10 on student book 1. On that page, Ali and Parham are having conversation. Parham is introducing Erfan to Ali.

4.6. Results of national factor

One-sample t-test was used to address participants' attitudes towards national factor of the questionnaire. Table 6 shows the results.

Table 6: Results of one-sample t-test for national (Test Value=3)

Subscale	N	Mean	SD	T	Df	Sig	Mean difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
National	110	4.66	.72	23.96	109	.000	1.66	Lower 1.52 Upper 1.80

Table 6 shows that the mean obtained for the last seven items associated with national subscale is 4.66 indicating a significant (sig=.000) difference with the hypothesized mean (test value=3.0). Mean difference is 1.66, according to the Table. For example, on page 67 of student book 1, we can see the photo of Milad Tower and Iranian apartments and architecture which are symbols of national identity.

5. DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to investigate local identity attachment in Iranian EFL new series prospect. Findings obtained from data analysis showed that the personal aspect of identity received the greatest score (4.84), whereas the religious aspect of identity received the smallest score (3.85). The second largest score goes to the national aspect of identity which is 4.66. After

that, the ethnic aspect of identity received the score of 4.50, as it is clear in the table above. And the fourth place goes to the social aspect of identity whose score is 4.04. Regarding the religious factor, the mean was calculated to be 3.85, the SD was calculated to be .558, and as table 2 shows, the sig was measured to be 0.000. Also the mean difference is .855. According to table 3 which is on the ethnic aspect of identity, the mean was calculated to be 4.50, the SD was calculated to be 0.477, with the Sig of 0.00 and the mean difference of 1.498. Regarding table 4 which is on the social aspect of identity, the mean was calculated to be 4.04 and the SD was calculated to be 0.986, with the Sig of 0.00 and the mean difference of 1.04. Regarding table 5 which is about the personal aspect of identity, the mean was calculated to be 4.84, with the SD of .43, Sig of .000 and the mean difference of 1.84. With regard to table 6, the mean was calculated to be 4.66, with the SD of .72, Sig of .000 and the mean difference if 1.66.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study was carried out with the purpose of analyzing the attachment of identity issues in the book series prospect. The results demonstrated that the prospect series has devoted a specific attention to Iranian culture with a focus on local identity of Iranian students. Such dimensions of local identity Religious, Ethnic, Social, Personal, and National have been taken into consideration by the authors of the textbook. The present study came to the conclusion that personal identity ranked first among other types of identity. In the second place, national identity and in the third place, ethnic identity issues were prevalent throughout the book series prospect. Social identity received the fourth place and religious identity was in the fifth place. On the whole, the researchers can conclude that different subscales of local identity have received an appropriate level of attention throughout the book series prospect. Development of such books as prospect can enhance Iranian EFL learners' language learning, since having familiarity with and background of the content included in a textbook appear to facilitate the process of teaching and learning, alike. Focusing on L2 identity and inclusion of L2 culture may hinder the process of learning. In such books mirroring the source culture rather than target cultures, as Mahboudi and Javdani (2012) state, learners see people of their own cultures who speak English and they are usually familiar with the settings and the participants and sometimes the topics. Iranian students do not need to know culturally, unnecessary and confusing details of the British class system, or the rules of cricket (Alptekin, 1993, as cited in Mahboudi, & Javdani, 2012). Material developers in Iran should devote specific attention to the issue and include materials of source culture in the textbooks. It was concluded that the authors of prospect series paved the way for other ones whose responsibility is to design materials for EFL/ESL students worldwide. Since identity issues are important for the process of language leaning and language teaching, and of course, they make language learning attractive for the language learners, the researchers hope that identity issues receive enough importance in other areas of teaching and learning in other study fields.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to be grateful to Dr. Motallebzadeh for insightful suggestions, comments and support. And also, we would like to thank all the participants of this study for their time, and cooperation.

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11. The series Prospect fosters the sense of social and collective cooperation among the students and prepares them for their future's life.	1	2	3	4	5
12. The series Prospect includes examples of local identity attachment.	1	2	3	4	5
13. The series Prospect shares life experiences of Iranian Identity.	1	2	3	4	5
14. The series Prospect contains entertaining activities and games which are tied up with Iranian Identity.	1	2	3	4	5
15. The series Prospect develops caring relationships with others.	1	2	3	4	5
16. The social identity of the teacher and student is fully respected and protected through appropriate words and pictures in the series Prospect.	1	2	3	4	5
17. The series Prospect pays attention to the social behavior, such as the way students act when meeting people.	1	2	3	4	5
18. The series Prospect regards personal values and moral standards of the students.	1	2	3	4	5
19. The series Prospect looks at the teacher's role as a facilitator in teaching profession rather than a transmitter of knowledge.	1	2	3	4	5
20. The series Prospect includes characters who have mutually satisfying personal relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
21. The series prospect shows the sense of hospitality which is common among Iranians.	1	2	3	4	5
22. The series prospect fosters the sense of emotional connectedness among students.	1	2	3	4	5
23. The series Prospect considers students 'feeling of belonging to their community.	1	2	3	4	5
24. The series Prospect uses Iranian names and pays attention to their ethnic national identity.	1	2	3	4	5
25. The series Prospect includes some lessons on Iranian foods and clothes as part of Iranian national identity.	1	2	3	4	5
26. The series Prospect focuses more on local identity rather than global identity.	1	2	3	4	5
27. The series prospect contains photos of Iranian places, cities, poems, writers as part of Iranian Identity.	1	2	3	4	5
28. The series prospect fosters the sense of national unity which is a sign of Iranian Identity.	1	2	3	4	5
29. The different types of identity used in the series Prospect do not weaken the learners' investment to learn and practice English.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I am satisfied with the series Prospect, because they cover most of the identity-related issues.	1	2	3	4	5