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Zahra Edalati Kian

On the Role of English in Iranian Learners' Intercultural Awareness

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation investigated the role of English in Iranians learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness, from the perspective of both the formal teaching of English and of learners' informal experiences of learning and using English. The theoretical framework drew on research on English as a global lingua franca in an increasingly globalized world and research on the role of culture in language teaching and learning. Methodologically, the study was qualitative in nature and content analysis and thematic analysis were applied in analyzing the data. Two data sets, comprising seven *global* English textbooks and in-depth interviews with eight – young adult – learners were analyzed. The results were reported in three substudies.

The first substudy, focusing on the formal teaching of English, analyzed an English language textbook series used in a private language institute. This specific study is important given the enormous popularity of private language institutes in Iran and the central role textbooks play in the courses they offer. The second substudy focused on the nature and quality of learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness. As the role of English is not limited to formal education, the third substudy focused on learners' informal experiences in learning and using the language outside the classroom and the ways in which it enhanced or hindered their intercultural awareness.

The results showed that English played a positive role in learners' development of intercultural awareness. English provided them with numerous resources and opportunities to learn and expand their horizons. This positive role was most clearly observed in learners' reports of their personal experiences in learning and using English rather than the formal textbook-centered education they had received in private institutes. The results also showed English as feeding into cultural stereotypes. This was manifested both in the reductionist and essentialist portrayal of cultures in the textbooks, mainly in their reliance on national paradigms, and in how the participants made sense of others in their intercultural interactions in English. Moreover, the results highlighted the twofold role of English in an era of globalization. On the one hand, English was the primary medium for accessing mainstream cultural products and ideologies, mainly from a Western point of view, while on the other it acted as a bridge to alternative cultures beyond the uniformity and the homogeneity of – mainstream – cultural products and values. The findings of this research thus indicate the multiple and complex role of English in learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness in the context of Iran.

Keywords: intercultural awareness, intercultural competence, English as a lingua franca, culture, English language learners, globalization, cultural stereotypes

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

Edalati Kian, Zahra
Englannin roolista iranilaisten oppijoiden kulttuurienvälisessä tietoisuudessa
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Väitöstutkimuksessa tarkasteltiin englannin roolia iranilaisten oppijoiden kulttuurikäsitysten ja kulttuurienvälisen tietoisuuden kehittymisessä. Aihetta tutkittiin formaalin englanninopetuksen ja toisaalta osallistujien epävirallisten englannin oppimis- ja käyttökokemusten näkökulmista. Teoreettisen viitekehyksen väitöskirjalle muodostivat tutkimukset, joissa tarkastellaan englantia globaalina lingua francana sekä kulttuurin roolia kieltenopetuksessa ja -oppimisessa. Tutkimus oli laadullinen, ja aineiston tulkinnassa käytettiin sisällönanalyysiä ja temaattista analyysiä. Tarkastelun kohteena oli kaksi eri aineistoa: seitsemän globaalin englannin oppikirjaa ja kahdeksan nuorten aikuisten syvähaastattelua. Tulokset raportoitiin kolmessa osatutkimuksessa.

Ensimmäisessä, formaaliin englanninopetukseen keskittyvässä osatutkimuksessa analysoitiin yksityisessä kielikoulussa käytettävää englannin oppikirjasarjaa. Tämä osatutkimus on tärkeä, koska yksityiset kielikoulut ovat erittäin suosittuja Iranissa ja oppikirjoilla on keskeinen asema niiden tarjoamilla kursseilla. Toinen osatutkimus kohdistui osallistujien käsityksiin kulttuurista ja kulttuurienvälisestä tietoisuudesta. Koska englannin merkitys ei rajoitu vain formaaliin koulutukseen, kolmannessa osatutkimuksessa kartoitettiin oppijoiden arkikokemuksia kielen oppimisesta ja käytöstä luokan ulkopuolella sekä sitä, kuinka ne vahvistivat tai heikensivät heidän kulttuurienvälistä tietoisuuttaan.

Tulokset osoittivat englannin vaikuttavan myönteisesti oppijoiden kulttuurienvälisen tietoisuuden kehittymiseen. Englannin kieli antoi osallistujille lukuisia keinoja ja mahdollisuuksia oppia ja laajentaa horisonttiaan. Myönteinen vaikutus näkyi selvemmin osallistujien kuvatessa omakohtaisia oppimis- ja käyttökokemuksiaan kuin yksityiskouluissa saatua formaalia, oppikirjakeskeistä opetusta. Tulosten perusteella englanti myös näyttää ruokkivan kulttuurisia stereotypioita. Tämä ilmeni siinä yksinkertaistavassa ja olemuksellisessa tavassa, jolla oppikirjoissa kuvataan eri kulttuureita pääasiassa kansallisiin paradigmoihin nojautuen sekä siinä, kuinka osallistujat tulkitsivat toisia englanninkielisissä kulttuurienvälisissä vuorovaikutustilanteissa. Tulokset toivat esiin myös englannin kaksitahoisen roolin globalisaation aikakaudella. Yhtäältä englanti oli ensisijainen keino, jolla voi päästä käsiksi lähinnä länsimaisesta näkökulmasta valtavirtaa edustaviin kulttuurisiin tuotteisiin ja ideologioihin. Toisaalta englanti toimi siltana vaihtoehtokulttuureihin, joita löytyy – valtavirtaisten – kulttuurituotteiden ja kulttuuriarvojen yhdenmukaisuuden ja homogeenisuuden takaa. Kaiken kaikkiaan tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että englanti vaikuttaa monimutkaisesti ja monin eri tavoin oppijoiden kulttuurikäsityksiin ja kulttuurienväliseen tietoisuuteen Iranissa.

Asiasanat: kulttuurienvälinen tietoisuus, kulttuurienvälinen osaaminen, englanti lingua francana, kulttuuri, englannin oppijat, globalisaatio, kulttuuriset stereotypiat

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation for the study

In this dissertation, I investigate the role of learning and using English in Iranian learners' intercultural awareness. My interest in the relationship between English and intercultural awareness stems on the one hand from research in English as a global lingua franca in an increasingly globalized world and on the other from research on the place of culture in language teaching and learning.

We live in an age of globalization, where, as Blommaert (2010) argues, "the world has not become a village, but rather a tremendously complex web of villages, towns, neighborhoods, settlements connected by material and symbolic ties in often unpredictable ways" (p. 1). One of the primary ways in which this "complex web of villages" is linked is through English. Today, English enjoys a position as the global default lingua franca in a wide range of fields from politics, business and academia to the daily lives of asylum seekers, migrants, tourists and anybody using digital media (Mauranen, 2017). Anyone communicating in English contributes to this living discourse with their own values, ideologies, identities and cultures, and in turn is potentially influenced by others.

In this age, especially with the development of telecommunication technologies bringing people closer than ever, the goal of learning foreign languages is no longer to achieve native-speaker competence but to learn to communicate efficiently with people from different cultural backgrounds (Byram, 1997, 2009; Kramsch, 2014a; Sharifian 2013). This entails teaching culture along with teaching the language. The approach taken towards culture depends on various disciplinary, ideological and political orientations, and on whose interests are to be served (Kramsch, 2013). From the modernist perspective, culture is basically the native speakers' way of behaving and their customs and values, whereas from the postmodernist perspective culture is no longer seen as a static set of national traditions, but instead approaches culture as multiplicity, change and power relations (Kramsch, 2013).

The increasingly globalized world we live in today, however, is not marked solely by new technologies and greater mobility. It also has an ugly side, one in which racism, chauvinism, and discrimination of different kinds are on the rise. What we need, therefore, is education that can help students become "real *interculturalists* who can question these phenomena and act critically, ethically, and responsively" (Dervin, 2016, p. 2).

In this dissertation research, I have attempted to find out what role English plays in learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness. For several reasons, this question is especially important and interesting in the context of Iran. First, English language teaching in Iran – a multilingual and multicultural country – is characterized by two contradictory models with completely different approaches to culture: the indigenized model utilized in the public sector and the international Anglo-Americanized model implemented in the private sector (Borjian, 2013, 2015) (see section 1.2.2 for a more elaborated discussion on the place of English in Iran). Moreover, although some research has been conducted on the representation of culture in English language textbooks used in Iran (e.g. Aliakbari, 2005; Rashidi & Najafi, 2010; Zarei & Khalessi, 2011, Dehbozorgi et al., 2014; Gholami Pasand & Ghasemi, 2018), textbooks have not been analyzed as to how, if at all, they support learners' intercultural competence or intercultural awareness (In chapter 2, sections 2.1.3 and 2.1.4 I discuss the difference between the two concepts). Finally, Iranian learners' experiences of learning and using English outside of formal environments and its role in their intercultural awareness have not previously been researched. This study contributes to filling this gap by investigating the relationship between English and intercultural awareness, both in the formal teaching of English, by analyzing a series of textbooks, and in informal learning and use of the language by conducting and analyzing in-depth interviews with learners.

As already mentioned, new technologies, telecommunications, and facilitated mobility on the one hand and increasing racism and all kinds of discrimination on the other, are two sides of the same globalization coin. What personally motivated me to start this research was not the much applauded side, but the ugly one. I believed – and continue to believe – that the world we live in today is cruel and unjust, and that one of the ways of securing justice is proper education for all. In my field of study, this translates into politically engaged teaching and learning of English aimed at training/becoming 'real interculturalists'.

This journey began when I first became interested in the ongoing shift in the general goal of learning a foreign language away from linguistic competence towards communicative purposes, with increasing emphasis on the intercultural aspects of communication. As an English language learner, the intercultural aspect was not present in my self-learning until later, after I had achieved an adequate command of the language and the Internet was gradually becoming an integral part of my life. In the beginning, as an English language teacher, I was largely limited to coursebooks, which varied in their intercultural content, but

later in my career, when I had gained more experience, I began to initiate discussions on intercultural issues and encourage students to reflect on and negotiate them. Along the way, I continued learning and reformulating my attitude and stance on many ideological, cultural and political issues. I believe this personal journey was one of the main reasons I decided to choose this topic for my doctoral research.

1.2 Structure of the dissertation

This doctoral dissertation comprises three substudies and this summary, which describes the research and evaluates the findings. This summary comprises four chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic, motivation and context of the research and presents the aim and research questions. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 presents the methodological choices and summaries of the substudies. Chapter 4 discusses the key findings of the research in light of the overarching research question, including its theoretical and pedagogical implications, and concludes with critical reflections on the research as a whole.

1.3 Context of the study

1.3.1 Iran (the Islamic Republic of)

Located in the Middle East, Iran shares borders with Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan in the north, with Afghanistan and Pakistan in the east, and with Turkey and Iraq in the west. It is demarcated by the Caspian Sea in the north and the Persian Gulf and Sea of Oman in the south.

Iran is a multi-ethnic country of more than 82 million people (Statistical Center of Iran, 2019), of whom 16 million – more than 20% of the whole population – are aged 29-39 (Statistical Center of Iran, 2016). The official and predominant language of this multilingual country is Persian, also known as Farsi, which is an Indo-European language. Some of the other languages spoken are Kurdish, Azerbaijani, Luri, Arabic, Gilaki, Mazandarani, Balochi and Armenian. The majority of Iranians are Shia Muslims, which is the official state religion. Since the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iran has been a unitary Islamic republic, with the Supreme Leader as the commander-in-chief and supervisor of all the country's policies.

On the topic of culture(s) in Iran, the reasons why I have become more and more disinclined to talk about *Iranian culture* during the years I have spent working on this project will hopefully be evident by the time the reader has reached the end of this dissertation. When I moved to Finland, as a newcomer to an international community, I was usually asked about *our culture*, us being Iranians, by others from different countries. At first, we were defined basically

by our nationalities. I do not remember exactly how I replied at the very beginning, but gradually in my mind, the question changed from being difficult to problematic.

It was very difficult because I was not sure if I knew the right answer. Sometimes, the people asking the question already had some ideas and wanted confirmation from someone native to *the culture*. I would usually make it clear that my answer was my personal view only and I couldn't speak for anybody else, thus trying my best not to generalize. How could I talk about a single national culture in a country spanning more than 1 600 000 km^2 and home to more than 80 million people of diverse ethnic groups each with its own history, culture and subcultures, living in urban and rural areas, and differing in socioeconomic status? I simply could not. Therefore, I now believe the question to be highly problematic. I do not believe in a national culture as such. Being vast, populous, and ancient, the country is inevitably culturally complex and heterogeneous.

1.3.2 English in Iran

1.3.2.1 Before the Islamic revolution

Linguistically, Iran can be divided into four different historical periods (Riazi, 2005). The first dates back to the early Persian Empire of the 6th century BC, which lasted until the Arab conquest in the 7th century AD, during which Old Persian was the dominant language. The second was the period following the exposure of the country to Islam, and consequently the Arabic language. During this period, Arabic script and vocabulary were incorporated into, and to some extent blended with, the Persian. In the third period, during the Gajar dynasty (around 170 years ago), Iran came into contact with Western languages and culture. Despite being politically weak and corrupt, and economically impoverished, Iran did not, unlike many other countries when they were exposed to the West, have to face the challenge presented by colonialism; it remained an independent nation throughout the modern era, at least nominally (Borjian, 2013). It was during this period that English came into the picture.

English first entered Iran in the mid-19th century, when the king at the time invited Christian missionaries of different nations and denominations to open modern schools (Borjian, 2015). In 1851, after the establishment of Dar-ol-Fonoon (House of Techniques), the first institution for higher education, foreign language instruction started in Iran (Sadiq, 1965, cited in Riazi, 2005). However, English was not as popular then as it later came to be. Although American and British organizations generally had a positive reputation, French was the primary foreign language in the newly founded modern schools and among intellectuals (Borjian, 2015), partly due to its status as the global lingua franca at the time (Borjian, 2013). It took English more than a century to attain the position of first foreign language in Iran.

During the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979), English was regarded as the language of modernity, and modernizing the country was a major goal (Zarrinabadi & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2017). These efforts to modernize the

educational system furthered the importance of English in Iran. According to Farzinnia (1964), the establishment of the Iran-America Society in 1925, an organization for promoting the English language and American culture, was a hugely effective step. Another organization promoting the English language was the British Council, which started up in Iran in 1942, first in the southern zone of British influence - because of the oil industry - and later throughout the country (EIr, 1989, cited in Borjian, 2013). Later, after the Second World War, and during the Cold War, Iran's ties with the West, especially the United States, in the industrial, economic, military and educational arenas, contributed to the status of English, and by the early 1970s it had officially replaced French as the first foreign language (Borjian, 2013). However, things were soon about to change for English, in the fourth and final period, after the Islamic revolution in 1979.

1.3.2.2 After the Islamic revolution

After the Islamic revolution in 1979 – which put an end to a 2 500-year-old monarchy and replaced it with a theocracy – the political and ideological situation of the country changed drastically. Driven by anti-imperialism and anti-Western sentiment and by the power of religion, the country's leaders were no longer interested in the Western model of modernization (Borjian, 2013). Instead, they aspired to a local model of development, free from the influences of the West (capitalism) and the East (socialism) (Borjian, 2015). Under the influence of these forces, not only politics and economics but also education were revolutionized. English, as a Western element, was no exception. It was regarded as an obstacle to the country's goal of distancing itself from the West and projecting an image of self-sufficiency to the world (Morady Moghaddam & Murray, 2019).

Soon after the revolution, driven by profound negativity towards the West in general, and English in particular, all foreign language schools, including those set up by the Iran-America Society and the British Council were closed, and in line with the indigenization movement, a new model of English education, ideologically adapted to the country's goals, and thus free from all foreign cultural elements, was introduced in the public sector (Borjian, 2015). Although still present in the public sector, the indigenized model is not the only model for English education in Iran. It coexists alongside an international Anglo-Americanized model, which later came into being in the private sector. According to Borjian (2015), this model was a product of the country's reorientation towards the international community after the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), a departure from some of the original revolutionary promises towards a more moderate attitude towards the West. From the early 1990s onwards, in line with neoliberal economic policies favoring the de-centralization of state-run agencies, private language institutes started to mushroom in the country (Borjian, 2015). Moreover, after a break of 22 years, the British Council, invited by the government, restarted its activities in 2001; however, for a short while only, as it was shut down again in 2009 (Morady Moghaddam & Murray, 2019).

To this day, the two divergent models of English education – the indigenized and the international/Anglo-American – continue to be practiced.

As already mentioned, the defining characteristic of the indigenized model in the public sector is its orientation towards cultural elements; however, this is not its only shortcoming. According to Sadeghi and Richards (2015), the current 'revised' syllabus, like the previous one, fails to meet the needs of learners to develop their communicative skills, as it focuses on pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, paying almost no attention to listening, writing and speaking skills. In addition to inadequate materials, the public-sector schools face the challenge of poor teacher competence, as no rigorous system for training language teachers exists. Consequently, after six years of formal education, unless they have taken courses in private institutes, students can hardly communicate in English.

Private language institutes are arguably the most influential force in shaping the future of English education in Iran (Borjian, 2010). Among the most popular language institutes are the Iran Language Institute, with more than 280 branches, the Safir Language Academy, with more than 107 branches, and the Kish Language Institute, with more than 120 branches. In the absence of official statistics, the English language teaching market in Iran has been estimated to be worth more than £25m (Borjian, 2015). The popularity of private language institutes among fee-paying learners of all ages at all language levels can easily be explained. Unlike their public sector counterpart, they are not bound to an indigenized curriculum. Instead, they have adopted English language teaching models and practices from abroad, a policy that has led to the importation of communicative language teaching methods, global English textbooks, and all sorts of audio-visual aids (Borjian, 2013, 2015). This process has been fueled by the absence of a copyright law for products published outside Iran (Borjian, 2013, 2015). Some of the customers of these institutes are among those who are planning to leave the country and thus need to improve their language skills. According to statements issued by the Secretary-General of the High Council of Iranian Affairs Abroad in 2014, between 5 and 6 million Iranians, i.e. around 7% of the whole population, live abroad, as compared to around 3 and a half million two years earlier, as estimated by the National Organization for Civil Registrations (BBC, 2014). It is worth mentioning however, that not all such aspirants have been able to afford the courses offered in the private sector, and even less so these days in a rapidly deteriorating economic situation. This form of social injustice prevents those from less privileged families from sharing in the growing opportunities and benefits which come through knowing the English language.

Despite more moderate attitudes towards the West, compared to the early years after the revolution, English is still caught up in what Kermani (2015) has termed the 'soft war'. On the one hand, English is viewed pragmatically as the required medium for social and economic development in a globalized world. On the other hand, from a more conservative standpoint, it is viewed as an imperialistic tool that threatens local values. This ambivalence towards English, characterized by "tolerance rather than acceptance", has led to an incoherent and

inconsistent English language teaching policy in Iran (Morady Moghaddam & Murray, 2019, p. 103).

1.4 Aim and research question

The aim of the present research was to investigate the role of English in Iranian learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness.[1] Accordingly, the following overarching research question was set:

How does learning and using English relate to intercultural awareness?

This dissertation is based on three original substudies, and thus is a so-called article-based dissertation. Each substudy of the dissertation – summarized in sections 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 – addresses certain issues in relation to the overarching research question, and thus has its own focus and more detailed research question(s):

Substudy 1: *Presentation of intercultural competence in English language textbooks: The case of a private language school in Iran*

- To what extent do textbooks for adult learners in a private language school in Iran aim at improving learners' intercultural competence?

- What dimensions of intercultural competence do the learning tasks found in the textbooks address?

The first substudy focused on the formal teaching of English. Given the huge popularity of private language institutes in Iran, and the central role of textbooks in English courses offered in these institutes, it was considered necessary to include an analysis of textbooks to ascertain whether they support the development of intercultural competence in learners.

Substudy 2: *Intercultural awareness of Iranian English language learners: An exploration*

- To what extent is Iranian English language learners' understanding of culture in line with the intercultural awareness needed to communicate through English as a lingua franca?

[1] As will be discussed in the second chapter (sections 2.1.2. 2.1.3. 2.1.4.), the terminology on the concept of intercultural competence/intercultural awareness varies in the literature; however, my personal preference is for the term intercultural awareness introduced by Baker (2011).

The focus of the second substudy was to explore the nature and the qualities of learners' intercultural awareness. To examine the relationship between English and intercultural awareness, it is first essential to understand what is meant by intercultural awareness, and the extent to which this supported by learners' beliefs, attitudes and skills.

Substudy 3: *On the role of English in learners' intercultural awareness: the good, the bad and the possible*

- In what ways does learning and using English enhance or hinder Iranian learners' intercultural awareness?

The third substudy focused on learners' informal experiences in learning and using English. As the role of English was not limited here to the formal education context, it was considered essential to examine the ways English enhances or hinders learners' intercultural awareness and hence to include an analysis of learners' accounts of their own experiences.

The present research has both theoretical and practical implications. Ascertaining the extent to which English, actually or potentially, influences learners' intercultural awareness could be a first step in rooting out problems or in recognizing areas of strength and acting accordingly. The study has practical implications for many stakeholders, ranging from individual self-learners to teachers, textbook writers, curriculum designers and policy makers.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter includes a discussion of the theoretical orientations and key concepts used to answer the main research question.

In the first part of this chapter, I focus on the place of culture in language teaching and learning. I begin with an overview of the concept of culture, highlighting the fact that it is not easy to define and is viewed from different perspectives, some of which are more relevant to the dynamics of intercultural communication. I then discuss the relationship between language and culture, a current topic of debate in language teaching and learning. This discussion is of especial importance for the purposes of this research for two reasons. First, in the first substudy, where textbooks are analyzed to see how, if at all, they contribute to learners' intercultural competence, the way culture is portrayed in general, and the underlying assumptions on the relationship between language and culture, influence the way learners are interculturally guided. Similarly, in the second and third substudies, where learners' intercultural awareness and how it is shaped by learning and using English is explored, the questions of what culture is, its characteristics – especially in intercultural communication – and how it is related to language becomes meaningful, especially in relation to what the participants may believe. The implications of the relationship between language and culture shape the perspective taken on intercultural competence and intercultural awareness, two essential concepts which are elaborated next in this section. Intercultural competence (Byram, 1997) was used as the theoretical framework in the first substudy. Intercultural awareness (Baker, 2011) – which is built on the concept of intercultural competence but differs significantly from it – was the theoretical framework used in the second and the third substudies.

In the second part of this chapter, I review the place of English in an age of globalization. In discussing how English has become the primary medium in intercultural communication, I return to the concept of culture and consider how it needs to be viewed in the present age of globalization and what the implications of this are for the concepts of intercultural competence or intercultural awareness. The next section, I first present a brief overview of the so-called global textbooks, which I analyzed in the first substudy, and show how

they could influence learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness. This brings me to the last topic in this chapter, the complex two-fold role of globalized English in shaping learners' intercultural awareness that I draw on in the third substudy.

2.1 Culture in language teaching and learning

The significance of culture in language teaching and learning is nowadays well recognized. The origins of this recognition lie partly in the theory and practice of language pedagogy, and partly in understanding the social and political connotations of language teaching and learning (Byram & Grundy, 2003), especially in an age of globalization. This section begins with a brief outline of the concept of culture; first in a more general sense, to provide a background, and then more specific sense relevant to the context of intercultural communication. This provides the basis for the ensuing discussion on the relationship between language and culture, and finally the implications of this for language teaching and learning.

2.1.1 On the concept of culture

> It is hard to resist the conclusion that the word 'culture' is both too broad and too narrow to be greatly useful. Its anthropological meaning covers everything from hairstyles and drinking habits to how you address your husband's second cousin, while the aesthetic sense of the word includes Igor Stravinsky but not science fiction. Science fiction belongs to 'mass' or popular culture, a category which floats ambiguously between the anthropological and the aesthetic. (Eagleton, 2000, p. 32)

By opening with the above quotation, I do not mean to imply that we no longer need the word culture – although I have at some points been tempted to do so throughout this research project – but to emphasize from the very beginning that the concept is notoriously difficult to define, despite it being used in many different disciplines as well as in everyday life.

Scholars have attempted to shed some light on this ambiguous notion by elaborating on its different aspects and uses. Bauman (1973, reprinted in 1999) for instance, provided a comprehensive account of the concept of culture from three different aspects, i.e. *hierarchical*, *differential* and *generic*. In the hierarchical sense, culture is inherent in the Western mentality; as people who fail to live up the standards set are regarded as lacking culture, and everybody is judged based on their level of culture. In this sense, culture is a possession, one that could be inherited or acquired (Bauman, 1999, p. 56). In the hierarchical sense, Bauman (1999) argues, there is no plurality of cultures, but *the* culture, meaning a conscious effort to attain the ideal nature of a human being. In its second meaning, he contends, culture as a differential concept is used to justify differences between communities of people. A basic assumption underlying the differential concept of culture is the Lockean belief that no matter how rich the

innate equipment of a human being, it still leaves many loose ends in the human way of life that could be tied up in many different ways, none inherently better than the other (Bauman, 1999, p. 65). In the differential sense, as he elaborates, a culture is a unique, cohesive, and self-contained entity, and any case of ambiguity is perceived as 'clash' between otherwise cultural wholes; therefore, any contact or mixing of cultures is viewed as fundamentally abnormal, if not evil. Finally, the generic concept of culture is about the features that unite human beings and distinguish them from everything else. Paradoxically, Bauman (1999) argues, the more we emphasize splitting humankind into unrelated self-sufficient communities (the differential concept of culture), the more strongly we feel the need for something that essentially applies to them all; one culture, the human culture (the generic concept of culture).

Risager (2006) overviews three concepts of culture different in nature from Bauman's categorization, i.e. the *individual*, the *collective* and the *aesthetic*. The individual concept of culture, she argues, is characterized by a hierarchical understanding of culture as an individual developmental process starting from being on an uncultivated or less cultivated level and proceeding to a more cultivated level intellectually, spiritually and aesthetically. The collective concept of culture, which arose at the end of the 17th century alongside the individual concept has been through two phases. The earlier phase was based on the hierarchical sense of culture, in which certain people in society were supposedly cultivated and others were not. The hierarchical view of the collective concept of culture was later challenged as a generic, and hence differential, concept of culture - the belief that culture is for all humankind, and every individual shares in it - gained in popularity. Risager (2006) further states that the interplay between the individual and collective meanings of culture, by providing the opportunity for all individuals, regardless of their origins, to cultivate themselves in order to become a member of the cultivated community, in some ways describes today's society. The aesthetic concept of culture, on the other hand, arose in the 19th century, when the role of the arts, including literature and music, in modern development was highlighted. Culture from this perspective, in which the role of artistic products and achievements in the process of becoming cultivated was emphasized, was both individual and hierarchical. Risager (2006) also believes that culture in its aesthetic sense seems to be predominant in everyday language today, both in its more exclusive highbrow meaning, and in different popular-cultural directions such as youth culture, rock music and tattooing.

Another concept of culture, from an anthropological and sociological point of view, which gained prominence in the 19th and 20th centuries, refers to the way of life of peoples (Baker,2015). Anthropological accounts of culture are especially important in research on the relationship between language and culture (Risager, 2006). One of the last attempts at a comprehensive definition of the anthropological concept of culture was that proposed by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952, p. 357):

> Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values.

Since then, it has widely been considered that it is impossible to have a single 'authorized' definition of culture (Risager, 2006).

In a more recent attempt, Baker (2015) presents a characterization of culture in relation to intercultural communication and to English as a lingua franca that comprises four perspectives: culture as *product*, as *discourse*, as *practice* and as *ideology*. He explains that as a *product*, culture is something, which is shared by a group of people. In this sense, culture could also be seen from a cognitive perspective, meaning that the 'thing', shared by a community, is in its members' minds, like their knowledge and their beliefs. This idea of culture as a 'thing' that people 'have', something that can be described and distinguished from other things and other groups of people could lead to essentialist views of others which hinders rather than contributes to understanding in intercultural communication. It is this structuralist approach to culture as product, mainly in national paradigms, he argues, that is most prominent in language teaching; however, the dynamic nature of intercultural communication requires more fluid, poststructuralist understandings of culture.

In elaborating on culture as *discourse*, as a poststructuralist perspective, Baker (2015) refers to the definition of culture by Kramsch (1998, p. 127): "1 Membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting. 2 The discourse community itself. 3 The system of standards itself". What distinguishes Kramsch's account of culture from structuralist views is her emphasis on the critical dimension of culture, as something which always entails power struggles (Baker, 2015). In other words, the 'common' values are constantly being challenged, as conflicts arise, which leads to an understanding of culture as "fundamentally heterogeneous and changing" (Kramsch, 1998, p. 10). Another group of scholars who understand culture as discourse are Scollon, Scollon and Jones (2012). Acknowledging that different interpretations of culture exist, all of which could be useful in different situations, they suggest the term 'discourse system' for understanding culture in intercultural communication. They define a discourse system as follows:

> a cultural toolkit consisting of four main kinds of things: ideas and beliefs about the world, conventional ways of treating other people, ways of communicating using various kinds of texts, media, and languages, and methods of learning how to use these other tools. (Scollon et al., 2012, p. 8).

Scollon et al. (2012) point out that people can participate in different discourse systems in different ways, centrally in some and peripherally in others, and that discourse systems can mix with each other. As Baker (2015) contends, discourse approaches to culture, since they are more flexible than structuralist

approaches, could better help in understanding culture in intercultural communication and in the use of English as a lingua franca.

Another poststructuralist approach to culture according to Baker (2015) is culture as *practice*, which is closely related to culture as discourse. Simply put, the approach views culture as something we 'do' rather than something we 'have'. As Risager (2006) explains, in this perspective, culture is no longer seen as a cohesive system; it is rather constructed through meaning-making negotiations between individuals in interaction. Such a process-oriented approach, Baker (2015) argues, leads to understanding of culture as "complex, multiple, partial, contradictory and dynamic" (p. 56), which is beneficial in understanding the fluid dynamics of intercultural communication.

Finally, elaborating on culture as *ideology*, Baker (2015) refers to Piller's account of culture, which emphasizes that it is not something existing outside of communication, but rather:

> an ideological construct called into play by social actors to produce and reproduce social categories and boundaries, and it must be the central research aim of a critical approach to intercultural communication to understand the reasons, forms and consequences of calling cultural difference into play. (Piller, 2011, p. 16)

What is essential in approaching culture as an ideology, according to Baker (2015) is the element of criticality and recognizing the powers relations behind the construction and negotiation of meaning. However, approaching culture as ideology, he further explains, could lead to perceptions of culture as hierarchical, and thus to valuing some cultures above others, and thus raising issues of essentialist and stereotypical views in intercultural communication.

Considering the existence of multiple accounts of culture, and the lack of a consensus on its definition, it is reasonable to conclude that culture is complex. In the general sense, "culture is multiple, on many levels or scales, contested, and fluid" (Baker, 2015, p. 67). Baker (2015) conceptualizes culture as: "a complex social system, as opposed to natural system, that emerges through individuals' joint participation in the world giving rise to sets of shared knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes and practices" (p. 71).

In conclusion, I return to what I stated at the beginning and in the middle of this section: culture is complex, and it means very different things to different people. Some see it as a thing you have, some having more of it, others less; some see it as something people think, like a set of beliefs; some talk about culture as a set of rules: if you follow them you are in, if not, you are out; some people cherish culture as something that keeps us together, and others disdain it on the view that it forces us apart (Scollon et al., 2012). Some, like Scollon et al. (2012) see the complexity of the concept of culture as a problem. Whether it truly is a problem or not, and how, if at all, this problem needs to be tackled is beyond the scope of this research. Hence, for present purposes, I agree with Baker (2011, 2015) that culture is relevant, fluid and multiple on many levels. This understanding is necessary to perceive the dynamic characteristics of intercultural communication. (For more on this topic, see section 2.2.1)

2.1.2 The relationship between language and culture

The relationship between language and culture has long been of interest to scholars in different fields such as anthropology, sociology, psychology and education. It is important to examine this relationship in language education because of its practical implications for language and culture pedagogy, especially in an age of globalization, in which more than ever in history, as Risager (2006) puts it, "languages spread across cultures, and cultures spread across languages" (p. 2). In such conditions, more emphasis has been put on communication, requiring that teachers of language become teachers of language and culture (Byram, 2009). However, despite recognition of the relevance of culture in language pedagogy at the research level, many practicing teachers are not yet convinced that it is their role to teach something that is perhaps better left to sociologists, historians, literary critics, or anthropologists,. Moreover, it is uncertain what aspects of culture, or culture in what sense needs to be taught (Kramsch, 2013). In practice, in language education, the focus has been on a superficial level, with a reductionist and essentialist portray of cultures, mainly adhering to national paradigm (Baker, 2015).

When discussing the relationship between language and culture, and whether the two are separable, one of the first theorizations that spring to mind is the Sapir Whorf hypothesis (Whorf, 1939). However, the idea of linguistic relativity is not relevant here for two main reasons. Firstly, it has traditionally been characterized by first language bias, and secondly, it adopts a cognitive approach (Risager, 2006). Nevertheless, the popular idea of the inseparability of language and culture at the system level can be traced back to two interacting tendencies:

> On the one hand, the single individual has a tendency to project his or her own subjective feeling of the connection between his or her own personal language, culture and identity onto the community, e.g. the nation, and thus imagine that there is a connection at the system level for which there is, however, no empirical basis. On the other hand, this psychological tendency has been used politically in connection with the building-up of nations and nationalism, in which an image of a single nation, or a single folk, is construed, characterized by a common national culture expressed via a common national language. (Risager, 2006, p. 196)

According to Risager (2006), in the context of language pedagogy, the relationship between language and culture is significant from a sociological – rather than a psychological or cognitive – point of view. She also distinguishes between this relationship in a generic sense – language and culture as universal to all humanity – as opposed to a differential sense – including specific languages and cultures. From the sociological perspective in a differential sense, Risager (2006) argues, language and culture are separable. She elaborates on the separability of language and culture at three different levels. First, language and languaculture are separable to a certain degree; since when learning a new language, people assign languacultural elements of their first/previously learned languages to the new one; second, language/languaculture and context are separable, because discourse is a content-based phenomenon which, despite

going through some transformations in translation, reaches across languages, and third, language/languaculture/discourse is separable from cultural context as people can move from one context to another.

Risager (2006) argues that understanding the nature of the relationship between language and culture has some implications for language and culture pedagogy. The first implication is recognizing the empirical field not just in a limited geographical sense, but as the whole network around the world in which the target language is spoken, read and written. The second implication is that the target language is not only used as a first language, but also as a second/foreign language by many different people in many different contexts. This is particularly significant in the case of English as a global lingua franca on which I will elaborate in section 2.2.1.

Recognition of the significance of culture in language pedagogy was accompanied by a shift in the aims and purposes of learning a foreign language, i.e. from native speaker competence to intercultural competence (Byram, 1997, 2009). Now, more than ever in the history of humankind, people are in contact with each other, people with different native languages and from different cultural backgrounds, a phenomenon which not only brings communicative opportunities, but also presents challenges (Fantini, 2009). The biggest challenge is to learn to get along on this planet that we share, to transcend boundaries and to accept our differences while remaining united as human beings, and this is what intercultural competence is all about (Deardorff, 2009). Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), overviewing some *conceptualizations* – using the tree/forest metaphor, they intentionally avoid using terms such as approach, perspective, paradigm, model or theory – of intercultural competence, define it generally as "the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world" (p. 7). Such orientations, they contend, could be reflected in categories such as nationality, race, religion, region, ethnicity or tribe.

While it is generally accepted that in today's increasingly globalized world, people need to be equipped with knowledge and skills in order to be able to efficiently communicate with others, there is no consensus on the specifics of such equipment. Fantini (2009) points to the myriad terminology around the concept of intercultural competence, as confirmation of the vagaries of intercultural abilities. The terms include, but are not limited to: biculturalism, multiculturalism, bilingualism, multilingualism, plurilingualism, communicative competence, cross-cultural adaptation, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, cultural competence, cultural or intercultural sensitivity, effective intergroup communication, ethnorelativity, intercultural cooperation, global competitive intelligence, global competence, international competence, international communication, intercultural interaction, metaphoric competence, and transcultural communication (Fantini, 2009, p. 457). In an attempt to resolve this problem, Deardorff (2004) tried to determine a definition for intercultural competence. Her primary findings included rating general

definitions of intercultural competence by experts; of these, Byram's (1997) definition was rated the best. Byram's definition was summarized as "Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self. Linguistic competence plays a key role" (p. 128). I will elaborate on Byram's (1997) definition of intercultural competence, which was used as the theoretical framework in the first substudy of this dissertation, in the following section.

In sum, understanding the nature of the relationship between language and culture is important in that it has implications for how culture could be taught in language education. The relevance of culture in language teaching and learning has been recognized, as more emphasis is now put on communication, reflecting the nature of the increasingly globalized world we live in. In line with this recognition, the goal of learning a foreign language has shifted away from native speaker competence towards efficient communication with people of various cultural backgrounds and groupings, which entails intercultural competence; however, the particulars of the concept of intercultural competence have been debated. Unless we can pin down exactly what these are, we will fail to educate interculturally competent learners.

2.1.3 Intercultural competence

Along with the increasing emphasis on the cultural dimension of language learning, the notion of the native speaker, as an ideal model towards which learners had to strive, was challenged and substituted by the notion of an *intercultural speaker* (Byram, 2018). The term intercultural speaker was coined by Byram and Zarate (1996) and subsequently accompanied by the introduction of the term intercultural competence in the field of foreign language education. In 1997, Byram proposed a comprehensive model of intercultural communicative competence for foreign language learning and teaching, in which he renounced the notion of native speaker and instead offered the notion of intercultural speaker. An intercultural speaker, he suggested, is someone who brings to an intercultural interaction their national identity, language and culture.

Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, which was specifically designed for the foreign language teaching and learning context, is composed of four main competences, namely linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and intercultural competence. He also differentiates between three different locations of teaching/learning the four competences, namely the classroom, fieldwork, and independent learning. Intercultural competence in turn has six components, which Byram (1997) calls *saviors* and for each of which he proposes specific educational objectives.

The first component, *savoirs* (knowledge) is about knowledge of one's own national identity and culture and as well as knowledge of those of others. It includes, for instance, geographical, historical, political, and social knowledge. Among the objectives for this component is knowledge of the levels of formality

in various social interactions. The second component, *savoir etre* (attitudes) is fundamental to intercultural competence. It entails curiosity and openness, and willingness to devalue one's own presuppositions and take into consideration others' perspectives. The objectives also include a willingness to take opportunities in order to engage with otherness, which Byram emphasizes is different from seeking out the exotic. There is no causal relationship between the first two components. In other words, more knowledge does not automatically lead to positive attitudes. The third component, *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating) is the skill to compare and contrast cultural matters in one's own culture and a foreign culture. It also includes the skill to identify ethnocentric perspectives and misunderstandings in intercultural interactions. The fourth component is *savoir apprendre* (skills of discovery), which emphasizes the importance of actively seeking to acquire new knowledge about cultural matters from different sources. The fifth component is *savoir faire* (skills of interaction) which is about using one's knowledge, attitudes and skills in real-time intercultural communication. An intercultural speaker knows how to draw on their knowledge, attitudes and skills in order to ensure understanding in efficient, meaningful communication and avoid dysfunction. The last component, *savoir s'engager* (critical cultural awareness) is "an ability to evaluate critically and, on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (Byram, 1997, p. 53). Elaborating on "explicit criteria", Byram clarifies that the intercultural speaker brings an ideological/political/moral standpoint to communication. It is important to note that in elaborating on the notion of intercultural competence and the intercultural speaker, no developmental levels or stages are defined.

Despite being influential in the field of interculturality in general and in foreign language education in particular, Byram's definition of intercultural competence has been criticized mainly for how it generally presents the concept of culture, and for the emphasis on the learner's national culture. Critics point out that the model implies a structuralist perspective of culture, suggesting that cultures are homogeneous, especially national cultures that do not exist in reality (Byram, 2018). Besides, the inherent dichotomy between self and other, native and foreign in the model has been criticized as being far more rigid than it is in reality (Byram, 2018). This is a point to which I will return when I discuss the theoretical implications (see section 4.2.1).

2.1.4 Intercultural awareness

More than a decade after Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence, Baker (2011), in an attempt to meet the realities of English as a lingua franca, proposed a new model, which he called intercultural awareness, modeling what competencies are required in intercultural communication in a global lingua franca context.

According to Baker (2011), the perspectives most relevant to understanding intercultural communication through English as a lingua franca are the postmodernist perspectives, where culture is approached as relevant, dynamic,

and emergent, and the relationship between language and culture is not that of an essentialist inseparable bond between one language and one nationalistic culture. He believed that, although conceptualizations of intercultural competence which recognized the fluid boundaries between language and culture had been proposed, they continued to take the national paradigm as the baseline. This was particularly problematic, in his opinion, in the case of English as a lingua franca, as English increasingly transcended national boundaries and was no longer necessarily associated with any specific community. Accordingly, he proposed intercultural awareness – which is expanded here beyond its common definition to also include skills and behavior – which enables English language users to efficiently negotiate the complexities of intercultural communication.

Building on much of the previous work on intercultural competence – such as Byram's notion of critical cultural awareness – and drawing on fluid, dynamic and relevant notions of culture and language, Baker (2011) defines intercultural awareness as "a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication" (p. 202).

To delineate different components of intercultural awareness and the relationship between different types of knowledge and skills, Baker (2011) proposed a model, comprising three levels, namely, basic cultural awareness, advanced cultural awareness and intercultural awareness. The model also makes a distinction between conceptual versus practice-oriented intercultural awareness. While conceptual intercultural awareness is concerned with knowledge of and attitudes towards cultures – and conscious understanding of these –, practice-oriented intercultural awareness is about applying this knowledge in real-time intercultural communication. He states that each level in this model feeds into the others, with the types of understanding at higher levels affecting the concepts at lower levels. However, he emphasizes that the model is not meant to be a developmental one, meaning that the development of intercultural awareness does not necessarily proceed linearly from one level to the next.

The first level of Baker's (2011) model, basic cultural awareness, as the name suggests, is concerned with a general understanding of cultures and how this could shape and influence communication. The focus at this level is on one's own culture and an ability to articulate one's own cultural perspective, as well as an understanding that others' cultures might be similar or different from one's own culture. This might be combined with an ability to compare one's own and others' cultures; however, this comparison might nevertheless remain at the level of overgeneralizations and stereotypes and thus essentialist.

The second level, advanced cultural awareness, involves an awareness of the complexity of cultures and of the dynamic and relevant nature of culture (Baker, 2011). At this level, there is an understanding that individuals may belong to different cultural groupings and that different cultural groupings could

contain multiple voices and perspectives, thereby moving beyond essentialist stereotypical views. This understanding of the complex nature of culture comes with an awareness of the possibilities of mismatch and miscommunication between specific cultures and could be combined with an ability to mediate between them.

The third level of the model is intercultural awareness (Baker, 2011). At this level, many of the previous elements are engaged simultaneously; hence, besides an awareness of the complexity of cultures, there is an understanding of the emergent nature of intercultural communication, meaning that "cultural references and communicative practices in intercultural communication may or may not be related to specific cultures" (Baker, 2011, p. 205). Moreover, at this level, this understanding is combined with the ability to negotiate and mediate between different culturally grounded communications.

Baker (2011) argues, that it is the third level, which includes the context of global use, that is the most relevant to expanding intercultural competence, a process in which we move away from the 'our culture' 'their culture' dichotomy and recognize both the pluralistic nature of communicative practices and that participants may not confirm to the norms commonly associated with any specific cultural groupings. Acknowledging the aim of English language teaching to be preparing learners for intercultural communication, he contends that the model of intercultural awareness requires adaptation for proper translation into classroom practice.[2]

2.2 English in an age of globalization

The case of English, the role it currently occupies worldwide, is hardly comparable to that of any other language in history. It is unique in several fundamental ways, predominantly in the myriad fields in which it is found and the multiple purposes it serves, in the extent to which it is geographically diffused, and in the immense cultural diversity of its users (Dewey, 2007). In this section, I first discuss what globalization means for a language like English, used globally as a lingua franca in intercultural communication, and what the implications of this are for the discussion on the relationship between language and culture, and hence for the issues on intercultural competence/intercultural awareness. I then turn to its more practical implications for teaching languages by briefly overviewing so-called *global* English language textbooks, published by international publishing houses, a central point of interest in this research project. Finally, I will briefly address some of the views propounded on the cultural imperialism of English, another central issue in the present research.

[2] The theoretical framework in this research project was changed from the first substudy to the two following substudies from Byram's (1997) model for intercultural competence to Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness. The reasons for this shift are clarified later in sections 4.2.1 (Theoretical implications) and 4.3 (Reflections on the research).

2.2.1 English as a lingua franca: the primary medium of intercultural communication

Although globalization in the general sense has always been part of the history of humankind, we are now living in an age of globalization the scale of which is not comparable to that of any other period in history. However, no consensus has yet been reached on any single clear-cut definition of globalization. As Baker (2015) stated, globalization is not anything in itself; rather it is a useful umbrella term for different processes that are defined according to different practical and theoretical orientations. Inherent in many conceptualizations of globalization is the notion of connectedness. Simply put, "globalization may be thought of initially as the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life" (Held et al., 1999, p. 2). Similarly, according to Scholte (2008), "globalization involves reductions in barriers to transworld social contacts. People become more able – physically, legally, linguistically, culturally and psychologically – to engage with each other wherever on earth they might be" (p. 1478). Both characterizations emphasize a stretching of the social aspect of life. Highlighting specific dimensions of globalization, including the stretching of social activity and power, the possibility of action at a distance, the intensification of interconnectedness, and the speeding up of global interactions, Held et al. (2003) offered a more precise definition of globalization as:

> a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power. (p. 68)

In other words, as Jenkins et al. (2011) explain, through globalization, the world is growing more and more interconnected in local, regional, national and global contexts which escalates flows of language and culture. It is in this escalation that globalization becomes tied to the use of English, mostly as a lingua franca, in intercultural communication, and consequently to discussions of intercultural competence and intercultural awareness. The reason is that English, as the most common contact language, and thus "fundamentally part of the fabric of globalization", is the primary means by which these flows of language and culture are established and maintained (Cogo & Dewey, 2012, p. 161). In fact, the relationship between the English language and globalization is two-fold. English has become a lingua franca for intercultural communication partially in response to globalization; however, the, large-scale globalization that we are witnessing today is in part the result of the availability of a globally diffuse lingua franca like English (Jenkins et al., 2011), therefore, "ELF is at once a globalized and a globalizing phenomenon" (p. 303).

What gives English this position, differentiating it from other languages, is the sheer number of people using it as an additional language. This number is not precisely known, but Crystal's (2008) estimate of two billion is largely cited as reliable, if not conservative (Baker, 2015). For the most part, these huge

numbers of users do not use established varieties of English, but rather they use it as a lingua franca (Baker, 2015). Accordingly, Seidlhofer (2011) defines English as a lingua franca as "any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option" (p. 7). Importantly, in English as a lingua franca, English may or may not be the first language, and thus the definition includes native speakers of English as well. What is especially interesting about interactions in English as a lingua franca is not only the enormous variety of first languages, but also the higher probability of communication involving people from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds and groupings. Jenkins (2006) alludes to the intercultural aspects of English as a lingua franca in her definition: "[English as a lingua franca] refers to English when it is used as a contact language across linguacultures" (p. 159).

According to Hulmbauer et al. (2008), English as a lingua franca is undeniably the language most frequently used for intercultural communication. Emphasizing the intercultural aspect of English as a lingua franca, they point to the way it is defined: "*functionally* by its use in intercultural communication rather than *formally* by its reference to native speaker norms" (p. 27, original emphasis). Similarly, Baker (2015) contends that due to the global expansion of English, intercultural communication is likely to take place more in English used as a lingua franca than in any other language, whether as a lingua franca or otherwise. However, it is important to emphasize here that researchers are not suggesting that intercultural communication through English as a lingua franca is innately different from any other kinds of intercultural communication (Baker, 2015). If we accept that English as a lingua franca and intercultural communication are two phenomena and that the two research fields are intertwined – partly as a result of globalization –, what is there to learn from this close connection in the debate on culture and intercultural competence/intercultural awareness in language teaching and learning?

As already mentioned, what makes English especially interesting for research is the scale on which it is used for intercultural communication. There are points of convergence and divergence between the two disciplines – English as a lingua franca and intercultural communication – that could have theoretical and practical implications. Since both fields are concerned with interactions which involve participants from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Zhu, 2015), an evident point of convergence between research in English as a lingua franca and intercultural communication concerns the factors that lead to efficient communication (Baker, 2015). The notion of competence has been studied more directly in intercultural communication; however, research on English as a lingua franca has also recognized that linguistic competence alone is not enough for successful communication (Baker, 2015). Viewed as a process rather than a product, English as a lingua franca raises awareness of the intercultural aspect of communication and emphasizes the role of the communicative strategies and negotiation of meaning, through which mutual understanding is achieved (Hulmbauer et al., 2008). Baker (2011), in his model of

intercultural awareness (see section 2.1.4) also underlines the significance, at both linguistic and cultural levels, of negotiation and mediation. Similarly, according to Zhu (2015), negotiation is essential in both intercultural and lingua franca communication. In other words, participants in such communications must accommodate their language to different cultural frames of reference so that they can make sense of their interaction. As Zhu (2015) explains, it is through negotiation that participants "employ, mobilize, or manipulate diverse resources to achieve their goals of interaction" (p. 64). Relevant to the discussion on negotiation is the emergent nature of both English as a lingua franca and intercultural communication. It is due to this emergent nature – which Zhu (2015) calls "here and now" – that the participants accommodate their language (Hulmbauer et. al, 2008) and use their previous cultural schemas to interpret new experiences and perhaps also to resolve conflicts (Zhu, 2015).

Not only should the nature of intercultural and lingua franca communication be viewed as emergent but so too should the notion of culture itself. This is the point where, traditionally, research on intercultural communication diverges from that on English as a lingua franca. Conventionally, in intercultural communication, culture has been perceived as a unitary concept, a stable and homogeneous entity, usually associated with a nation; thus, culture is a fixed variable, a representative of certain national groups (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). Many earlier conceptualizations of intercultural competence, such as the one in Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence (see section 2.1.3.), were influenced by this essentialist perspective. The spread of English in the increasingly globalized world, however, demands a different approach to culture; one that takes account of the dynamism of the world we live in (Cogo & Dewey, 2012). English is no longer associated with specific nations that have unitary cultures, rendering the simple language-nation-culture relationship even more simplistic. In case of English as a lingua franca, critical postmodernist perspectives are relevant, i.e. those which reject the notion of culture as a homogeneous, static entity that is easy to describe (Baker, 2015). In Baker's (2015) understanding of English as a lingua franca, cultures "should be conceived as liminal, emergent resources that are in a constant state of fluidity and flux between local and global references, creating new practices and forms in each instance of intercultural communication" (p. 568). Unlike earlier conceptualizations of intercultural competence, such as that proposed by Byram (1997), the model of intercultural awareness advanced by Baker (2011) (see section 2.1.4.), which is specifically designed to account for intercultural communication through English as a lingua franca, takes a postmodernist stance on the concept of culture, viewing it as relative, hybrid, and more heterogeneous. It is important to note, however, that in cases other than English, such as Finnish or Japanese, which have a more distinctly defined speech community, the one-language one-culture equation is not relevant either. National identity is only one of many cultural groupings, also with multiple voices within them, that people might belong to, and in an age of globalization, such categories are becoming less clear-cut than ever.

To sum up the points made in this section, with globalization and the spread of English around the world, English has become the primary lingua franca in intercultural communication. The earlier essentialist perspectives on culture, which regarded it as a homogeneous static entity associated with a nation, are no longer relevant in today's world. Today, culture should be viewed as hybrid, heterogeneous and emergent. Participants in intercultural communication are constantly moving between local, national and global cultural frames of reference in order to make sense of interactions and make themselves understood. Such a view should be adopted in accounts of intercultural competence, which is regarded as the ultimate aim in learning foreign languages, English being the most popular of these.

2.2.2 Global textbooks

Besides functioning as the primary medium for intercultural communication, there are other ways in which English is linked to globalization. One of the factors associated with globalization is the rise of transnational corporations, which contribute to the spread of as well as demand for English (Gray, 2002). This, in turn, means continuing growth in the highly competitive industry of publishing English language teaching textbooks, with so-called global textbooks as their main product. Global textbooks are full-featured English language teaching materials, including workbooks, CDs, videos and online data (Hadley, 2014), designed to be used as the core text in language classrooms around the world (Gray, 2002). The rise of this industry, according to Gray and Block (2014), coincides with the beginning of the neoliberal era, in the late 1970s. It is difficult to estimate the exact economic value of the English language teaching publishing industry. Pennycook (1994, cited in Gray, 2002) speculated annual sales of British English language teaching textbooks to be somewhere between £70 and £170 million. It is therefore important to bear in mind that textbooks, particularly global textbooks, are not merely pedagogical tracts, but also 'economic commodities' traded in a highly competitive marketplace (Harwood, 2005).

Global language textbooks, Hadley (2014) argues, have their advocates and opponents in the field. He believes those in the supporting camp, are 'less than inspiring in their defense', and views global textbooks as either time-savers or simply a handy guide for inexperienced teachers unable to develop their own materials. Tomlinson (2013) sees the use of global textbooks as having both advantages and disadvantages. An advantage is the potential financial gain which motivates investment in the considerable expertise and resources required to produce a quality product; a disadvantage, in turn, is that the materials, because they are targeted at an idealized audience, inevitably fail to satisfy the needs of any actual learner (Tomlinson, 2013). Gray (2002), also in the latter camp, states that it is naïve and inaccurate to think that the English language teaching publishing industry is solely in the business of making money and that global textbooks are just commodities to be traded; they are also "highly wrought cultural constructs and carriers of cultural messages" (p. 152) and their content

"is the result of the interplay between, at times, contradictory commercial, pedagogic and ethical interests" (p. 157).

In analyzing the kind of worldview modern global textbooks present to their audience, Gray (2002) goes on to explain how these textbooks have changed. He points to the fact that global textbooks have increasingly oriented towards the international market, which reflects the recognition by publishers of English as a growingly global language. Gray (2002, 2010) also underlines the way modern global textbooks resemble each other, in both format and content, and attributes this similarity to two main guidelines followed in their content: namely, inclusivity and inappropriacy. The former refers to a non-sexist approach in the presentation of men and women, while the latter refers to topics the textbooks writers are advised to avoid, such as politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, isms, and pork, as these are potentially sensitive issues for some users. This approach results in misrepresentations of cultures, as they are stripped of some of their distinguishing – supposedly inappropriate – features (Gray, 2002). Therefore, "while coursebooks can be seen as feminized for ethical reasons they are also sanitized for commercial purposes" (Gray, 2002, p. 159).

In sum, global textbooks which have gained in popularity, in part because of the globalization of English, are more than just pedagogical tools. They are both commercial commodities produced for financial benefit and carriers of cultural, ideological and political worldviews. It is in this sense, i.e. that 'one size does not fit all', that they could be problematic. The problem lies in the hegemony of a specific worldview, of a naïve view of a globalizing world, and a reductionist, stereotypical portrayal of some local cultures and the exclusion of many others.

2.2.3 Perils and promises of the globalization of English

Views differ on the destructive and constructive effects of globalization with respect to cultural issues. For instance, at one end of the continuum is the perspective of Berger (1999), who states that "the culture in which we live is perhaps the most claustrophobic that has ever existed; in the culture of globalization…there is no glimpse of an *elsewhere* or an *otherwise*" (p. 3. original emphasis). At the other end of the continuum are those who think like Perlmutter (1991), who sees the building of the planet's first global civilization as the cause and the consequence of globalization. He describes the outcome as follows:

> a world order, with shared values, processes, and structures…whereby nations and cultures become more open to influence each other . . . there is recognition of the identities and diversities of peoples in various groups, and ethnic and religious pluralism . . . peoples of different ideologies and values both cooperate and compete but no ideology prevails over all the others . . . where the global civilization becomes unique in a holistic sense while still being pluralist . . . where increasingly these values are perceived as shared despite varying interpretations. (Perlmutter, 1991, p. 898)

The globalization of English in particular, has also raised concerns about cultural issues. Scholars have accused English of linguistic as well as cultural imperialism (Canagarajah 1999; Phillipson 1992; Phillipson 2009). According to Phillipson (1992, 2009, 2013) – whose stance is akin to that of Berger (1999) –

linguistic imperialism is linked to a structure of imperialism in other fields, including culture, education, politics, media and communication; it is structural, hegemonic, ideological and, in essence, about exploitation. Phillipson sees the spread of English as contributing to the endorsement of neoliberal and capitalist ideologies and connected to the homogenization of the world's cultures in an Americanized way (1999). In his review of the book 'English as a Global Language' by Crystal (1997), (1991), Phillipson, who stands somewhere close to Perlmutter (1999), criticizes Crystal for glorifying English as symbiotically connected to progress, ignoring the human cost that has led to English becoming a global language and for overlooking the ecological and cultural effects of the homogenized, globalized world.

Pennycook (2007) refers to the two extreme views on globalization as two axes: one global and the other local, i.e. the dominance of specific cultural and linguistic practices on the one hand, and the maintenance of the local on the other. However, he calls for a more complex and flexible approach to thinking about this issue than this dichotomy. He believes that seeing globalization as Western domination of the world pure and simple is reductionist, and neglects the possibilities resulting from the complex flows of languages and cultures across multiple borders in multiple directions provided by the new technologies and ways of communication. He clarifies his stance on globalization as follows:

> My interest in globalization is not merely with the ugliness of a world dominated by a rampant superpower, by a war on terror, by the rise of fundamentalist ideologies, by the imposition of crippling social and economic policies on those who can least afford it, but also by the possibilities that the global flows of languages and cultures open up. (Pennycook, 2007, p. 18)

Focusing, in particular, on the complexity of English in relation to globalization, while acknowledging the destructive effects of the spread of the English language on social and economic policies, on educational systems and on other languages and cultures, Pennycook (2007) emphasizes the need to recognize how English becomes relocated and appropriated in various domains, the crucial role it plays in transcultural flows, and the opportunities it provides.

The perils and promises of the globalization of English are therefore too large and too significant to be ignored in teaching and learning the language. As Kramsch (2014b) argues, globalization, marked by the mobility of people and capital and the deployment of new technologies in telecommunication and social networks, has changed the conditions under which foreign languages are taught, learned and used. Under such conditions, she believes, the teaching of foreign languages, by the very simple act of choosing what to talk about and what to exclude, and by trying to make students sensitive to linguistic and cultural diversity and encourage them to engage in and negotiate differences in political, social, religious and cultural worldviews is inevitably politicized. She emphasizes that this requires a shift away from predetermined facts of a linguistic or cultural nature, towards more fluid interpretational approaches.

To sum up the points made in this section, I refer to Pennycook (2007) once again: "English is closely tied to processes of globalization: a language of threat,

desire, destruction and opportunity" (p. 5). As he describes it, the case of English is two-fold. On the one hand, it is a primary tool of cultural imperialism, which is responsible for the exclusion and destruction of local cultures in favor of Western hegemony and thus could lead to cultural homogenization. On the other hand, it is the leading language in global flows of knowledge and culture that can be used and appropriated by individuals and communities as a window of boundless possibilities, including the possibility to resist. It is only by acknowledging this complex position and its implications that we can train learners of English who are politically engaged and interculturally competent.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

The aim of this study was to investigate the role of English in Iranian learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness. In line with this overall aim, the overarching research question was:

How does learning and using English relate to intercultural awareness?

This overarching research question was addressed in three substudies, each with its own focus and research question(s) (see section 1.3). A qualitative methodological framework was used throughout the study. Qualitative research, according to Berg (2001), refers to "the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things" (p. 3). It is also characterized by using words as data, gathered and analyzed in different ways (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The framework of this study is qualitative in that it analyzes qualitative data in the form of words – drawn from textbooks and interviews – that are not reducible to numbers. Moreover, throughout the process, as a researcher, I brought my subjectivity – my perspectives for making sense of the world – into the research. Subjectivity is an important element of a qualitative research framework (Silverman, 2008, cited in Braun & Clarke, 2013). On the significance of subjectivity, Peshkin (1988) argues that "one's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed" (p. 17). He contends that simply acknowledging their subjectivity is not useful for researchers; instead, they should actively and meaningfully seek out their subjectivity throughout the research process so as to become fully aware of how it influences their inquiry and its results (Peshkin, 1988). Braun and Clrake (2013) mention specific skills and orientations that fit into the qualitative framework, including the following:

> A critical and questioning approach to life and knowledge – you don't take things at face value and simply accept the way they are, but ask questions about *why* they may be that way, whose interests are served by them, and *how* they could be different. (p. 9)

This approach has been adopted throughout this research, from formulating the research questions to collecting and analyzing the data, and finally, considering the implications of the findings.

As mentioned earlier, this article-based dissertation comprises three different substudies. In what follows in this chapter, I first detail the methodologies used in the substudies, explaining how these relate and contribute to the overall aim of the research. First, I focus on the two data sets gathered for the textbook analyses and interviews. I then present the characteristics of the participants selected for the interviews. Next, I discuss the methodological approaches used in the content and thematic analysis of the data and review the ethical considerations relevant to the interviews. The chapter closes with a summary of the findings of each substudy and its contribution to answering the main research question.

3.1 Overview of the data

3.1.1 Textbooks

In this research project, the first data set comprised seven English language textbooks. This data set was analyzed in the first substudy, which focused on investigating the extent to which the textbooks aim at improving learners' intercultural competence. Although it is debated whether textbooks are the best language learning medium among the materials available, they continue to dominate the language teaching market (Tomlinson, 2012). Proponents claim that textbooks help teachers prepare lessons, provide learners with a sense of system, cohesion and progress, and that they give administrators a means for ensuring standardization (Tomlinson, 2013). Opponents on the other hand argue that textbooks are bound to be superficial and reductionist in the language they provide, and that, by imposing uniformity, they deprive teachers of power and initiative (Tomlinson, 2001). According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), textbooks can have various roles, including that of a trainer, a map, an authority, a de-skiller and an ideology. Harwood (2014) contends, it is essential to study textbooks at three levels, namely, content, consumption, and production. At the level of content, he claims that textbooks can be investigated for what they include or exclude, for instance in terms of topic, linguistic information, pedagogy and culture.

Most private language institutes in Iran use the so-called global textbooks, targeted at an international audience (see section 2.2.2). Because of the huge popularity of these institutes among English language learners in Iran, and the fact that global textbooks are the primary type of learning materials in general English courses offered in these institutes, it was considered essential to include an analysis of them in this research project.

The data consisted of seven textbooks, all published by Oxford University Press, used in English courses offered by the Safir language Academy, one of the

largest and most popular private language institutes in Iran. They were offset printed in Iran with no consideration given to international copyrights. The textbooks came with complementary audio CDs, which were also included in the data in case they were relevant to learning tasks. More information on the textbooks is provided in Table 1[3].

TABLE 1 Textbooks analyzed

Title of textbook	Publishing year	Objective
English Result Elementary	2007	Take student from false-beginner level to A1+ on CEF
English Result Pre- intermediate	2008	Take strong A1-level student to A2+ on CEF
English Result Intermediate	2009	Take strong A2-level student to B1 or B1+ on CEF
English Result Upper- intermediate	2010	Take strong B1-level student to B2 on CEF
FCE Result	2011	Prepare student for *Cambridge English: First* (FCE) exam which corresponds to level B2 on CEF
CAE Result	2008	Prepare student for *Cambridge English: Advanced* (CAE) exam which corresponds to level C1 on CEF
Proficiency Masterclass	2002	Prepare student for Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) exam which corresponds to level C2 on CEF

3.1.2 Interviews

> The best stories are those which stir people's minds, hearts, and souls and by so doing give them new insights into themselves, their problems and their human condition. The challenge is to develop a human science that can more fully serve this aim. The

[3] The objectives, defined according to CEFR (the Common European Framework of References for Languages), are provided by the Publisher.

> question, then, is not "Is story telling science?" but "Can science learn to tell good stories?" (Reason, 1981, p. 50)

The second data set for this research was collected through interviews. These data were reported in the second and the third substudies. Through interviews we get to hear other people's stories. According to Seidman (2006), telling stories is a meaning-making process, through which people select constitutive details of their experiences, reflect on them, give them order and thus make sense of them. As Silverman (1993) observed, we live in an interview society, where we have come to realize that every single individual is a significant source of knowledge (Gubrium & Hoilstein 2012). When it comes to choosing a research method, when the sort of knowledge we are seeking is "authentic accounts of lived (subjective) inner experience" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 164), or the participants' subjective understanding (Schutz, 1967, cited in Seidman, 2006), as was the case in this part of the research, interviewing is a particularly useful tool.

The epistemological assumption behind the interviews in this research stemmed from postmodernism. In traditional views, interviews are considered controlled asymmetric conversations in which the interviewer applies their interpersonal skills merely to encourage the interviewees to express attitudes and sentiments without helping them to construct these (Gubrium & Hoilstein, 2012). In this view, the interviewer is not more than a highly trained instrument, designed to extract responses from the *respondents* (see Seidman, 2006 for a discussion on the choice of terminology). From the postmodern perspective, however, the boundaries between the interviewer and interviewee are more blurred, as the two parties are seen as collaborating in the construction of narratives (Borer & Fontana, 2012). Moreover, as Cicourel (1964, cited in Borer & Fontana, 2012) argued, an interview is not possible without the participants' ability to share overlapping social worlds and their relevant communicative understanding. In this sense, my position as interviewer was significant, as I shared social worlds with the participants. I not only shared their native language, but also the larger society from which they came. I was also familiar with most - if not all - of the cultural references brought up in the interviews. This commonality contributed to the development of interview narratives by collaboratively assembling accounts of experience.

The general aim of the interviews was to investigate the interviewees' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness, and how it related to their experiences in learning and using English. The in-depth semi-structured interviews, which were designed in accordance with the theoretical framework of the study – Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness – were conducted with eight participants. The first draft of the interview questions was reviewed by my colleagues and later used in a pilot interview, which was not included in the final data. The pilot interview was the basis for finalizing the main questions. Although the key concepts in all the interviews were the same and despite the fact that some questions were asked of all participants, the interviews turned out to be very different from each other, owing to the participants' different experiences, their willingness to elaborate on them, and the ensuing discussions.

The interviews were conducted in the spring and summer of 2016. Since I was in Finland and the participants were in Iran, and I did not have the possibility to travel back to Iran, the interviews were all done online, using the telecommunication applications Skype and WhatsApp. Based on the participants' preferences, five interviews were video conversations and the other three audio conversations. The interviews lasted on average 60 minutes, ranging from 30 to 90 minutes. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by me for the purposes of analysis. The language used was Persian, as it was both my and the participants' mother tongue. I later translated some extracts, which I used in the two substudies, into English.

3.2 Participants

Participants were selected using Robinson's (2014) theoretical and practical guide. In the first step, a target population or sample universe was defined using two inclusion criteria: being an Iranian adult and having taken English courses for at least six months in the same private language institute in Iran as the one whose textbooks had been analyzed in the previous phase of the research. Second, following theoretical and practical considerations, the sample size was set at a minimum of six and a maximum of ten participants. In the next phase, participants were selected using the convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling "proceeds by way of locating any convenient cases who meet the required criteria and then selecting those who respond on a first-come-first-served basis until the sample size quotient is full" (Robinson, 2014, p. 32). Finally, the sample was sourced through online advertising that involved snowball sampling or referral chains, which means asking participants to recommend others who also qualify for participation. In practice, I asked followers on my public Twitter account if, assuming they met the criteria, they would be willing to participate in my research. Four participants meeting the criteria were recruited through Twitter. One of these suggested a further four eligible participants, and thus the final sample comprised eight participants.

Apart from studying English in public-sector schools, all the participants had attended English courses at private language institutes during the previous few years. They had also had access to English through various other sources, including the Internet, social networks, movies, music, books, and interaction with other people. The extent to which they used each of these sources varied from one participant to another. Below, more information on each of the participants is provided (see section 4.3 for limitations regarding the participants).

Frans (male) was a 28-year-old engineer. He had attended English courses specifically designed for the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) exam for 8 months in Safir Language Academy. Other than that, he had mainly learned English through watching movies and shows in English from the age of 17 and had focused on these extracurricular activities for about four years.

He had recently traveled twice to Turkey, and he had been a CouchSurfing host for more than a year, as a result of which he had engaged in several intercultural interactions in English. He was planning to leave the country within a few years.

Noora (female) was a 31-year-old graphic designer. She had studied English in Safir Language Academy for two or three years intermittently but had stopped about two years earlier. Before and after that, and apart from her public schooling, she had taught herself English. She had traveled to Turkey, Saudi Arabia and India. She had also experienced several intercultural interactions in English in Iran and online.

Sanni (female) was a 26-year-old interior designer. Since childhood, she had attended different English language courses in different institutes for short periods of time. Recently she had attended classes in preparation for the IELTS exam in a Safir Language Academy. She had recently been to Turkey twice, and she had been a CouchSurfing host for more than a year, as a result of which she had engaged in several intercultural interactions in English. She was planning to leave the country within a few years.

Essi (male) was a 22-year-old engineer. He had been studying English at Safir Language Academy for almost 15 months. Before that, he had learnt English independently through watching movies, listening to music and using similar media. He had experienced few interactions in English outside the classroom context and had never traveled outside of Iran. He was planning to leave the country in about four years.

Jenni (female) was a 30-year-old architect. She had studied English at a Safir Language Academy for a year about four years previously, and at the time of the interview she had been taking courses there again for about seven months, preparing for the IELTS exam. She had not been outside of Iran and had had few interactions in English. She was planning to leave the country within a few years.

Leila (female) was a 23-year-old student of theology. Since her childhood she had been intermittently taking English courses in different private language institutes, including Safir Language Academy. She had not travelled outside of Iran, but she had experienced several intercultural interactions in English with her sister's CouchSurfing guests. A few years back, she had planned to leave the country, but this did not happen. She was now really keen to try again but did not have any specific plans.

Hanna (female) was a 29-year-old student of geophysics. She had studied English in different language institutes, including Safir Language Academy, continuously between the ages of 13 to 18, and then occasionally, sometimes with a few years in between. She had visited China, Turkey, Dubai, and Russia and had also experienced several intercultural interactions in English in Iran.

Saara (female) was a 21-year-old student of engineering. She had attended English courses in different language institutes including Safir Language Academy off and on since she was 10 years old. She had not traveled outside of Iran and had not experienced any interactions in English. She was planning to leave the country within a few years.

3.3 Analysis of the data

3.3.1 Content analysis

In the first substudy of the project, the data, comprising seven English language textbooks, was analyzed using content analysis. This research method has been variously defined in the literature. Some of these definitions assume content to be inherent in the text, believing that a message has but one true content and hence excluding all other meanings as either deviant or subjective (Krippendorff, 2004). In some other definitions, content emerges in the process of analysis by the researcher, on the principle that a text can be read in different ways by different readers and that if this was not the case, there would be no point in content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). For the purposes of this research, the definition of qualitative content analysis as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" was adopted (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1278), as it was in line with the qualitative framework of this research (see the beginning of this chapter).

In content analysis, data are approached as representations of texts, images and expressions that are meant to be interpreted – sometimes as to what they enable or prevent – and acted upon accordingly (Krippendorff, 2004). This is how I approached the textbooks, analyzing them to see to what extent they enable intercultural competence in learners of English. In so doing, I used the so called directed approach to content analysis in which the starting point is an already existing theory or research (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This approach is deductive in nature and works by applying theoretically formulated categories in connection with the text (Mayring, 2000). The main advantages of theory-based directed content analysis are the theoretical implications it generates as well as the possibility it offers researchers of working with explicit reality (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Although the content analysis of the data was qualitative in this research, descriptive statistics were used to summarize and present the findings.

3.3.2 Thematic analysis

The second set of data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which shares similarities with content analysis. The two terms have even been used interchangeably in the literature, and the hybrid term *thematic content analysis* is also common. However, thematic analysis is now more widely recognized as an independent qualitative approach to analysis (Braun et al., 2018). To better understand thematic analysis, it is important to describe what is meant by a theme. In the present research, themes are considered as reflecting a pattern of shared meanings (Braun et al., 2018). DeSantis and Ugarritza (2000), in a review of how the term is viewed in the literature, identified some aspects common to themes in qualitative research. According to their review, themes are mostly implicit and implied rather than explicit and declared and thus inferred from

behavior or verbal expression; they unite an otherwise large and disparate body of data; and they capture the essence of meaning. Morse and Field (1995) discuss themes and thematic analysis in the framework of qualitative interviews. They state:

> Thematic analysis involves the search for and identification of common threads that extend throughout an entire interview or set of interviews. Themes are usually quite abstract and therefore difficult to identify. Often the theme does not immediately "jump out" of the interview but may be more apparent if the researcher steps back and considers. "What are these folks trying to tell me?" The theme may be beneath the surface of the interviews but, once identified, appears obvious. Frequently, these themes are concepts indicated by the data rather than concrete entities directly described by the participants. . . Once identified, the themes appear to be significant concepts that link substantial portions of the interviews together. (pp. 114-115)

The present research adopted the analytical approach known as reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2018). In such approach the analysis is grounded on qualitative paradigms, where – usually - meaning is contextualized, realities are multiple, and the researcher's subjectivity is recognized as valid and in fact a strength, rather than a weakness (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In reflexive thematic analysis, the researcher is like a storyteller, actively engaged in interpreting the data through their own political and ideological stance as well as their theoretical knowledge (Braun et al., 2018).

In different stages of the analysis, I recursively approached the interview data from both inductive and deductive orientations, at some points immersing myself in the data just to make sense of it, trying to identify any meaningful patterns relevant to my research questions, and at other points, trying to see how the data were informed by the theoretical framework I had adopted (Baker's model of intercultural awareness). Moreover, I mostly identified meanings at the latent rather than semantic level, i.e. abstracted implicitly from verbal expressions. As both the interviewer and the analyst, I was subjectively involved in constructing and interpreting meaning, trying to provide a compelling and coherent account of lived experiences.

3.4 Ethical considerations

> Social life is replete with ethical dilemmas, with complicated choices between values of often equal importance. These are extremely difficult issues that interrogate the consciences of us all, which no magic formula can resolve once and for all. (Marzano, 2012, p. 453).

One such ethical dilemma that researchers face concerns interviews, especially in-depth interviews, where, to encourage interviewees to share their most personal feelings and experiences, the researcher must first earn their trust. Researchers conducting interviews may be seeking knowledge for its own sake or for the sake of the society to which their interviewees belong. Whatever the reason, it is crucial that the researcher evaluates the risks and benefits of

interviews so as not to compromise either the participants' psychological, civil or legal safety, or the integrity of the data. To this end, the notion of informed consent has become essential in research dealing with human subjects. Its purpose is to protect participants, especially with respect to the principles of autonomy and privacy (Marzano, 2012).

In the present research, to safeguard their autonomy, participants were provided with detailed information on the purpose, duration and method of the research and on how the findings were going to be used and published. On the issue of the interview method, they were given the freedom to choose between a video or an audio-only remote interview. They were also informed that the whole conversation would be recorded for analysis purposes. They were told that they could ask any questions about the research before, during or after the interviews. To ensure participant privacy and anonymity, pseudonyms have been used in published/submitted papers, conference presentations, and in this summary.[4]

Another important ethical issue concerns the confidentiality of the data. In the case of the present research, all the digital data collected during the interviews, including audio recordings, transcripts of interviews and the relevant notes, are stored in the local network of the University of Jyväskylä in my personal account, which is protected by a password.

[4] The interview data were collected in the spring and summer of 2016, before the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into effect.

3.5 Substudy 1

Presentation of Intercultural Competence in English Language Textbooks: The Case of a Private Language School in Iran

The aim of the first substudy was to investigate to what extent the textbooks used in a private language institute in Iran improve learners' intercultural competence. As elaborated in section 1.2.2, Iran is a polarized context regarding the teaching of culture in English language education. Unlike the public-sector schools, where foreign culture is totally absent from the English language curriculum and localized materials, private language institutes are not required to emulate the indigenized model. As a result of this situation, they import teaching models and materials from the global market (Borjian 2013, 2015). They obtain and update textbooks, published by well-known publishers such as Oxford University Press, Longman, Cambridge University Press and Pearson. They also adapt these textbooks to improve their cultural suitability for the Iranian context; however, such changes are mostly superficial (Zare-ee & Hejazi, 2018).

The study addressed the following questions:

1. To what extent do textbooks for adult learners in a private language school in Iran aim at improving learners' intercultural competence?

2. What dimensions of intercultural competence do the learning tasks found in the textbooks address?

The data consisted of seven global English textbooks published by Oxford University Press (see section 3.1.1). The theoretical framework of the study was intercultural competence as defined by Byram (1997) as a part of his comprehensive model of intercultural communicative competence (see section 2.1.3). The methodology was primarily directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) of the learning tasks, based on the different components of intercultural competence, called *saviors* (Byram, 1997). In total, more than 5 000 learning tasks were analyzed. The content analysis of the data was qualitative in nature, although, to clarify the results, some data characteristics were later converted into numbers, using descriptive statistics.

The results of the analysis with respect to the first research question showed that in each textbook, only 3% to 10% of all the learning tasks aimed at enhancing learners' intercultural competence. The results on the second research question showed that, although all the components of intercultural competence were addressed in the textbooks, they were unevenly distributed and they were not equally emphasized. Of all the learning tasks aiming at improving learners' intercultural awareness, almost half (48%) pertained to *saviors* (knowledge), 35% to *savoir etre* (attitudes), 16% to *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), and only 1% to *savoir apprendre* (skills of discovery).

As already mentioned, the overarching research question was: *How does learning and using English relate to intercultural awareness?* The value of this substudy in relation to this question is what it reveals about the role that global English textbooks play in promoting Iranian language learners' intercultural awareness. Despite their popularity, my research results indicate that global English textbooks do not seem to be adequately or properly cultivating intercultural awareness in learners. First, the proportion of learning tasks with intercultural objectives was very low in all the textbooks analyzed. Moreover, most of these tasks offered learners bits and pieces of information about different cultures instead of engaging them in critically thinking about and interpreting cultural complexities. Also, when it was brought up, culture was mostly defined by national paradigms. These features could have adverse effects on learners' intercultural awareness through the propagation of cultural stereotypes. On another level, I question the appropriateness of such mass-produced global textbooks in local contexts like that of Iran and whether learners could benefit more from customized materials in which a larger number of cultural references are relevant to their own cultural groupings.

3.6 Substudy 2

Intercultural Awareness of Iranian English Language Learners: An Exploration

As the general research aim was to explore the role of English in Iranian learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness, this substudy focused on the traits and details of intercultural awareness of Iranian learners. The specific research question in this substudy was:

> To what extent is Iranian English language learners' understanding of culture in line with the intercultural awareness needed to communicate through English as a lingua franca?

To answer the research question, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight participants (see sections 3.1.2 and 3.2). The theoretical framework was Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness (see section 2.1.4). Four main themes, which were considered to have captured the essence of intercultural awareness, namely one's own culture, complexity of cultures, cultural stereotypes, negotiation and mediation between cultures were drawn from the model. The same themes were then used in thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2018) of the data, with a mainly deductive orientation.

Based on the findings of this substudy, all the participants were aware of the cultural groupings they belonged to and also of any contradictions between what is generally attributed to those groups and what they themselves believed and how they behaved; in other words, they were aware of their own culture. Moreover, they seemed to be aware of how their cultural identity was continually

changing over time, and how it shaped their communication with others. The participants had learned about different cultures and the complexity of cultures through various means, most of them entailing the English language. They however, showed traits of culturally stereotypical views; these were mainly based on people's nationalities or other geographical grounds. Finally, only four of the participants described situations in which they had mediated in a cultural conflict situation. Moreover, the main theoretical implication of the study was that, although Baker's model of intercultural awareness is designed to account for the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to communicate through English as a lingua franca, as was shown in the data, it could also apply to other contexts such as those where intercultural awareness is required irrespective of the language used.

The main contribution of this study in relation to the overall research project and the overarching research question concerns the quality of intercultural awareness itself. If we are investigating the role of English on learners' intercultural awareness, it is important to clarify what we mean by this, not just theoretically, but through concrete examples of participants' feelings and experiences. The most important finding was that intercultural awareness is extremely complex and indefinite and does not develop in a linear fashion. Participants who showed deep understanding of an instance of cultural complexity in one case seemed to lack the same understanding in another. This was at its most evident in relation to cultural stereotypes; a critical issue which requires more investigation in the field of language education.

3.7 Substudy 3

The role of English in learners' intercultural awareness: the good, the bad and the possible

In the third substudy, the research aim was to explore how Iranian learners' experiences in learning and using English enhance or hinder their intercultural awareness. This substudy was based on the same set of data, gathered through interviews with eight Iranian learners of English (see sections 3.1.2 and 3.2). The specific research question was

> In what ways does learning and using English enhance or hinder Iranian learners' intercultural awareness?

The theoretical framework was Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness (see section 2.1.4), as in the previous substudy, and the analytical method was recursive and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2018), a hybrid approach utilizing both inductive and deductive orientations. Discussing the findings of the study, I refer to the *good* ways in which learning and using

English contributed to participants' intercultural awareness, the *bad* influences it had, and the *possibilities* it provided.

On the ways in which English enhanced learners' intercultural awareness, the data showed that learning and using English contributed to participants' understanding of their own cultural identities as well as that of various cultural complexities. In the words of Noora, one of the participants, English was like an "escape", making her "more hopeful" and enabling her to "discover" new things. Leila, another participant, talking about one of her intercultural interactions, used the word "blessing" to describe the role English had in her life. The negative influences of English mainly centered around feeding into cultural stereotypes; however, the participants did not seem to be aware of this role of English on their views.

The contribution of this substudy to the main research question lies in the crucial importance it demonstrated of learners' reflecting on their experiences of learning and using English. The findings showed that the positive role of English in enhancing learners' intercultural awareness was mostly gained through self-learning and using the language – listening to music, watching movies and shows, using social networks, interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, etc. – rather than formal English education, whether in public-sector schools or private institutes. The findings also showed that where English hindered intercultural awareness, for example by propagating cultural stereotypes, it was mostly, although not exclusively, through the textbook-based formal teaching of the language. This finding was in line with the results of the first substudy. Finally, drawing on the discourse on the place of English in an age of globalization, while acknowledging the destructive effects of globalization in general, and the spread of English in particular, I argue, based on my admittedly limited data, that English undeniably offers learners, providing they are critical thinkers, with vast opportunities, for promoting their intercultural awareness.

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I bring together the key findings of the substudies and discuss them in light of the main research question: *How does learning and using English relate to intercultural awareness?* In addition, I discuss the theoretical and pedagogical implications of the study. I conclude the chapter with reflections on the research.

4.1 Key findings of the research

As the aim of this research was to investigate the role of English in Iranian learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness, I will discuss the key findings of the research in relation to the research aim, under three headings. First, I discuss the positive role of English in enhancing learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness. Then, again focusing on the role of English, I argue that the biggest hindrance to the development of learners' intercultural awareness is the continuing propagation of cultural stereotypes. Finally, I review the debatable role of English on learners' intercultural awareness in an increasingly globalized world.

4.1.1 Positive role of English

According to the results of the interviews (second and third substudies), learning and using English enhanced participants' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness. It contributed to participants' understanding of their own cultural identity and how it was being changed and constructed over time. Noora, one of the participants used the word *escape* to describe the role of English. She said it makes her more *hopeful* and enabled her to *discover* things. Another participant, Essi, elaborated on the fact that, unlike other members of his family, he is not a religious, traditionalist type of person and that his values are partly influenced by the sources of English he has access to, such as the TV show

Friends. English also functioned as a tool for better making sense of cultural complexities. Jenni, for instance, mentioned that her view on homosexuality[5] changed after she had read articles and followed discussions on this topic in social media.

A significant finding on the positive role of English was the huge difference between the impact of informal learning and using the language, and that of formal education, mainly centered around textbooks, in the classroom environment. The analysis of interview data showed the participants mainly gained their intercultural awareness through their own experiences of learning and using English outside the classroom in the real or virtual world. These experiences included, but were not limited to, reading books, listening to music, watching movies or shows, using social networks, engaging in online discussions and having real-time interactions with foreigners in Iran or during their trips abroad. Through these means, English provided new sources and opportunities for them to learn and expand their horizons, sometimes to change their views, and even to decide on which parts of the bigger cultural groupings to adopt. English thus became a medium in what Pennycook (2007) calls transcultural flows, which he describes as "the ways in which cultural forms move, change, and are reused to fashion new identities in new contexts" (p. 6). In contrast, what they mentioned having learned from formal education in private institutes, especially from textbooks, was little more than stereotypical portrayals of culture as habits. This latter finding was in line with the results of the textbook analysis (first substudy), which also showed very narrow and basically essentialist representations of culture that did not substantially support learners' development of intercultural awareness.

In acknowledging the enabling role of English, it is important to keep in mind the specific context in which the present participants learned and used the language. Firstly, they learned and used English as a foreign language and, therefore, except in formal classroom environments or when engaging in activities of their own choice, or when they travelled outside the country, they were not exposed to the language. In other words, they had an active role in consuming and producing the language. It is important to note here that they were all from middle-class families who provided them with the financial as well as societal resources enabling them to learn and use English. Not every young Iranian can afford to take English courses in a private language institute, or even take time off to self-study; such educational opportunities are a privilege. Secondly, regardless of the differences between the participants, such as in their family background and profession, they were all born and brought up in a larger society characterized by its own political, ideological and cultural features and constraints; one, which is, among other traits, overtly religious, distinctly misogynist, and tacitly anti-Western. In a country with such an ambiance, which most of them were planning to leave, English functioned as an "escape" route to a whole new world, where they would have access to bountiful resources. This

[5] In Iran, homosexuality is legally forbidden and is punishable by imprisonment, corporal punishment, or execution.

privilege of mobility could have had influenced the participants' understanding of how English had shaped their intercultural awareness, in turn encouraging them to continue making use of it.

4.1.2 Cultural stereotypes

Based on the results of the interviews (second and third substudies), the biggest hindrance to the development of participants' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness was cultural stereotypes. In his model of intercultural awareness, Baker (2011) argues that having intercultural awareness means having an understanding of the complex, relevant and emergent nature of culture and intercultural communication, which helps individuals move beyond essentialist stereotypical views. In this research, all the participants, at one or more points in their talk, exhibited culturally stereotypical views, mainly based on people's nationalities or on other geographical grounds. Although participants' culturally stereotypical views could not be attributed to their experiences in learning and using English alone, they were clearly influenced by this. Their views stemmed in part from their own experiences of intercultural interactions in English. Frans, for instance, believed that Spanish people love partying, because all his Spanish CouchSurfing guests – perhaps four or five of them – reported doing so. Stereotypes also originated from their formal education of English. Two of the participants said they learned about cultural practices connected with dining and greeting people in different countries in their language textbooks. The results of the textbook analysis (first substudy) also revealed an inadequate portrayal of culture, which was essentially seen in terms of nationalities and the attribution to these of certain habits. While this kind of knowledge about different cultural behaviors in different places might eventually enhance learners' intercultural awareness – by making them aware of the existence of differences in cultures – it could, if not approached critically, also very easily lead to overgeneralizations and stereotyping.

On the issue of cultural stereotypes, two observations were particularly interesting. The first was that the participants seemed to feel more comfortable with the positive generalizations they made about certain groups of people, which could suggest they were not necessarily aware of the potentially adverse consequences of such stereotypes. In contrast, when they had associated a group with certain negative characteristics, they immediately, at least in some cases, tried to alleviate their tone, in the *I'm not racist, but…* fashion. Similarly, while the textbooks did not explicitly attribute negative features to a given cultural group, they were quite sparing with neutral or positive attributions. The second observation was the imbalance in different areas of the learners' intercultural awareness. Even participants with an otherwise profound understanding of their own cultural identity and of cultural complexity, and even with skills of mediation and negotiation, seemed to have culturally stereotypical views. It seemed as if, in many cases, they made sense of others through their differences rather than their similarities, and specifically based on nationality or other geographical grounds.

4.1.3 Globalization, cultural imperialism of English and beyond

As I argued in chapter 2 (see section 2.2.3), the effects of globalization in general, and the spread of English in particular, are two-sided. On one side is the cultural imperialism of English and the destructive effects this has in further homogenizing the world (Canagarajah 1999; Phillipson 1992, 1999, 2009), and on the other is the constructive role of English in promoting the global flow of knowledge and culture, and the opportunities related to these that it provides (Pennycook, 2007). The present research underlined the potential influence of both roles of English – destructive and constructive – on learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness.

The results of the textbook analysis (first substudy) revealed the presence of both mainstream topics, such as politeness, forms of greeting, fashion, table manners, giving gifts, and nonmainstream matters, such as the American civil war, and cannibalism. However, the former topics were more prevalent; this is not surprising given that the textbooks, which were so-called global textbooks published by one of the largest British publishers (Oxford University Press), were targeted for consumption by an idealized, supposedly homogeneous international audience (see section 2.2.2). Even if the audience is not necessarily homogeneous – which, of course, it is not – the underlying goal, and hence possible consequence, might be to bring this about. I believe any such aim or consequence to be detrimental to the intercultural awareness and intellectual development of culturally diverse users. The findings of the interviews (second and third substudies) also revealed that the participants used English in accessing both mainstream products such as the US TV show Friends and celebrities' social media accounts, and counterculture movements and products, such as LGBTQ rights, Zen philosophy, and Japanese anime. The opportunities they had to learn about and critically evaluate alternatives mostly occurred through their experiences in self-learning and using the language than in their formal language learning education. Although most of the participants seemed to be mindful of the role English was playing in building their intercultural awareness, they did not specifically demonstrate any recognition of how, if at all, they were exposed to and potentially influenced by the cultural imperialism of English.

4.1.4 Summary of the key findings

To summarize the key findings of the study, I return to the main research question:

How does learning and using English relate to intercultural awareness?

To seek answers to this question, I investigated the role of English in Iranian learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness, both in their formal learning of English, through analyzing textbooks, and their informal learning and use of the language, through in-depth interviews.

First, the findings showed that English had a positive role in enhancing learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness. In both the formal education of English (first substudy) and informal experiences of learners in using the language (second and third substudies), the separability of language and culture was inherently recognized (see section 2.1.2 and Risager, 2006). The relationship between language and culture was seen from a postmodernist perspective in which no essentialist bond exists between language and culture (Baker, 2011). In other words, learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness was not restricted to knowing about the so-called national cultures of English-speaking countries, or to native speakers or writers of English. For the sample of learners studied, English was rather like a bridge, connecting them to people from different cultures speaking different first languages. However, this positive role of English was mostly found in the learners' individual experiences of learning and using the language, rather than the formal education they received in private institutes, which centered around global textbooks.

Second, the findings revealed the role of English in feeding into cultural stereotypes, both in formal education through language-learning textbooks, and in learners' own experiences. As already mentioned (see section 2.1.2), in language education, according to Baker (2015), cultures tend to be portrayed in an essentialist manner, with the focus mainly on national paradigms. The textbook analysis in this research (first substudy) yielded the same results. Such a reductionist presentation of cultures potentially supports national/cultural stereotypes, in turn hindering the development of intercultural awareness in learners. The results of the interviews (second and third substudies) also underlined the learners' culturally stereotypical views, acquired partially from their intercultural interactions in English. What led to the adoption of cultural stereotypes by the learners was a failure to recognize the existence of "multiple voices or perspectives within any cultural grouping" (Baker, 2011, p. 203), particularly national ones. In other words, despite the awareness that language and culture are separable, the relationship between a nation and a culture remained to a great extent inseparable, both in learners' minds and in the minds of textbook writers.

Finally, the findings of the study highlighted the twofold role of English in in an age of globalization (see section 2.2.3, and Pennycook, 2007). On the one hand, both in formal education, through the medium of global textbooks, and in learners' own experiences in learning and using the language, English functioned as a tool for accessing – and arguably spreading – Western products, cultures and ideologies (see Phillipson, 1999), or for portraying other cultures in a superficial, reductionist way, from a predominantly Western point of view. In this way, English potentially hinders the development of intercultural awareness. On the other hand, English acted as a bridge to alternative cultures and countercultures outside of the uniformity and homogeneity of mainstream cultural products and values (see Pennycook, 2007), thereby enhancing learners' intercultural awareness.

To conclude, the role of English in Iranian learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness was multiple and complex. It was perceived as a *blessing* for Leila a 23-year-old woman struggling with a religious family in a sexist and misogynist society, by providing her with an opportunity to talk about Japanese anime with two Spanish males in Tehran. It was hindering in that the textbooks presented a reductionist stereotypical view of national cultures to learners in a society where stereotypical jokes about ethnic groups from different parts of their own country are already considered funny by many people. Lastly, English has a complex role for Iranian learners with respect to cultural imperialism. In their larger cultural grouping, the Islamic state claims to be anti-Western and anti-imperialist, while implementing policies that are in line with Western ideologies, capitalism and neoliberalism, all of which have cultural connotations. Individually however, learners have access to alternative discourses on cultures. In this sense, the role of English in Iranians' intercultural awareness comes into play together with many other tacit factors.

4.2 Implications

In this section, I first discuss the theoretical implications of the research, in relations to the two models; Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence and Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness (see sections 2.1.3 and 2.1.4 respectively). Then, in light of the key findings presented in the previous section, I point out some pedagogical implications for teaching English.

4.2.1 Theoretical implications

The theoretical implications of this study relate to the use of Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence and Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness. Although Byram's model of intercultural competence proved useful to a great extent in analyzing the learning tasks in language textbooks (see section 4.3 below for more details), it failed to capture the complex and heterogeneous nature of culture. The problem in this model is the emphasis on the dichotomy of *our culture* versus *their culture* or *foreign* cultures, a consequent focus on cultures based on national paradigms. The assumption underlying such a perspective is that of the inseparable link between one nation and one homogenous culture. This assumption potentially leads to cultural stereotypes. Baker's model of intercultural awareness on the other hand, underlines the relevant, fluid and emergent nature of culture.

Two main observations regarding Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness emerged from this study. First, the model emphasizes that intercultural awareness is complex and amorphous and does not proceed in a linear fashion. Developing an awareness of one's own culture requires an understanding of the complex nature of culture in general; this in turn influences one's understanding of the way cultures shapes intercultural communication.

This could help in seeking to move beyond essentialist overgeneralizations and cultural stereotypes, although *not* necessarily. The findings of this dissertation research showed that the acquisition of intercultural awareness does not proceed linearly from basic cultural awareness through advanced cultural awareness to intercultural awareness. The participants in this study were shifting between levels, sometimes showing an awareness at the advanced level of the model, while lacking skills at the basic level. Although Baker (2011) states that the model is not a developmental one, the fact that it incorporates *levels* could be misleading.

The second observation about Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness concerns its application. Although it has been specifically designed for intercultural communication through English as a lingua franca, the findings of the present research showed that it could equally be applied to account for knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to communicate in any kind of intercultural interaction, regardless of the language used, even if participants speak the same first language. This in turn implies the heterogeneity of national cultures.

The theoretical implications of the study reflect the accelerated globalization that we are currently experiencing, a phenomenon that Dervin (2016) claims is "thanks to" technological innovations, compressing time and space. While personally unsure about whether we should be *thankful* for such rapid changes, I cannot deny their effects on different aspects of our lives. In this age, views on intercultural awareness need to accommodate to such changes. Most importantly, individual diversity needs to be acknowledged, meaning that each of us is composed of multiple identities (Dervin, 2016) including those related to nationality, race, gender, profession, social class and language, and not just the first and last of these. In a globalized world where borders and boundaries between different people are growing increasingly fuzzier, the concept of diversity and the role of different cultural frames of reference in intercultural communication could be helpful in furthering understanding of the complexity of intercultural awareness.

4.2.2 Pedagogical implications

In the present research, the role of English in Iranian learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness was explored both in relation to the formal education of English and to the learners' individual experiences of learning and using the language. The findings highlighted the contribution of learners' individual experiences in learning and using English, as opposed to the formal education they received (see section 4.1.1). This suggests that the negative effects of the formal classroom environment with its heavy reliance on textbooks are too significant to be ignored by policy makers in English language teaching. A hybrid approach combining formal teaching under the supervision of qualified teachers together with learners who can actively and purposefully benefit from the wealth of resources and opportunities offered by the outside world would likely be of greater benefit to learners' development of intercultural awareness. This

implication could be considered in curriculum development and syllabus planning as well as in teacher training.

Another pedagogical implication relates to the issue of cultural stereotypes. As the findings of the present study showed (see section 4.1.2), the biggest obstacle to the development of learners' intercultural awareness was their pre-existing culturally stereotypical views, due in part to the reductionist and essentialist presentation of cultures, mostly in terms of national paradigms, in the textbooks used. As I mentioned in the previous section, it is essential to acknowledge the enormous diversity between individuals and groups that goes beyond nationality. As Dervin et al. (2015) point out, a multitude of formerly marginalized groups, characterized by social class, gender, sexuality, race and religion, are increasingly becoming more visible in the media. However, how, if at all, they are represented in textbooks remains debatable. This is an issue which also needs to be taken up in curriculum development and teacher training.

Last, the results of the study have implications for the twofold role of English in learners' intercultural awareness (see section 4.1.3). The question is how in practice to minimize the cultural imperialism of English in formal education and provide an unbiased setting that stimulates the flow of all cultures and countercultures. In formal education settings, textbooks and teachers play both major roles. In the case of textbooks, political agendas and economic considerations play a crucial role in their production, and to ensure their popularity and profitability, it is often considered that they must not be controversial (Dervin et al., 2015). Therefore, it is essential not only to investigate the kinds of values and ideologies textbooks promote but also to find ways to put research into practice, despite possible conflict with the political agenda. Furthermore, as teachers have agency in circulating knowledge, attitudes and values, it is necessary that they be educated on the issue of cultural imperialism and the part English plays in it. Material development, textbook writing and teacher training could all benefit from considering the present findings and implications.

4.3 Reflections on the research

In this section, I review the process of my research project, reflecting on what worked well, methodologically and theoretically, in understanding the role of English in Iranian learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness, and on what I could have done differently. In addition, I discuss the limitations of my study and recommend some directions for further research.

I begin with the textbook analysis, with which I started the research project. In that substudy, I used Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence, and specifically his definition of intercultural competence, as the theoretical framework. I chose this model for three reasons. First, because in the literature, which was replete with various definitions, models and frameworks of basically the same concept, Byram's definition of intercultural competence was

favored by most scholars in the field (Deardorff, 2004). Moreover, his model was based on a foreign language teaching background, and specified different locations for acquiring intercultural competence, including the classroom environment, and thus the most relevant to my research. Last, since Byram had clarified the objectives for each component of the model, the codes for starting the content analysis were ready, solid and compelling,. This made the model especially useful for handling large amounts of data: in this case more than 5 000 learning tasks, which were the units of analysis. However; later, when engaging more in depth in the second phase of the study, which focused on learners' experiences, Byram's model seemed inadequate to explain the complex relationship between English, culture and globalization. This was specifically evident in the dichotomy he draws between *our culture* and *their culture*, which is based on national paradigms. For reasons elaborated above (section 4.2.1) in discussing the theoretical implications of my study, I believe this essentialist view of culture is no longer relevant in an increasingly globalized world and, thus, on reflection, I could have been more critical of this view when I used Byram's model in the textbook analysis.

In the second phase of the research, in which I conducted the interviews, I used Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness as the theoretical framework. This model moves beyond the above-mentioned dichotomy and underlines the dynamic, relevant, and emergent nature of culture. Unlike Byram's model, which has concrete objectives defined for each component of intercultural competence, Baker's model is less detailed and more open to interpretation. This characteristic, in turn, proved to be especially useful in analyzing the interview data using thematic analysis. In this analysis, unlike in the deductive analysis of the textbooks, I adopted a hybrid approach combining both inductive and deductive orientations.

In the interviews, I believe that my position as the interviewer, and partly as a result of that, how I then constructed and interpreted the interviews was particularly fruitful in terms of results. Before I started this phase, I had constantly been reminded about the significance of objectivity in research. However, as I learned more about different kinds of interviews from different epistemological points of view (see section 3.1.2), I realized that, as an interviewer, especially one who shares the social and cultural worlds of the participants, I could in fact use this position in helping them construct their narratives. I also realized, not only in theory but also in practice, that my subjectivity, my own political and ideological stance in analyzing the data was a strength, rather than a weakness. As a middle-class Iranian – like the participants – learning and teaching English in Iran, I could identify with and make sense of the participants' experiences in a more meaningful way than what would be possible for someone totally unfamiliar with the context.

This last point brings me to one of the limitations of my research: the participants. First, my sample size was rather small. While there is no magic formula for determining an optimal number of participants in qualitative interviews, various contextual and pragmatic considerations could be brought to

bear on this issue, such as local norms regarding the type of research, the scope of the research, the diversity across participants, and the richness of the data to be gathered from each of them (Braun et al., 2018). According to Malterud et al. (2016), an approximation of the sample size is needed in order to plan the research, but whether an adequate number has been recruited should be continuously evaluated during the process. To do this, they propose the concept of "information power" which offers guidelines for assessing the adequacy of the sample size. Accordingly, they argue, the least number of participants is required if the scope of the study is narrow; the participants are specified and homogeneous with respect to the research aim, while also exhibiting some variation in their experiences; the research is supported by an established theoretical framework; the interview dialogue is rich; and the analysis aims at an in-depth exploration of narratives. In light of these criteria, I planned to have from six to ten participants, and believed that eight interviews would yield rich and significant results. This does not mean however, that more interviews would necessarily have been redundant, as the participants, while belonging to a specific target group, proved to have different kinds of experiences worth exploring. A second potential limitation regarding the participants was that they were rather homogeneous socio-economically: all were middle-class , meaning that they could all afford to take courses in private language institutes, had access to the Internet and social media, and in most cases were planning to leave the country. It is important to point out here that this is definitely not true of all young Iranians, and therefore the results could not be generalized to other young leaners from different socio-economic backgrounds with different concerns. This issue could be taken up in further research.

Another limitation of this study relates to the sample size of the textbooks analyzed. Although the optimum procedure would have been to analyze all the textbooks used in all the private language institutes in Iran, this was not within the scope of this research project. Despite these limitations, a heuristic approach to sampling was taken, which involves analyzing any arguably unbiased sample of texts to see how well it answers the research question (Krippendorff, 2004). The sample in this research was considered representative of the textbooks on the market. They were the main materials in general English courses for adult learners in Safir Language Academy, which is one of the biggest and most popular private language institutes in Iran. At the time of data collection in 2015, it had 72 branches and more than 60,000 students. Currently the number of branches has grown to more than 107 in Tehran and other cities, and the textbooks for general English courses have been updated. Analyzing the more recent global textbooks to ascertain how they enhance or hinder intercultural awareness would be a fruitful topic of future research.

Researching and discussing interculturality is complex as it is shown in this study as well. This was perhaps the biggest challenge for me. Throughout the project, I aimed at taking up a liquid rather than a solid approach to intercultural discourse (Dervin, 2011), meaning that I tried to take into account the complexity of individuals and avoid reducing them to cultural facts. As Dervin (2011)

elaborates, liquid interculturality rejects the "internal and external descriptions of 'cultures' and their 'members' as truth-conditional evidence or arguments" (p. 41). However, in the second substudy for instance, in attempting to clarify an intercultural interaction, I talk about the cultural concept of *târof*, which is "very common among Iranians". While I intentionally avoided using the term "Iranian culture", this might be interpreted as a solidified vision of culture. However, it is not intended to be so. To clarify my point, I could have perhaps said that *târof* is a familiar concept in Iran. Whether or not practicing it is very common among Iranians is a more complex matter and out of the scope of this study.[6]

Finally, the purpose of this research was not to generalize the results to all Iranian English language learners. While many of the issues raised in this study may have relevance for other learners and even in other contexts, such as global textbooks, cultural stereotypes and the effects of the globalization of English, this was a small-scale project aiming to raise awareness in those areas. It is to be hoped that further research will elucidate the issues of interest in more detail and provide theoretical and practical solutions to them.

[6] For more on the concept of *târof* see for instance: Sharifian (2011), Koutlaki (2002), and Asdjodi (2001)

SUMMARY

In this dissertation research, I have attempted to find out what role English plays in learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness. For several reasons, this question is especially important and interesting in the context of Iran. First, English language teaching in Iran – a multilingual and multicultural country – is characterized by two contradictory models with completely different approaches to culture: the indigenized model utilized in the public sector and the international Anglo-Americanized model implemented in the private sector (Borjian, 2013, 2015). Moreover, although some research has been conducted on the representation of culture in English language textbooks used in Iran, textbooks have not been analyzed as to how, if at all, they support learners' intercultural competence or intercultural awareness. Finally, Iranian learners' experiences of learning and using English outside of formal environments and its role in their intercultural awareness have not previously been researched. This study contributes to filling this gap by investigating the relationship between English and intercultural awareness, both in the formal teaching of English, by analyzing a series of textbooks, and in informal learning and use of the language by conducting and analyzing in-depth interviews with learners.

My interest in the relationship between English and intercultural awareness stems on the one hand from research on the place of culture in language teaching and learning, and on the other from research in English as a global lingua franca in an increasingly globalized world.

The relevance of culture in language teaching and learning has been recognized, as more emphasis is now put on communication, reflecting the nature of the increasingly globalized world we live in. In line with this recognition, the goal of learning a foreign language has shifted away from native speaker competence towards efficient communication with people of various cultural backgrounds and groupings, which entails intercultural competence (Byram, 1997, 2009; Kramsch, 2014a; Sharifian 2013); however the particulars of the concept have been debated. Unless we can pin down exactly what these are, we will fail to educate interculturally competent learners.

With globalization and the spread of English around the world, English has become the primary lingua franca in intercultural communication (Hulmbauer et al., 2008). The earlier essentialist perspectives on culture, which regarded it as a homogeneous static entity associated with a nation, are no longer relevant in today's world. Today, culture should be viewed as hybrid, heterogeneous and emergent (Baker, 2011, 2015). Participants in intercultural communication are constantly moving between local, national and global cultural frames of reference in order to make sense of interactions and make themselves understood. Such a view should be adopted in accounts of intercultural competence, which has a significant place in learning foreign languages, English being the most popular of these.

According to Pennycook (2007) "English is closely tied to processes of globalization: a language of threat, desire, destruction and opportunity" (p. 5).

As he describes it, the case of English is two-fold. On the one hand, it is a primary tool of cultural imperialism, which is responsible for the exclusion and destruction of local cultures in favor of Western hegemony and thus could lead to cultural homogenization. On the other hand, it is the leading language in global flows of knowledge and culture that can be used and appropriated by individuals and communities as a window of boundless possibilities, including the possibility to resist. It is only by acknowledging this complex position and its implications that we can train learners of English who are politically engaged and interculturally competent.

This dissertation is based on three original substudies, and thus is a so-called article-based dissertation. Each substudy of the dissertation addresses certain issues in relation to the overarching research question, and thus has its own focus and more detailed research question(s).

The aim of the first substudy was to investigate to what extent the textbooks used in a private language institute in Iran improve learners' intercultural competence. The data consisted of seven global English textbooks published by Oxford University Press (see section 3.1.1). The theoretical framework of the study was intercultural competence as defined by Byram (1997) as a part of his comprehensive model of intercultural communicative competence. The methodology was primarily directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) of the learning tasks, based on the different components of intercultural competence, called saviors (Byram, 1997). In total, more than 5 000 learning tasks were analyzed. The content analysis of the data was qualitative in nature, although, to clarify the results, some data characteristics were later converted into numbers, using descriptive statistics.

The second substudy focused on the traits and details of intercultural awareness of Iranian learners. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight participants. The theoretical framework was Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness. Four main themes, which were considered to have captured the essence of intercultural awareness, namely one's own culture, complexity of cultures, cultural stereotypes, and negotiation and mediation between cultures were drawn from the model. The same themes were then used in thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2018) of the data, with a mainly deductive orientation.

In the third substudy, the research aim was to explore how Iranian learners' experiences in learning and using English enhance or hinder their intercultural awareness. This substudy was based on the same set of data, gathered through interviews with eight Iranian learners of English. The theoretical framework was Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness, as in the previous substudy, and the analytical method was recursive and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2018), a hybrid approach utilizing both inductive and deductive orientations.

The key findings were discussed in relation to the overarching research question:

How does learning and using English relate to intercultural awareness?

First, the findings showed that English had a positive role in enhancing learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness. In both the formal

education of English (first substudy) and informal experiences of learners in using the language (second and third substudies), the separability of language and culture was inherently recognized. The relationship between language and culture was seen from a postmodernist perspective in which no essentialist bond exists between language and culture (Baker, 2011). In other words, learners' understanding of culture and intercultural awareness was not restricted to knowing about the so-called national cultures of English-speaking countries, or to native speakers or writers of English. For the sample of learners studied, English was rather like a bridge, connecting them to people from different cultures speaking different first languages. However, this positive role of English was mostly found in the learners' individual experiences of learning and using the language, rather than the formal education they received in private institutes, which centered around global textbooks.

Second, the findings revealed the role of English in feeding into cultural stereotypes, both in formal education through language-learning textbooks, and in learners' own experiences. In language education, according to Baker (2015), cultures tend to be portrayed in an essentialist manner, with the focus mainly on national paradigms. The textbook analysis in this research (first substudy) yielded the same results. Such a reductionist presentation of cultures potentially supports national/cultural stereotypes, in turn hindering the development of intercultural awareness in learners. The results of the interviews (second and third substudies) also underlined the learners' culturally stereotypical views, acquired partially from their intercultural interactions in English. What led to the adoption of cultural stereotypes by the learners was a failure to recognize the existence of "multiple voices or perspectives within any cultural grouping" (Baker, 2011, p. 203), particularly national ones. In other words, despite the awareness that language and culture are separable, the relationship between a nation and a culture remained to a great extent inseparable, both in learners' minds and in the minds of textbook writers.

Finally, the findings of the study highlighted the twofold role of English in in an age of globalization. On the one hand, both in formal education, through the medium of global textbooks, and in learners' own experiences in learning and using the language, English functioned as a tool for accessing – and arguably spreading – Western products, cultures and ideologies (see Phillipson, 1999), or for portraying other cultures in a superficial, reductionist way, from a predominantly Western point of view. In this way, English potentially hinders the development of intercultural awareness. On the other hand, English acted as a bridge to alternative cultures and countercultures outside of the uniformity and homogeneity of mainstream cultural products and values (see Pennycook, 2007), thereby enhancing learners' intercultural awareness.

Despite having had limitations, mainly regarding the participants and the sample size of the textbooks, this study had theoretical as well as pedagogical implication. The theoretical implications relate to the use of Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence and Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness.

The pedagogical implication could be taken up in curriculum development, syllabus planning, textbook writing and teacher training.

The purpose of this research was not to generalize the results to all Iranian English language learners. While many of the issues raised in this study may have relevance for other learners and in other contexts, such as global textbooks, cultural stereotypes and the effects of the globalization of English, this was a small-scale project aiming to raise awareness in those areas. It is hoped that further research will elucidate the issues of interest in more detail and provide theoretical and practical solutions to them.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

PRESENTATION OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS: THE CASE OF A PRIVATE LANGUAGE SCHOOL IN IRAN

by

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Presentation of Intercultural Competence in English Language Textbooks: The Case of a Private Language School in Iran

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Abstract: As the objective of learning a foreign language is now defined in terms of intercultural competence, all aspects of an English as a foreign language (EFL) program are expected to be geared towards cultivating interculturality. The issue is specifically significant in the Iranian context, because of the indeterminate status of English language in the country, and also the growing need of intercultural competence for Iranians. The present study investigated to what extent the learning tasks in textbooks for adult courses in a private language institute aimed at increasing learners' intercultural competence, and what dimensions of intercultural competence they addressed. The methodology centered on qualitative theory-based content analysis of the textbooks (targeted at an international audience), categorized according to the themes in Byram's (1997) model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Indicating the little emphasis on developing intercultural competence, and also the unequal share of the different dimensions of intercultural competence in the textbooks, the findings of the study cast doubt on the appropriateness of these so-called "global" English textbooks, especially for Iranian learners. Hence, the results of the study can have pedagogical implications for stakeholders in EFL education in general, and for curriculum developers and material designers in Iran, in particular.

Key words: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), intercultural competence, interculturality, textbook analysis, Iran

1. Introduction

The present study is part of a broader project investigating the role of culture and intercultural competence (IC) in English as a foreign language (EFL) in Iran. Research on interculturality is of specific significance in this context for a number of reasons. First of all, the English language has an equivocal status in Iran. Before the Islamic Revolution in 1979, due to the governmental ties with the western world, especially the United States and the UK, the English language received extensive attention; however, after the revolution, it faced waves of hostility, because politically and culturally the new government opposed the west (Davari & Aghagolzadeh, 2015). The post-revolutionary cynicism against the western culture has somehow been attenuated with the recent developments in information technology and telecommunication, and with the establishment of English as the global language of trade and education, more people are changing their views regarding the need to foster intercultural communication with the world (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008, cited in Mirzaei & Forouzandeh, 2013). Still

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English is regarded as the enemy's language (Borjian, 2013, cited in Davari & Aghagolzade, 2015) and at the same time a path to progress (Riazi, 2005, cited in Davari & Aghagolzade, 2015). The second reason which makes interculturality distinctly important in the Iranian context is the substantial number of people leaving the country every year. There are already four to five million Iranians living in 32 countries around the world. According to a report by the International Monetary Fund in 2009, Iran, with an annual loss of 150,000 to 180,000 specialists, topped the list of developing and developed countries which lose their academic elite. There is no gainsaying the fact that these people need to develop IC in order to be successful in culturally different contexts. Besides, according to the Iranian Ministry of Interior in 2015, more than two million Afghan refugees live in Iran. And last but not least, Iran, with a population of around 80 million is a multicultural country with various ethnic groups who speak different languages and have different cultures, hence the importance of cultivating IC even for those who stay in the country.

The importance of IC in foreign and second language education has been recognized since 1980s (Baker, 2009). Today, due to the developments in transportation, telecommunication, and information technology, and also through the process of globalization, cultural exchange has increased drastically. In fact, people of various cultural backgrounds, now more than ever in history, have contact with each other (Fantini, 2009). Such changes have affected not only industry, health, politics, and business, but also education (Sercu, 2005). Accordingly, the objective of learning a foreign language has changed in important ways in recent years as well. It used to be defined as the ability of a person to act linguistically, sociolinguistically and pragmatically appropriate in a foreign language (Council of Europe, 2001). However, today, within an intercultural approach to language education, learning a foreign language is defined in terms of IC which is defined as "the ability of a person to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures" (Meyer, 1991, p. 137). It is further explained that adequacy and flexibility refer to the fact that there are cultural differences, and one should be able to handle the problems that such differences might lead to. In other words, IC "implies a normative transformation of self that overcomes claims of absolute truth and encourages the subject (and the community) to live with differences and constructively engage with the Other" (Witte, 2014, p. 232). Hence, teaching a foreign language should take place in a way that the learner's view of the world which is dominated by his own culture develops into a multicultural one (Kaikkonen, 1997, p. 49).

For Iranian citizens there are two systematic ways to learn English: in public schools and/or in private language institutes. Students start to learn English as a compulsory course from grade 6 (age 11) onwards in public schools, where all educational policies, including curriculum development, textbooks and materials, and testing system are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education (Zohrabi, Torabi & Baybourdiani, 2012). In public schools, the goal of teaching English is mainly to master the grammar (Zohrabi et al., 2012; Musawi, 2001; Hayati & Mashhadi, 2010) with hardly any reference to foreign cultures (Agari, 2015; Mahboubi & Javdani, 2012; Aliakbari, 2004). Due to the perceived failure of the public sector in English language education, and also during a wave of privatization from 1989, private language institutes became prevalent and popular, and at the beginning of the 21st century, along with the growth of globalization, the Internet and their social and cultural influences, the private sector flourished (Davari & Aghagolzadeh). Unlike public schools, the teaching approach in private institutes is mainly communicative language teaching (CLT), and they use "global" English textbooks, such as American File, Top Notch and New Interchange Series, published by international publishing houses (Leather & Motallebzadeh, 2015).

Although the idea that it is actually possible to produce English language textbooks for a global market,

bearing in mind that "one size fits all", has been a matter of dispute (Harmer, 2001, cited in Lund, 2007), publishing "global" English textbooks has been an expanding and competitive industry (Gray, 2002). A "global" coursebook which Bell and Grower (2011) believe is misleadingly called so is defined as "a coursebook for a restricted number of teaching situations in many different countries rather than all teaching situations in all countries" (p. 117). Bell and Grower (2011), who are themselves writers of such textbooks, claim that in order for international materials to be successful, not only the publishers, but also the users should make compromises. Despite contrary arguments, they believe international course materials could in fact foster individualization and creativity, if the teacher is ready or allowed to adapt them based on the characteristics of their students and the context in which they teach.

As for the specific Iranian context, there is a mismatch between learners' need for IC, and the textbooks used in EFL education. On the one hand, in public schools, foreign culture has hardly any place in English language curriculum and in the textbooks which are produced by national authors. On the other hand, in private institutes, textbooks used are targeted at a general international audience. The fact that there are no English textbooks specifically produced for Iranian learners, ones in which different cultures are presented, makes it difficult to say whether "global" textbooks are the best option for Iranian learners' interculturality. At the moment, they are the only option for them. Whether such textbooks could foster IC in learners is a question tackled in the present study.

2. Review of literature

2.1 Byram's Definition of IC

Despite efforts to develop the notion of IC for more than five decades (Deardorff, 2011), researchers still do not seem to have a consensus on the terminology around this concept (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2009). Terms used in the literature include biculturalism, multiculturalism, multilingualism, communicative competence, cross-cultural awareness, cross-cultural communication, cultural or intercultural sensitivity, global competence, and international communication (Fantini, 2009). As for IC, there are numerous definitions, frameworks, and models published. For a synoptic review of IC theories and models, see Spitzberg and Changnon (2009). In her doctoral dissertation, Deardorff (2006) applied a methodology called Delphi to document a definition for IC based on the opinions of a number of experts in the field. Based on the results of her research, Byram's (1997) definition was top-rated. Byram's definition of IC is part of his comprehensive model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). This model which is based on a foreign language teaching background is applied as the theoretical framework in the present study.

Byram (1997) proposes a comprehensive model of ICC which renounces the notion of native speaker as a model for foreign language learning and teaching and instead introduces the notion of intercultural speaker. An intercultural speaker is an interlocutor who brings his/her national identity, language, and culture to an intercultural interaction (Byram, 1997). In his model of ICC, which is developed for an educational context, Byram (1997) distinguishes between linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and intercultural competence.

To clarify the concept of IC, six components are proposed which are called saviors, and some educational objectives regarding each of them are defined (Byram, 1997). The first component, savoirs (knowledge) concerns knowledge of one's own national identity and culture and also those of others. It includes, but is not limited to historical, geographical, political, and social knowledge. Among the objectives for this dimension is also to know about the levels of formality in different social interactions. The second component, savoir etre (attitudes) which

is fundamental to IC is about curiosity and openness, and willingness to devalue one's own presuppositions and valuing other perspectives. The objectives also include a willingness to take opportunities in order to engage with otherness, which is different from seeking out the exotic. The relationship between the first two components is not one of cause and effect. In other words, more knowledge does not necessarily result in positive attitudes. The third component, savoir comprendre (skills of interpreting and relating) is the ability to compare and contrast cultural issues in one's own culture and a foreign culture. It is also about the ability to identify ethnocentric perspectives, and areas of misunderstanding in interactions. The fourth and the fifth components are respectively savoir apprendre (skills of discovery) and savoir faire (skills of interaction). The main objective in the last two components is not only to acquire new knowledge about cultures from various sources, but also to operate one's knowledge in real-time communication. An intercultural speaker knows how to draw on his/her attitudes and skills in order to ensure understanding and avoid dysfunction. The last component, savoirs' engager (critical cultural awareness), is about the ability to critically evaluate cultural practices, products, and perspectives. This evaluation needs to be based on explicit ideological criteria.

Some of the specific objectives of IC are very demanding and complex, and therefore not compatible with usual classroom work. To overcome the limitations of the classroom, Byram (1997) describes two other categories of locations for acquiring IC; namely, fieldwork and independent learning. In each of these so-called locations, he specifies the roles of the teacher and the learner. Moreover, he explains how some dimensions of IC could be better developed in which locations.

2.2 The Importance of Textbooks in English Language Education

In spite of the debates for and against textbooks as the best medium for delivering language learning materials, they continue to dominate the language teaching market (Tomlinson, 2012). Textbooks have a central role in foreign language education; one that scholars across time have believed cannot be overestimated: they control a major share of classroom teaching (Tergujeff, 2014). Textbooks can have various roles, such as that of a teacher, a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority, a de-skillser, and an ideology (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). They provide a map for both teachers and learners so they can see what has already been done, and what they should expect in future lessons (Tomlinson, 2003, cited in Demir & Ertas, 2014). The significance of textbooks is emphasized to the extent that learning programs might have no influence without them (Richards, 2001). Indeed, it is not the actual reality that students learn through textbooks, it is the reality created by the text (Karvonen, 1995, cited in Lappalainen, 2011).

2.3 Culture and Intercultural Issues in "Global" English Textbooks

Although textbooks have been a subject of interest for scholars for decades (Andarab, 2015), they had not been systematically studied until the 1990s (Elomaa, 2009, cited in Lappalainen, 2011). Numerous studies have analyzed representation of culture or intercultural elements in English language textbooks. What follows is an overview of some recent ones which have focused on "global" English textbooks.

Hamiloglu & Mendi (2010) analyzed five EFL textbooks published by well-known publishing houses: Oxford, Longman and Express Publishing for cross-cultural/intercultural elements. What they were especially interested in was to find out if the frequency of intercultural elements was chronologically related to their publication date, as they had expected to see more interculturality in newer textbooks. However, according to their results, that was not the case. Tozun (2012) analyzed a series of textbooks published by Oxford University Press which were used in public secondary schools in Northern Cyprus. The analysis focused on the cultural content

with specific reference to intercultural sensitivity. She found out that the culture presented in the textbooks is dynamic, and not limited to British or American culture. She also concluded that although throughout the textbooks, learners are encouraged to reflect on cultural issues, mainly by comparing and contrasting different cultures — comparable to the skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre) as defined by Byram (1997) — the textbooks hardly fostered intercultural sensitivity. Zarei & Khalessi (2011) analyzed the "cultural density" in the New Interchange Series textbooks, published by Cambridge University Press, based on a model of cultural patterns. Their results indicated strong cultural biases and a tacit goal to acculturate language learners to the target language culture. In a more recent study, Andarab (2015) investigated a series of English as an International Language (EIL) coursebooks, and concluded that throughout the textbooks essentialist notions of cultures were presented in which they were considered national entities. This led to overgeneralization and stereotypization of foreign societies.

In the studies mentioned above, different models and frameworks were applied which were either drawn from the literature, or developed by the authors themselves. Moreover, they addressed the cultural content of the textbooks from different aspects. Nevertheless, there has been no research investigating how IC — as defined by Byram (1997) — is addressed in English textbooks targeted at an international audience. The present study attempted to fill this gap. It is specifically important because of the prevalence of "global" English textbooks in Iran, and also the growing need for IC among Iranian learners.

The context of the present study is Safir Language Academy, one of the largest and most popular private language institutes in the country, with over 60,000 students and around 1,200 teachers in 72 branches in different cities. Like in many other foreign language programs, textbooks have a central role in EFL courses in this institute, and in a way, they guide teachers and learners, therefore it is worth investigating how IC is addressed in them. The study attempted to answer the following questions:

(1) To what extent do textbooks for adult learners in a private language school in Iran aim at improving learners' intercultural competence?

(2) What dimensions of intercultural competence do the learning tasks found in the textbooks address?

In order to answer these questions, both qualitative and quantitative methods were applied. Qualitative methods were used to determine which dimensions of IC (if at all) the learning tasks in the textbooks address, while quantitative methods were used to find out the ratio of IC learning tasks, and the different dimensions they addressed, to the total number of learning tasks.

3. Methodology

3.1 Materials

Data consisted of seven textbooks; the ones used in courses targeted at adult learners: English Result Elementary, English Result Pre-intermediate, English Result Intermediate, English Result Upper-intermediate, FCE Result, CAE Result, Proficiency Masterclass. They are all published by Oxford University Press and thus used internationally. In Table 1 more information about the textbooks can be found. (Note: CEF, or the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, is a guideline developed by the Council of Europe to describe foreign language proficiency at six levels.)

3.2 Data Analysis

The methodology centered on directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) of the learning tasks in the seven textbooks. In this approach, analysis is based on an existing theory, framework or model. This can help focus the research questions, and also initial coding categories. In the present study, content analysis was categorized according to the dimensions described in Byram's (1997) model of ICC: savoirs (knowledge), savoir etre (attitudes), savoir comprendre (skills of interpreting and relating), savoir apprendre (skills of discovery).

Table 1 Textbooks Analyzed

Title	Publishing year	Objective
English Result Elementary	2007	Takes a student from false-beginner level to A1+ on CEF
English Result Pre-intermediate	2008	Takes a strong A1-level student to A2+ on CEF
English Result Intermediate	2009	Takes a strong A2-level student to B1 or B1+ on CEF
English Result Upper-intermediate	2010	Takes a strong B1-level student to B2 on CEF
FCE Result	2011	Prepares the student for *Cambridge English: First* (FCE) exam which corresponds to level B2 on CEF
CAE Result	2008	Prepares the student for *Cambridge English: Advanced* (CAE) exam which corresponds to level C1 on CEF
Proficiency Master class	2002	Prepares the student for Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) exam which corresponds to level C2 on CEF

After reading thoroughly Byram's account of IC, and also a preliminary analysis of the first textbook, a decision was made to remove savoir faire (skills of interaction) and savoirs' engager (critical cultural awareness) from the analysis. In savoir faire (skills of interaction), the objective is to "use in real time an appropriate combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to interact with interlocutors from a different country and culture" (p. 53). The problem lies in the fact that Byram's model of ICC takes a national culture as the basis for teaching IC. Therefore, based on the objective described in Table 2, whether a learning task in the textbooks, for instance, a pair work or a group discussion, could improve learners' skills of interaction (savoir faire) depends on the learners' nationality and is beyond the knowledge of a textbook analyst. Moreover, when Byram (1997) classifies locations of acquiring IC into three broad categories, namely, classroom, fieldwork, and independent learning, he claims "what the classroom cannot usually offer is the opportunity to develop the skills of interaction in real time" (p. 68). He further explains; however, that in a second language as opposed to a foreign language classroom context, or in some immersion and bilingual programs, this specific opportunity exists, because in these context, learners interact with interlocutors from different nationalities/cultures.

Besides, savoirs' engager (critical cultural awareness) was omitted from the analysis, mainly because it sums up and includes all the other dimension of IC. It specially has overlaps with objectives of savoir comprendre (skills of interpreting and relating) savoir apprendre (skills of discovery) and savoir faire (skills of interaction). However, what is specific for savoirs' engager (critical cultural awareness) is the evaluative dimension "especially for purposes of clarifying one's own ideological perspective and engaging with others consciously on the basis of that perspective" (Byram, 1997, p. 101). In the textbooks analyzed, although there are some specific learning tasks inviting learners to make an evaluative analysis of events, concepts or controversies (such as global warming, prisoners of conscience and Amnesty International) drawing upon their political and ideological perspectives, almost all other tasks belonging to the category of savoir comprendre (skills of interpreting and relating) could also improve learners' critical cultural awareness, depending on how the teacher leads the learners in the

arguments, and how conscience the learners themselves are in approaching those subjects. Moreover, when elaborating on how different locations for acquiring IC (classroom, fieldwork, independent learning) are specifically suitable for which dimensions, Byram does not mention savoirs' engager. In a way, this dimension is concerned with the educational system, or "political education" using Byram's words, in which teaching and learning take place, rather than the materials used.

3.3 Unitizing

All seven textbooks have 10–12 units, and each unit has a theme; such as travel, shopping, and health. In English Result series, the following skills are being focused on: reading, listening, writing, and interaction. Besides, each unit has grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation lessons related to the theme. In FCE Result, and CAE Result, each unit consists of the following sections: Lead in, Reading, Vocabulary, Grammar, Listening, Speaking, Use of English, Writing, and Review. In Proficiency Master class, the sections for each unit are: Reading, Language in use, Comprehension and summary, Listening, Speaking, Writing, and Overview. The structure of all the textbooks is based on learning tasks which come in different forms and focus on different skills. As these learning tasks are the smallest units which bear all the information required for analyzing textbooks, they were defined as the units of analysis.

3.4 Coding

In order to have clear criteria in determining whether a learning task fosters IC, Byram's (1997) objectives for each dimension of IC were used; especially those which are relevant to classroom as a learning location, because as Byram (1997) maintains, some objectives he mentions for each *savoir* are more complex and also more demanding than what normally leads the work in a classroom context. These objectives are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2 Criteria for Identifying and Analyzing IC Learning Tasks

Dimension of IC	Objectives	Description of objectives
Knowledge (*savoirs*)	Factual knowledge of cultures	Tasks in this category contribute to increase learners' knowledge of culture specific (their own/foreign) events, products, significant individuals, emblems, conventions, and institutions.
	Knowledge of the levels of formality in social interaction	Tasks in this category contribute to increase learners' knowledge of appropriate use of language and levels of formality in different modes of interaction.
Attitudes (*Savoir etre*)	Discovering new perspectives on cultural issues	Tasks in this category invite learners to find different perspectives, for example by having a discussion.
	Questioning values and presuppositions on cultural issues	Tasks in this category attract learners' attention to presuppositions, generalizations, or stereotypes about cultural issues.
Skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*)	Relating cultures and cultural issues	Tasks in this category invite learners to compare and contrast cultural events, conventions and issues to see the differences and similarities.
	Identifying ethnocentric perspectives	Tasks in this category invite learners to analyze events or documents in order to find ethnocentric perspectives.
	Identifying causes of dysfunction in interaction and mediate between the interlocutors	Tasks in this category invite learners to identify causes of misunderstanding in interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present and/or help the interlocutors find a common ground.
Skills of discovery (*savoir apprendre*)	Acquiring and eliciting new information on cultural issues	Tasks in this category invite learners to find out new knowledge of cultures from different sources.

3.5 Examples of Learning Tasks

In the textbooks analyzed, there are quite a few types of learning tasks improving learners' knowledge of cultures (saviors). They include, but are not limited to cloze tests, listening, writing, and speaking exercises, pictures with short descriptions, strips of short stories and reading passages followed by questions. They provide learners with diverse aspects of culture, such as arts, literature, celebrations, traditions, rituals, and social and political organizations around the world. For instance, in CAE Result (2008, p. 21) learners listen to two people talking about two festivals; Kattenwoensdog (Belgium's cat festival which originally dates back to 12th century) and La Tomatina (the Spanish festival in which people throw tomatoes at each other), and then answer some questions. Another task in English Result Upper-intermediate (2010, p. 49), invites learners to read a short passage entitled "A song of freedom" and then answer a few questions individually and with a partner. "A song of freedom" is about the American Civil War and the history of slavery in the US.

The learning tasks addressing learners' attitudes towards cultures (savoir etre) are mostly of two types. Some of them are group/pair discussions in which learners are invited to agree or decide on something, or simply to exchange opinions. These tasks help learners discover new perspectives and learn to value them. Other tasks start with questions where learners are supposed to think about some cultural issues such as the importance of money, friends, or traveling, the notion of luck, and the significance of preserving language and land for future generations. They are then asked to read a text, listen to an audio extract, or have a group discussion on the same issues. In this way learners can question generalizations, stereotypes and presuppositions about cultural matters. For example, in English Result Intermediate (2009, pp. 122–123), firstly, learners read some short extracts entitled "Extreme Decisions". As the title suggests, they are about decisions some people have had to make when faced with moral dilemmas. In one of them, for instance, a group of passengers whose plane had crashed on high snowy mountains, left with no food, decided to eat the dead bodies after a few days, in order to survive. After reading these passages, learners are invited to discuss them and share their views with a partner.

Similar to the learning tasks improving learners' attitudes towards cultures (savoir etre), those which address learners' skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre) are also mainly in the form of pair/group discussions on topics like honesty or white lies, politeness, forms of greeting, fashion and religion. In addition, there are also writing exercises, reading or listening extracts, and questionnaires followed by some questions. In all of these tasks, learners are invited to compare and contrast different issues in various cultures in order to see their similarities and differences. For instance, in English Result Pre-intermediate (2008, p. 54) there is a short text about giving gifts in China. Learners are supposed to read it and then (if they are not Chinese) think in what ways their country is different from China when it comes to choosing and giving gifts. In another learning task in Proficiency Master class (2002, p. 117) learners discuss the characteristics of family life in their own country and any other countries that they know. They also talk about how important families are in their culture. In this case, although they might come from the same country, family life might not have the same status in their subcultures.

To improve their skills of discovery (savoir apprendre), learners have to acquire and elicit information on cultural issues from different sources. In the textbooks analyzed, there are only three learning tasks addressing these skills. In two of them learners are supposed to ask their partners some questions. In the one in English Result Elementary (2007, p. 44) the topic is everyday life and the one in English Result Pre-intermediate (2008, p. 93) is about table manners. The third one in English Result Elementary (2007, p. 104) invites learners to ask their teachers questions to find out about Pablo Neruda, the Chilean poet.

4. Results

In this section, the quantitative results of the textbook analysis are reported. Every single learning task in each textbook was examined to see if they had, in one way or another, intercultural objectives. If a learning task included audio or visual aspects, they were taken into account as well. Altogether, more than 5,000 learning tasks were analyzed based on the coding system described in Table 2.

The first research question was to what extent the textbooks aim at improving learners' IC. To answer this question, for each textbook, the ratio of the learning tasks aimed at improving learners' IC to the total number of tasks was determined using descriptive statistics. In Figure 1, the ratio of IC learning tasks to the total number of learning tasks in each of the seven textbooks are displayed. Learning tasks addressing more than one dimension were counted once.

Out of the seven textbooks, Proficiency Master class had the highest (10%), and English Result Elementary, the lowest (3%) ratio of IC learning tasks. The second textbook with the highest proportion of IC learning tasks was English Result Upper-intermediate (9%). English Result Pre-intermediate had a slightly higher ratio of IC learning tasks (5%) than English Result Elementary. The other three textbooks, i.e., English Result Intermediate, FCE Result, and CAE Result had the same (6%) proportion of IC learning tasks. On the whole, there was only little emphasis on IC development in the analyzed textbooks.

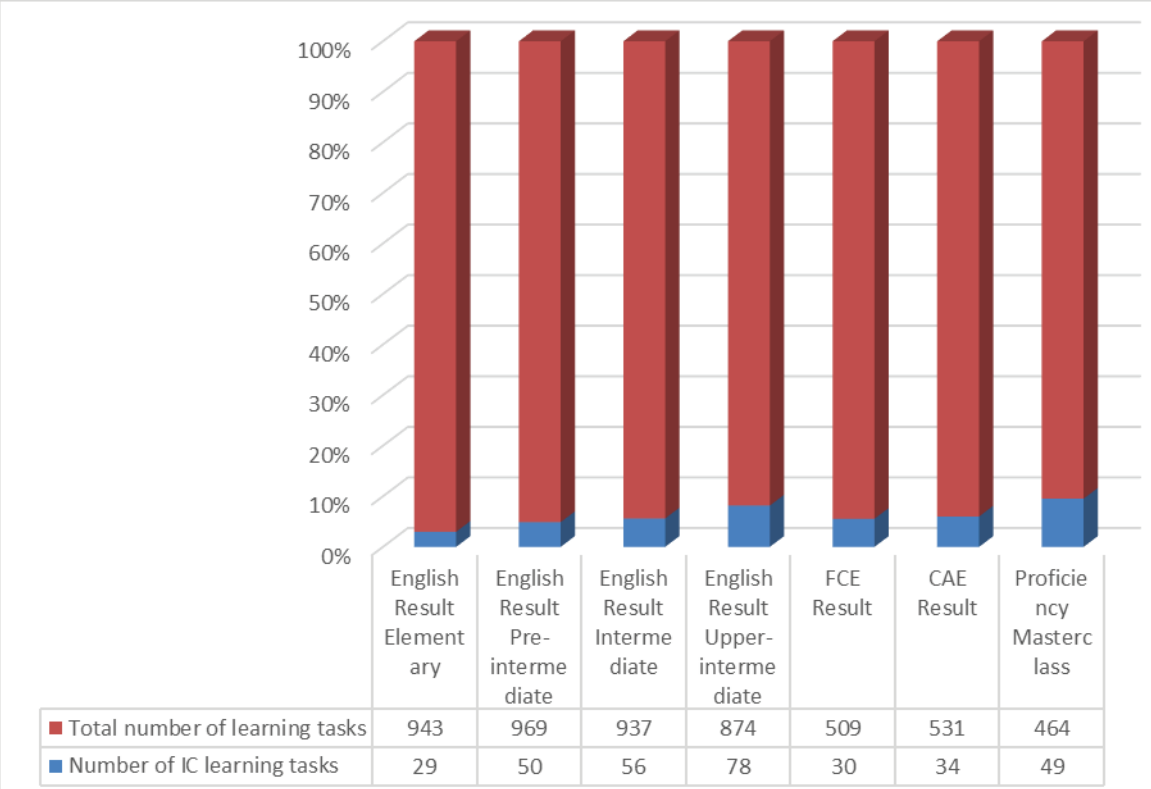

Figure 1 Ratio of Learning Tasks Aimed at Increasing Learners IC to the Total Number of Tasks in Seven Textbooks

The second research question was what dimensions of IC the learning tasks found in the textbooks addressed. To answer this question, firstly, the learning tasks which were related to each of the four dimensions of IC —

savoirs (knowledge), savoir etre (attitudes), savoir comprendre (skills of interpreting and relating), and savoir apprendre (skills of discovery) — were counted in each of the seven textbooks. Secondly, the ratio of the total number of tasks for each dimension in all textbooks, to the overall number of tasks in all textbooks (5, 227) and also to the overall number of IC learning tasks was determined using descriptive statistics.

In Table 3, the number of the learning tasks corresponding to different dimensions of IC in each textbook is displayed. Learning tasks addressing more than one dimension were counted separately.

Table 3 Dimensions of IC Addressed in the Learning Tasks of the Seven Textbooks

Dimension of IC	*savoirs*	*savoir etre*	*savoir comprendre*	*savoir apprendre*
English Result Elementary	23 (62%)	5 (13%)	7 (19%)	2 (5%)
English Result Pre-intermediate	43 (67%)	11 (17%)	9 (14%)	1 (2%)
English Result Intermediate	35 (48%)	18 (25%)	20 (27%)	0
English Result Upper-intermediate	45 (45%)	37 (37%)	17 (17%)	0
FCE Result	8 (25%)	20 (62%)	4 (12%)	0
CAE Result	15 (43%)	17 (48%)	3 (8%)	0
Proficiency Master class	21 (38%)	29 (53%)	5 (9%)	0
Total number of IC learning tasks in textbooks	190 (48%)	137 (35%)	65 (16%)	3 (1%)

Some diversity was observed regarding the IC dimensions addressed in the textbooks. In the four textbooks of English Result series, in most of IC learning tasks, the objective was to increase learners' knowledge of cultures (savoirs). Whereas, in the other three textbooks, namely, FCE Result, CAE Result, and Proficiency Master class, a higher ratio of IC learning tasks addressed learners' attitudes towards cultures (savoir etre). Moreover, the skills of discovery (savoir apprendre) were only addressed three times, and only in two textbooks. Figure 2 displays the ratio of the dimensions of IC in the learning tasks of the textbook data.

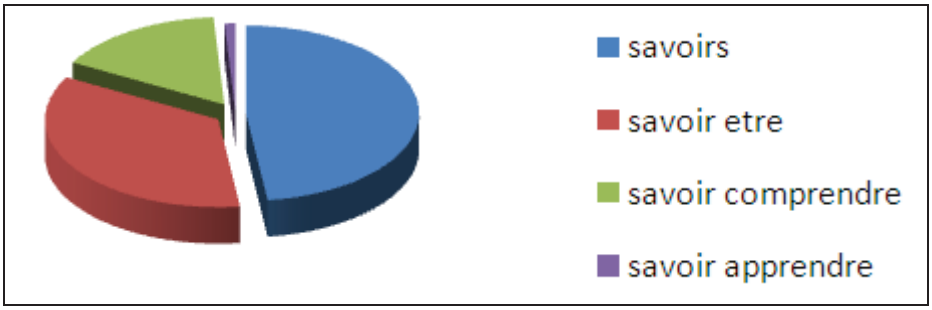

Figure 2 Distribution of Dimensions of IC Addressed in the Learning Tasks of the Textbooks

Almost half (48%) of IC learning tasks belonged to the dimension of saviors (knowledge), 35% to savoir etre (attitudes), 16% to savoir comprendre (skills of interpreting and relating), and only 1% to savoir apprendre (skills of discovery). Overall, although all dimensions of IC were addressed in the textbooks, their distribution was quite uneven, and they were not equally emphasized.

5. Discussion

The present study attempted to answer two main research questions about a series of English textbooks designed for an international audience, used in a private language institute in Iran: firstly to what extent (if at all) they could improve learners' IC and secondly, what dimensions of IC they addressed. The theoretical framework used was Byram's (1997) model of ICC and specifically his definition of IC. The analysis of the seven textbooks showed that in each textbook, only 3% to 10% of all the learning tasks aimed at increasing learners' IC. Moreover, according to the results, the four dimensions of IC were not equally addressed in the learning tasks of the textbooks.

The majority of IC learning tasks (48%) provides learners with bits and pieces of information about different cultures (savoirs), rather than train them to acquire new knowledge independently (savoir apprendre). Furthermore, in many of the learning tasks, culture is directly or indirectly defined in national terms. For instance, in a learning task in English Result Upper-intermediate (2010, pp. 60–61), learners read a short passage about someone's personal experience at the end of which it is concluded that silence is not a problem for Finns. Such generalizations could lead to stereotypes about cultures, and hence negatively affect intercultural communication. Byram (1997) claims in classrooms, learners must acquire the "underlying principles" (p. 69) of different skills and knowledge and also the right way of generalization, so they can learn from their new independent experiences. This suggests an approach to teach about culture in its own right, in other words, on the definition of culture, and not just about different cultures. In the textbooks analyzed in the present study, there was nothing concrete in this line, but perhaps it is more a matter of a teaching approach. In case of many learning tasks, like the one mentioned above, the teacher has a crucial role in the way learning takes place. For instance, he/she could attract learners' attentions to the issue of cultural stereotypes and overgeneralizations, even if the focus of the task is something else. Unfortunately however, "language teachers are supposed to teach nothing but language; culture is reserved for the professors of literature" (Kramsch, 2013). I believe it is something which definitely needs to be considered in teacher training programs in English language education in Iran. Unless teachers are interculturally competent and knowledgeable, it is doubtful that they can help foster interculturality of their students.

However, having interculturally knowledgeable teachers is not a sufficient condition to meet the needs of Iranian learners. Apart from the low ratio of IC learning tasks, the major problem here is the fact that the textbooks are not specifically designed for Iranian English learners, and thus their specific backgrounds and needs are not taken into account. In fact, the name of the country, Iran, is not even mentioned in the seven textbooks. Although some cultural issues are touched upon in some learning tasks, they are not necessarily the most relevant ones for the Iranian learner. In some of these tasks, people's experiences of different cultures are briefly discussed. For instance, in a series of listening tasks in English Result Upper-intermediate (2010, p. 110), a Mexican woman shares her experiences of living in England for seven years. Although such tasks could help improve learners' knowledge of other cultures (savoir), and sometimes their skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre) or their attitudes towards cultures (savoir etre), they could be much more helpful if they were somehow related to Iran. For instance, experiences of Iranian immigrants or refugees in other countries are probably more useful and meaningful for Iranian learners. On the other hand, the issue of Afghan immigrants in Iran, their living conditions, problems, and relationships to Iranians is something that an Iranian learner could more easily grasp, and make use of to develop IC.

According to Byram (1997), an important part of IC is to know one's own culture. In his model, this is part of

the broader dimension saviors which includes knowledge of other cultures as well. In the analyzed textbooks, most of the IC learning tasks belonging to the dimension of saviors, improved learners' knowledge of other cultures, not that of their own. One main advantage of textbooks designed specifically for an Iranian learner is that they help learners find their own stance as individuals in the cultural groups that they belong to. For instance, by reading about Muslim Iranians, they might realize that they do not behave in the way that is generally ascribed to these groups. Furthermore, they could become more sensitive to cultural stereotypes in general. The issue of knowing one's own culture is also present in Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness (ICA), as well as Witte's (2014) model for mediating IC in the L2 classroom. In the latter, it is elaborated on as a principle: developing subjective intercultural spaces (p. 367).

In another study, using the same theoretical framework, Äijälä (2009) analyzed three English language textbooks used in Finnish upper secondary school. However, unlike the present study, the textbooks were specifically designed for Finnish learners. The results were slightly different from those of the present study. The three coursebooks had a higher ratio of IC learning tasks (8%, 9%, and 15%). However, as for the second research question, the findings were quite similar. Most of IC learning tasks aimed at increasing learners' knowledge of cultures (savoirs). The second and the third most frequently addressed dimensions of IC were respectively attitudes towards cultures (savoir etre) and the skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre), similar to the results found in the present study.

6. Conclusion

As argued in the beginning of this article, it is crucial to incorporate IC in English language education in Iran, and more specifically in textbooks as a central source of teaching and learning in this context. As the findings reported here show, only a small portion of the learning tasks in the textbooks analyzed contribute to the development of IC in learners. The most important problem with the textbooks lies in the fact that they do not have a specific target audience whose needs would be taken into account. Although the significance of needs analysis in curriculum development and textbook design is well recognized in EFL education, the issue seems to be ignored in the private language institute under investigation. While there are limitations to the present study, such as lack of peer debriefing, the results could have pedagogical implications for curriculum developers, teacher trainers, and even teachers at the language institute under investigation, as well as in others comparable contexts. Moreover, by using Byram's (1997) model of ICC, it is hoped that the study contributes to the theoretical literature in the field of foreign language education and interculturality.

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II

INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS OF IRANIAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: AN EXPLORATION

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Intercultural Awareness of Iranian English Language Learners: An Exploration

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Abstract

The present paper reports on a qualitative study investigating how Iranian learners of English as a foreign language understand culture and the extent to which this understanding meets the needs of efficient intercultural communication. In order to gather data, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight participants. The interviews were designed and thematically analyzed using Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness. The model, which served as the analytical framework of the study, has been used to account for the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to communicate through English as a lingua franca. Based on the findings of the study, the main elements of the model are relevant in accounting for intercultural awareness—which varied among the participants—not only in English as a lingua franca setting but also in contexts where partners with different cultural backgrounds speak the same first language. Moreover, with the aim of developing learners' intercultural awareness, the policies and practices of English as a foreign language teaching in Iran need to be revised.

1. Introduction

> It looks like Americans are more honest. Europeans are imposters…it's like they are not honest with you, but people from the U.S. are really honest. These people are really simple. They are just themselves, they don't brag much. (Noora)

The quotation above is from a well-educated 31-year-old Iranian woman. Despite her definitive statements about Americans and Europeans, she has never been to Europe or the U.S.

The ability to move beyond cultural generalizations and stereotypes requires an awareness of the complexities of cultures, that is, an advanced cultural awareness (Baker, 2011). Culture has long been an element of language pedagogy, even in the Grammar-translation method, where the goal was to have access to the canons of Greek and Latin literature (Hermessi, 2016). However, it was not until a few decades ago that more attention was paid to intercultural communication—and culture in its own right—in language education. Despite the shift at the research and policy levels, this attention has only been on a superficial level; for instance, the essentialist and uncritical focus on national cultures (Baker, 2015). In the world of globalization and internationalization, language pedagogy "can no longer make do with focusing on the target language and target countries—and on cultures as territorially defined phenomena" (Risager, 2007, p. 1). Risager (2007) suggests that instead of a national paradigm, modern language studies should take on a transnational one that recognizes linguistic and cultural complexity.

Today, language education is based on an intercultural approach, with an ultimate goal of intercultural communicative competence rather than native speaker competence (Byram, 1997). However, this is the ideal. Whether or not this approach is followed in all contexts is the subject of debate.

English education in Iran consists of two divergent models: the indigenized or culturally/ideologically adapted English in the state-run public sector and the international Anglo-Americanized English in the private sector (Borjian, 2015). According to Borjian (2015), indigenized English—in which some aspects, such as phonology, morphology and syntax, are selectively accepted while some others, such as cultural elements, are totally eliminated—is the product of the indigenization movement that began after the Islamic revolution in 1979. Due to the prescribed syllabus and content, which mainly focus on reading skills, grammar, and vocabulary, after six years of formal English education in the public sector, learners usually have minimal communication skills (Sadeghi & Richards, 2016). They do, however, have another option: private language institutes.

In accordance with the government's neoliberal economic policies, which favor the decentralization of state-run agencies, private language institutes have proliferated nationwide since the 1990s (Borjian, 2015). Unlike public schools, these institutes are allowed to have their own curricula and textbooks as long as they follow the government's broader laws (Borjian, 2015). Having no obligation to observe international copyright laws, they mainly use English language textbooks published by international publishing houses such as Oxford University Press. The failure of the public model to meet the learners' needs, the private section's rather liberal curriculum, and the fact that many of private institutes advertise themselves as representatives of foreign universities have all contributed to the popularity of private language institutes in Iran, especially among the 55% of the population under the age of thirty (Borjian, 2015).

The present study is part of a bigger project examining the role of culture and intercultural competence in English as a foreign language education in Iran. In order to narrow down the scope of the research—which focuses on varying aspects, including textbooks, learners, and teachers—one specific private language school was chosen as the context. Safir Language Academy, which started its educational activities in 1999, is now the pioneer of English

language education in the country, with more than 107 branches in Tehran and other provinces. The focus of this part of the project is on learners, in an attempt to answer the following question:

To what extent is Iranian English language learners' understanding of culture in line with the intercultural awareness needed to communicate through English as a lingua franca?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 On the Concept of Culture

The teaching of culture and intercultural competence depends on the needs and purposes of the learners on one hand and the educational priorities of the institutions on the other (Kramsch, 2013). According to Kramsch (2013), there are two main perspectives on culture in language pedagogy, depending on one's political orientation as well as whose interests are considered significant: modernist and postmodernist. The national paradigm in language education is based on the modernist view of culture, which has been challenged by the emergence of English as a lingua franca that has few if any national boundaries (Kramsch, 2013). Unlike the modernist view, in which culture is a set of established societal structures and national customs, the postmodernist—post-structuralist or ecological depending on the discipline—perspective characterizes culture as multiplicity, change, and power struggles (Kramsch, 2013).

Risager (2006) discusses the relationship between language and culture, providing a concise outline of the development of the concept of culture. She refers to some of the most important dimensions, categories, and definitions of culture provided by scholars in different disciplines, including two types of categorizations: the hierarchical, differential, and generic concepts of culture described by Zygmunt Bauman (1999) and the individual, collective, and aesthetic concepts of culture. Furthermore, Risager (2006) outlines the conceptions of culture, including the holistic concept of culture, cultural relativism, the cognitive concept of culture, the structuralist concept of culture, the interpretive concept of culture, and the practice-oriented concept of culture. Another comprehensive definition of the concept of culture was provided by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952):

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action. (p. 357)

However, this was one of the last efforts to define culture in a way that would be applicable in all contexts. Since then, there has been a common understanding that it is impossible to give an authoritative definition of culture (Risager, 2006).

More recently, Baker (2015), in a thorough examination of culture through English as a lingua franca (ELF), gives an outline of different conceptions of culture, including culture as a product, culture as discourse, culture as practice, and culture as ideology. Considering the fact that there are multiple accounts of culture and no single definition of the concept on which there is consensus, it is not difficult to conclude that culture is complex.

2.2 ICA: A Model of Intercultural Awareness

The analytical framework used in the present study was Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness. He offers this model to account for the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to communicate through ELF. According to Seidlhofer (2011), English as a lingua franca refers to "any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option" (p. 7). While building on previous attempts to conceptualize knowledge, skills and attitudes for successful intercultural communication, such as Byrams's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence and specifically his concept of critical cultural awareness, as well as Risager's (2007) concept of "intercultural competence of the world citizen," Baker departs from them in that he emphasizes the complexities of global lingua franca contexts. Elaborating on the relationship between language and culture, he rejects the national paradigm suggested by previous scholars such as Byram and contends that a language such as English is no longer necessarily attributed to any particular community. Baker (2011) defines intercultural awareness (ICA) as:

> a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication. (p. 202)

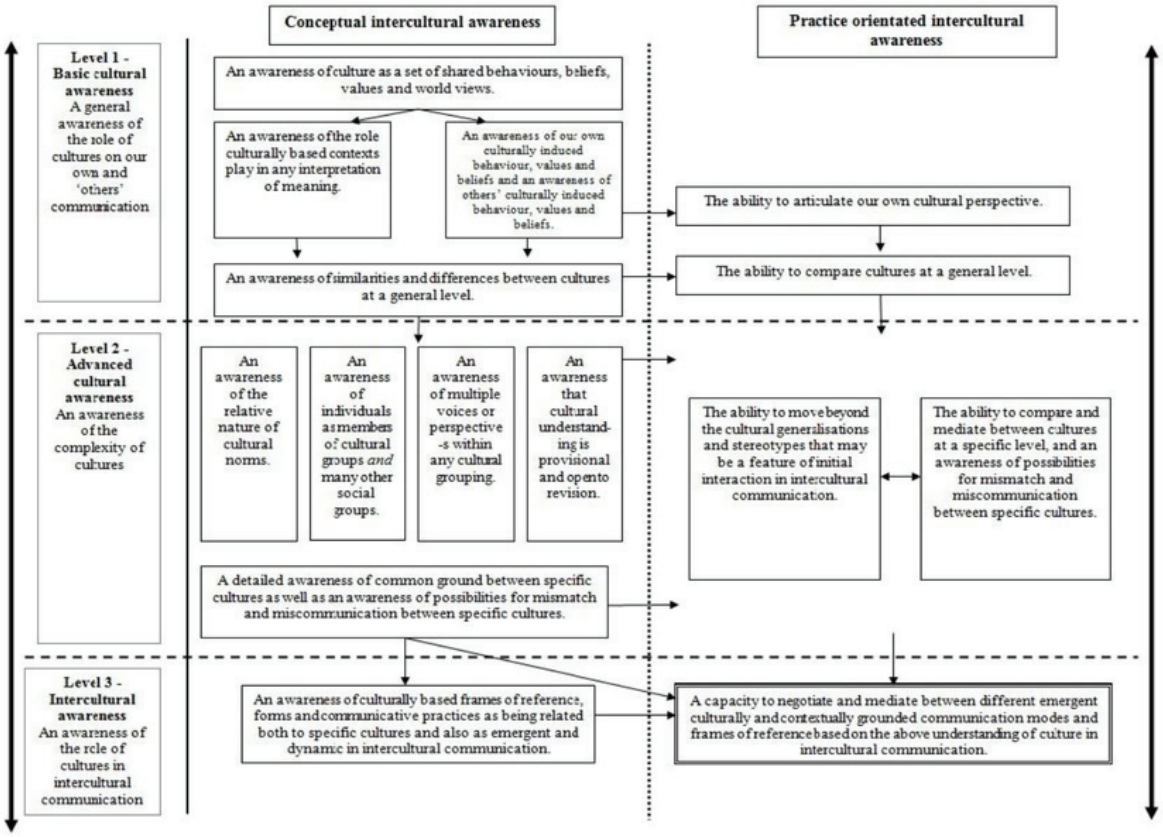

Figure 1. A model of intercultural awareness (Baker, 2011).

As can be seen in Figure 1, ICA is composed of three levels: basic cultural awareness, advanced cultural awareness, and intercultural awareness. As stated by Baker (2015) himself, the first two levels are quite similar to Byram's (1997) saviors in his model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Moreover, level 3 could also be comparable to Byram's notion of critical cultural awareness, specifically with regard to the role of mediation and negotiation. Nevertheless, it is here that ICA is distinguished from critical cultural awareness, as ICA emphasizes the fluid, complex, and emergent nature of culture and intercultural communication, where references that are drawn on in communication go far beyond national cultures. At this level, as described by Baker, the dichotomy of *our culture* vs. *their culture*, which is basic in Byram's (1997) ICC, is no longer relevant. However, ICA "involves an awareness of cultures, languages and communication which are not correlated and tied to any single native speaker community or even group of communities" (Baker, 2015, p. 166).

It is important to note that the model is not a developmental one, meaning that the development of ICA is not supposed to follow the order presented here. Moreover, Baker emphasizes that the distinctions made between different levels in the model are more conceptual than empirical in nature; hence the dashed lines. As shown by the multiple arrows, all kinds of awareness and abilities mentioned in the model are interrelated, and each level feeds into the other. To investigate the concept of ICA, four main categories of awareness and abilities can be drawn from the model. These themes are discussed briefly in the following.

- One's own culture

The first level of the model is about the basic awareness of what culture is, how it affects our values and behavior, and thus the role it has on the communication we have with others. Every one of us, as individuals, belongs to different cultural groups, such as the national group we identify with, our city, our family, our profession (artists, taxi drivers, doctors, etc.), our religion, and our ethnicity. The list could go on and on; however, this is only the surface—what others might see in us. The truth is more complicated. While technically being a member of these groups, a person might feel that he or she does not belong there. There might be discrepancies between what is generally attributed to some cultural groups and how the so-called members of those groups actually feel or behave. This awareness of multiple voices or perspectives within any cultural grouping comes at the second level of the model.

- Complexity of cultures

Awareness of the complexity of cultures comes at the second level of the ICA model. This entails a general understanding that there are similarities and differences between cultures, which could lead to common ground between specific cultures or cause mismatches and miscommunication between others. Here, the complexity of cultures refers to the dynamic, fluid, and relative nature of all cultural characterizations.

- Cultural stereotypes

There is no single definition of stereotypes upon which everyone agrees. However, most agree on its basic nature: stereotypes are "pictures in our heads" of other groups (Lippman, 2017). A stereotype could be defined as "a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing" (Stereotype, n.d.). Baker (2011) mentions the issue of cultural stereotypes in the second level of his ICA model, advanced cultural awareness, highlighting "the ability to move beyond the cultural generalizations and stereotypes that may be a feature of initial interaction in intercultural communication." Considering the phrase above, it could be concluded that having cultural stereotypes is a negative thing; however, Baker does not discuss how complicated this issue actually is. Even the definition of cultural stereotypes is taken for granted.

- Negotiation and mediation between cultures

In his research on ICA, Baker (2011) suggests that negotiation and mediation are key elements in successful communication. He further explains that "negotiation here is not just negotiation of linguistic forms and meaning but also negotiation in relation to social identities and cultural frames of references and practices" (Baker, 2015, p.41). The concepts of negotiation and mediation are also central according to Hua (2014), who contends that "the field of intercultural communication is primarily concerned with how individuals, in order to achieve their communication goals, negotiate cultural or linguistic differences which may be perceived relevant by at least one party in the interaction" (p. 200). In the model of ICA (Baker, 2011), this comes at the third level as "a capacity to negotiate and mediate between emergent culturally and contextually grounded communication modes and frames of references based on the above understanding of culture in intercultural communication."

3. Methodology

In the present study, the methodology is qualitative in nature. In order to answer the research question, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Iranian learners of English. If the interest of the research is in what Schutz (1967, cited in Seidman, 2006) calls the participants' subjective understanding, then interviewing is usually the best method of inquiry (Seidman, 2006). Compared to questionnaires, interviews offer more flexibility and allow room for more spontaneity on the part of the respondents. Moreover, the power of language and storytelling makes interviewing a particularly powerful tool. As Vygotsky (2012) observes, "a word is a microcosm of human consciousness" (p. 271).

3.1 Participants

Robinson's (2014) theoretical and practical guide was used for sampling the participants. First, a sample universe or target population was defined using two inclusion criteria: being Iranian and having studied English for at least six months in a specific private language institute in Iran. Second, considering theoretical and practical issues, a sample size range was chosen with a minimum of six and a maximum of ten participants. In the next step, convenience sampling was chosen as the strategic method for selecting the cases. Convenience sampling "proceeds by way of locating any convenient cases who meet the required criteria and then selecting those who respond on a first-come-first-served basis until the sample size quotient is full" (Robinson, 2014, p. 32). Finally, the sample was sourced using online advertising as well as snowball sampling or referral chains, which involves asking participants to suggest others who qualify for participation.

The participants included two males and six females between the ages of 21 and 31. They had all studied English—or were still studying at the time of the interview—in a specific private language institute in Iran. The amount of time they had studied there varied among the participants from six months to two years, sometimes with intervals, but the institute was not the only source for them to study/learn English. All the participants had access to different sources of English, including music, movies, social networks, books, and the Internet. However, they varied greatly regarding how much they used the mentioned sources and how much experience they had using ELF.

All the participants were informed about the use and purposes of the study as well as the voluntary nature of participation and what it would entail. Their anonymity was established through the use of pseudonyms, and they were allowed to ask questions and were provided with any information they needed before they verbally provided informed consent to participant in the study.

More information about the participants is provided in the appendix.

3.2 Interviews

The aim of the interviews was to encourage the participants to talk about the four main themes drawn from Baker's (2011) model based on their own feelings and experiences. For this purpose, a set of questions was designed by the researcher and reviewed by some colleagues. This first draft of questions was then tested in a pilot interview, based on which the final version of the questions was prepared. However, the interviews with different participants varied greatly due to their different experiences and the topics and discussions that followed accordingly.

The interviews were conducted in the spring and summer of 2016. They were all done online, using the video/audio conversation applications Skype and WhatsApp. Five interviews were video conversations, and three were audio conversations. All of the interviews were audio-recorded for analysis purposes. The language of the interviews was Persian, the interviewees' mother tongue. Each interview took from 30 to 90 minutes, depending on the interviewees' willingness to share their thoughts and experiences. To facilitate analysis, the researcher transcribed all of the interviews verbatim.

3.3 Analytical method

As mentioned previously, the analytical framework used in the present study was Baker's model of ICA. For designing the interview questions, four main themes were drawn from the model, which were considered to have captured the essence of ICA. Following a top-down approach, the same themes were then used to analyze the data deductively. More specifically, the transcription of each interview was studied several times to find any representation of the four themes.

4. Findings

The present study was an attempt to answer the following question: To what extent is Iranian English language learners' understanding of culture in line with the intercultural awareness needed to communicate through English as a lingua franca?

In this section, the findings of the study are presented in light of each of the four themes drawn from Baker's (2011) model of ICA; namely, one's own culture, the complexity of cultures, cultural stereotypes, and negotiation and mediation between cultures. General findings within each thematic category are presented first, followed by detailed findings with illustrative extracts from different interviews. The extracts of the interviews used in the present article were translated into English by the researcher.

4.1 One's Own Culture

In general, all the participants have an awareness of their own culture and whether their cultural understanding is attributed to the different cultural groupings to which they belong. In addition, all of them mentioned that their cultural understanding has changed in some ways over time. Moreover, they are aware of the influence that their culture has on their communication with others.

Noora, a 31-year-old female, talks about her feeling that Iranians are all becoming similar and imitating each other. This is something she does not like it, and she prefers "to be herself":

> I just know that I have lots of problems with our own culture. I don't like anything traditional of our country […] I thinks it's all rubbish […] I don't know…many things are nonsense to me. I don't get it…but I find myself getting along with them out of respect…I feel like I don't belong to this culture.

The last sentence from the above quotation says a lot—the fact that she is officially Iranian but does not feel like one. This leads to an important question: What exactly is this culture that she does not feel that she belongs to? When asked this question, she says it is the Iranian culture. It is interesting that she believes in the existence of a national culture but does not identify with it.

In the next extract, Essi (22-year-old male) talks about his cultural differences with his family:

> My parents are rather religious and traditional, especially my dad…it's like we [he and his brothers] say what we believe, but not loudly [laughs]…I mean we live our own lives…I know from my experience that in the family I should not always say what I believe, and it's better to keep distant and go my own way.

This contradicts the assumption that all members of a family have the same culture. Individuals can have their own culture, different from that of other members of the same family. This is also true in large contexts such as a city or country, highlighting the significance of cultural overgeneralizations and stereotypes.

Essi then continues to explain why he has decided to leave Iran in search of a better life. His main reason is the cultural ambiance in Iran. He believes that not everything (e.g., the fact that some people are sexist) is directly related to the government. He says that people have accepted sexism and laugh at it:

> To be honest, many people say when they leave Iran and live in another country that they feel *ghorbat* [the feeling that they don't belong], but that's how I feel here, to some extent.

The feeling that he talks about—*ghorbat* in Persian—has no exact equivalent in English, but it translates roughly as "the state or feeling of being a foreigner and/or longing for one's native land" (Ghorbat, 2018). It was very interesting that in his own country, where he is supposed to feel a sense of belonging, he instead feels alienated. This shows that he knows his own culture and how it differs from other cultures. Additionally, he was able to articulate his own cultural perspective, an ability that Baker (2011) refers to in the first level of his model as basic cultural awareness.

In the next extract, Saara (21-year-old female) talks about her feelings of being a Kurdish Iranian. She says that in the past she was proud of being a Kurd:

> Being an Iranian…I don't know [laughing] actually if I'm proud of that too or not…mmm, but [pause] I am proud of that too but to a lesser extent…I don't know. I wasn't like this before. You could say it was completely the opposite perhaps three or four years ago. I was much more proud of being an Iranian [than being a Kurd], and if some friend of mine emphasized being a Kurd, I'd say they are dogmatic and such, but now it's changed for myself. I don't know why [laughs] now I've also become like that, to some extent…Now I have the same feelings, but not to the extent of being a separatist and such…but…I don't have the same feeling of being an Iranian; maybe because I've met many people from all cities, and then somehow my view of the whole country changed…I think that's the reason.

For many people, their nationality and ethnicity are essential parts of their culture and of who they are. The interesting point in this case is how her thoughts and feelings regarding these two matters have changed over time and how fully aware of these changes she seems to be.

As Baker (2011) puts it, she is aware that cultural understanding is provisional and open to change. Knowing how our own culture changes over time could positively affect our tolerance towards others with whom we might have divergence, hence improving our ICA.

4.2 Complexity of Cultures

The participants had learned about different cultures and their complexities in different ways and from different sources, including but not limited to English language textbooks, movies, TV shows, music, books, travel, social media, and interactions with foreigners. The participants differed in their level of knowledge about specific cultures and in their awareness of the complexities of cultures. Their willingness to learn more about such matters varied as well. Moreover, some of the participants showed deep awareness of the complexities of culture in one aspect or case but not in others.

In the extract below, Frans (28-year-old male) talks about his encounter with his family's CouchSurfing guests:

> When you have a foreigner as a guest, first you get to know a completely different culture…maybe not completely different but very different. This is really interesting…for example, we were shocked the first few times when we'd get back home…we had planned to hang out with the guests…we'd ask if they are tired and wanted to rest. They'd say, "yes, we want to sleep," and we would be shocked, like, why did they say such a thing? Then, we understood that this is their lifestyle and culture and they don't have *târof* with other people. And, if you look into it, you realize that many times one happens to be in a situation where maybe it's better not to follow such formalities.

The reason they were shocked from this simple honest answer is that many Iranians tend to say yes on such occasions just to please their host (the concept of *târof* in Persian); otherwise, they might seem rude. There is no exact equivalent of this concept in English. However, it is very common among Iranians, especially in people with whom you are not very close or intimate. Its actualization in conversations might be in the form of "'ostensible' invitations, repeated rejection of offers, insisting on making offers, hesitation in making requests, giving frequent compliments, hesitation in making complaints, etc." (Sharifian, 2011, p. 143). In other words, a person might say or do things that he or she does not actually believe just to be polite. However, being polite or impolite could have different meanings in different cultures. It is interesting that Frans gradually learned that their guests were just different from them, with a different culture. Not only that, he also he seemed to like their way better, meaning he had learned something new. This is what Baker (2011) refers to as an awareness of the role culturally based contexts play in any interpretation of meaning.

In another case, Sanni (26-year-old female), another CouchSurfing host, talks about what she learned indirectly from one of her family's CouchSurfers:

> He was French, and he only had a very small backpack. It was very strange…well we had already had many guests, and they all had two or three backpacks, but this one had only a small one.

Sanni continues, describing a time when she and the above-mentioned guest were standing in line together to vote for the presidential elections, and a French man was standing in front of her in the queue:

> He was wearing baggy pants, and I saw that his pants were torn, like the size of a palm, at the back…it seemed weird to me…and there was a bunch of people behind us in the line…and it just came to my mind to wonder how much does a pair of pants cost…even here in Iran, he could buy one for like 30 thousand Toomans, which is

> nothing for him…but then I thought to myself, told myself, that it's your dream to be in his situation [laughs] countries he has visited…things he has done, experiences he has had… I didn't have even 1% of them…well there was another similar guest too…they don't care about clothes that much.

For Sanni, wearing such clothes seemed a little embarrassing at first. However, just a little bit of thinking helped her realize that it is something probably should not worry about. Sanni came to realize that clothes, which might seem to be a trivial issue and irrelevant to culture, could have different significance for different people. That is what Baker (2011) refers to as the relative nature of cultural norms, an awareness of which comes at the second level of his model: advanced cultural awareness.

4.3 Cultural Stereotypes

All the participants in the present study, at some point in their talks, demonstrated cultural stereotypes, most of them formed based on people's nationality or the city they come from in Iran. Many of the participants had learned about different cultures through their English textbooks, all of which were from large publishers (e.g., Oxford University Press) and thus internationally used. However, in many cases, the cultural references in the textbooks were so brief and shallow that they could actually trigger cultural stereotypes. As Ghadiri et al. (2014) points out, educators have to make an attempt to uproot the stereotypes in language textbooks.

Having gained an awareness of the complexities of cultures, some of the participants in this study seemed to have moved beyond cultural stereotypes and overgeneralizations in some cases but not in others. In addition, some of the participants seemed more comfortable holding positive rather than negative stereotypes. In the following extract, Jenni (30-year-old female) talks encountering people on her trips to different parts of Iran:

> I have been to different parts of Iran. Each has a different culture, in general, compared to Tehran [where she lives]…in many of them, this cultural difference is shown mostly with regard to religion…many of them are different in their behaviors…for instance, people in the south of Iran were truly another kind…they were very warmhearted, and they would easily accept you among themselves and would comfortably talk to you…of course, you can find such people in Tehran as well, but they were truly warmhearted…but in Ardabil, for instance, people were different…when you walked on the streets, it seemed that people were aggressive; however, when you talked to them, you would realize that they were not actually like that, it's just their the way they behave; for example, their voices are loud.

In Jenni's words, there is a cultural stereotype about the people from the south of Iran that is actually collective (meaning that it is shared by many people). A crucial question arises: If cultural stereotypes are bad, are positive ones also bad, or should only negative ones be avoided? Jenni seems comfortable with the comment she made about the people from the south of Iran, possibly because there was nothing negative or offensive about it from her point of view. However, when she talks about people in Ardabil looking aggressive, she says that it might have been due to their loud voices, and maybe they are not actually like that. It is interesting that she elaborates on her first impression, which turned out to be wrong later. As Baker puts it, she moved beyond cultural stereotypes, which might be a characteristic of first encounters in intercultural communication.

In the next extract, Frans talks about some of the things he learned about different cultures through watching TV series:

> Among series, I mainly watch South Park, the animated series, through which I got to know different personalities from around the world…and culturally speaking, there was this American culture, which I think was well portrayed…I have talked to my friends who live or study in the US, and most of them also confirm that American people are actually like that…a bunch of impulsive people, who are overly involved with eating and such…I mean, these things happen a lot in their society.

When we talk to people, there are often some cultural stereotypes in their words, such as what Frans says about American people. However, if deeply investigated, these expressions might simply represent a lack of political correctness, linguistically speaking. Political correctness is used to refer to "language that seems intended to give the least amount of offense, especially when describing groups identified by external markers such as race, gender, culture, or sexual orientation" (Political correctness, n.d.). In the extract above, Frans makes a strong statement about Americans first, but then, in the next sentence, he moderates this by saying, "these things happen a lot in their society." The same could be true in many other conversations; that is, not everybody knows how to speak in a politically correct way. This is why caution should be exercised when calling people racist or sexist based on one or two sentences. However, the opposite is also true: Some people might know very well how to hide their questionable beliefs within politically correct words.

Here, Noora, talks about what she learned from the textbooks she used:

> ...for instance, Japanese eating culture, like in what way they eat food, and what is considered disrespect for them…or for instance if you are in Algeria, or I don't know, another Arabic country…if you see your friend in the taxi, you should pretend that you haven't seen them because otherwise, when you are getting off the taxi, you have to pay for them too. That's why people pretend that they don't know each other in a taxi; it's their culture.

Both examples mentioned above could be very interesting and informative cases of different cultures—if and only if they are approached mindfully. They should not lead to the belief that the traditions they refer to are permanently fixed, firmly established, and true of all the people from those countries. Teachers could play a crucial role in combatting such universal stereotypes, but the learners themselves could also use such information in a positive way, expanding their views of cultural complexities and preventing possible cultural stereotypes.

In the following extract, Hanna (29-year-old female) talks about how travelling to Russia made her realize how different people are from what she originally believed:

> As for Russia, I strongly believed that Russians were cold-tempered and no one would respect me there…I mean, a bunch of tall, blond people in great shape who would not even look at me or care about me, but I was wrong. People were so kind.

The fact that she realized her presuppositions were wrong is very significant. This happened in so many cases with different people that she said she no longer trusts any sources other than what she sees with her own eyes. When asked if reading books had helped her get to know other cultures, she said:

> Most books that we read are translations…they give me an idea, but honestly, after the contradictions that I found between what I thought and what I saw, I can't trust them like I did before. I mean, I prefer to see everything with my own eyes in order to decide about people […] after so many mistakes that I made, I don't want to trust that anymore.

Although we can argue that face-to-face encounters are not only way to learn about other cultures, as Hanna claimed, the skeptical view one develops over time could actually

contribute to ICA. Hanna now realizes that cultures are more complicated than what she hears or reads about them. Moreover, this critical view could help her postpone her judgment about other people from different cultures. However, there are adverse effects as well. She now has so much confidence in her own eyes that she overgeneralizes all the people from the same country. She had a chance to spend time with two individuals from France, and they were her only source of cultural information:

> [The French] have easily omitted television from their lives. They care about what they eat, and they like to eat tasty food…They are different from us…I mean…for instance, if we go shopping, things that she buys are very different from what I choose.

Although she understands the differences between her own culture and that of her French friend, she makes the mistake of seeing her as representative of the whole country of France. She fails to realize that such cultural differences between the French friend and herself might also exist among French people themselves, and not all of them are the same.

In the next extract, she talks about the difference between men and women when it comes to discussions and debates:

> Well, as for the people I know…I cannot say for 100%, women are more…how can I say…they are easier [to talk to]…I mean, they are more flexible, and they listen to you…but well…this is my opinion.

Unlike her previous comments about different nationalities, here Hanna seems quite cautious not to make any stereotypical overgeneralizations. She emphasizes that this is true only about the people she knows, and she cannot say it about all women. Using Baker's (2011) words, in this case she seems to be aware of the fact that there are multiple voices or perspectives within any cultural grouping.

4.4 Negotiation and Mediation between Cultures

In the present study, the focus was on the participants' negotiation and mediation skills at a cultural rather than a linguistic level. This could apply to individuals who speak the same first language but have cultural differences. This theme was the least represented in the data. Only four of the participants elaborated on specific cases in which they had negotiated cultural differences with others.

In the following extract, Leila (23-year-old female), who has some religious and cultural differences with her mother, talks about an occasion when she tried to have a conversation with her mother about homosexuals (homosexuality is unacceptable both religiously and legally in Iran):

> We were watching a documentary on BBC Persian about homosexuals and transsexuals…how they had to take asylum in Turkey or Canada, and most of them committed suicide in the end…My mom was saying that homosexuals are sick, but my sister and I said that it is just a sexual orientation, just like you prefer to be with your opposite sex…I guess she accepted…she doesn't say anything bad about them anymore.

According to some of the participants, negotiating cultural differences sometimes occurred in the languages courses in the time dedicated for discussion. For instance, Essi mentions topics such as gender segregation in schools and sex work:

> The question was: what is the worst profession? …and then the issue of sex work came up…some had the idea that a sex worker is just horrible…one student said that he/she had a friend who was a sex worker[…]and that she was just human like them.

Although Essi is not the one who is negotiating a cultural issue, this is an interesting example that occurred in a language classroom setting. In the next extract, he is the one who takes the role of a mediator, negotiating a cultural issue with his mother:

> We were at the airport, and I was looking in a different direction when my mom said, why is she [a random woman] dressed like that?...I asked, what is the problem? She said, what's that supposed to mean when someone is dressed like that?…I replied she must like it this way, and perhaps she thinks she looks better this way…My mom then said it can't be like that…there are certain rules in the country…I told her that in my opinion it is a personal choice how someone likes to dress or how they prefer to be seen…you could easily look in some other direction if it bothers you to see something, just like me, I was looking at something else.

The willingness to negotiate between cultures is not always the same among people. For his part, Essi seemed to be passionate about it. Here, Essi responds to a question about whether he believes that such discussions are useful:

> Yes, in a number of ways…first, you get to learn about different thoughts, and I like that…to see different people, different opinions…perhaps someone's opinion is better than mine, so I'd learn to change mine…or perhaps I get to change someone else's mind…or maybe neither could happen, but it's not bad to get to know others' thoughts.

These attitudes of openness, curiosity, and discovery (ambiguity tolerance) are fundamental to intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006).

Hanna also gave an example of her talking to her mother about homosexuality, taking the role of a mediator, because she thought her mother came from a different culture when it comes to this issue:

> About homosexuality in our culture…for instance my mom had not noticed that it is something normal…usually when something is normal in other places of the world, it takes 20 or 30 years to become normal here…but it is, and you have to know that…and you should not think that they are sick, or I don't know…have such ideas…I had seen some people in my parents' age think so, so I thought my parents had better know that it is not the case.

She also mentions a conversation she had with a foreign guest who was curious about *hijab*, which is obligatory for Iranian women in public:

> They had questions specifically about the issue of hijab…well they have complicated questions in their minds as to why basically…for instance, one of the interesting questions they asked me was how we swim in the sea…I said that we have separate times for men and women…he/she asked how far it is separate, like, how far away can you swim and still be separate from men?…and even I didn't know the answer, so I said I don't know…perhaps from one point further, it's your prize, and you get to swim with men, because I had never thought about it.

According to the law in Iran, women have to cover their bodies and hair in public. In the example above, Hanna negotiates this cultural issue and what entails with someone who had little understanding of it.

In another example, Sanni talks about a misunderstanding with one of their CouchSurfing guests from Estonia:

> There was this very thin boy who was in love with Iranian food, and he ate…he ate a lot and loved it…I mean, he would say I'm full, but I have to eat more…once he was eating and he said that he's sorry he's eating like that…and I said in Iran everyone will

> love you when you eat like that because Iranians like to make food and their guests eat...but then he suddenly started to apologize and said that he's sorry, but he thought he could eat more…but then we explained to him that he doesn't have to worry and it's actually a good thing [laughs].

What Sanni did here is an interesting example of the negotiation of meaning and of different cultural norms in an emergent culturally grounded communication. There might have been linguistic negotiation as well, but the details of their conversation in English are not known.

5. Discussion

As stated in the previous sections, the model of ICA (Baker, 2011) used in the present study has been offered to conceptualize the intercultural competence needed to communicate in an ELF setting. Based on the findings of the study, the main concepts of ICA are all relevant to the types of knowledge and skills necessary for meaningful intercultural communication. The findings highlight a number of other points as well.

First, as shown by the illustrative quotes above, the main concepts are tightly interrelated, with no clear boundaries between them. For example, having an awareness of one's own culture entails an understanding of culture in general, its complexities, and how it influences communication with others, which in turn could help one move beyond cultural stereotypes. Second, the findings clearly show that it is possible to have an awareness/skill at an advanced level of the model while lacking another at the basic level. This indicates that the development of ICA does not necessarily proceed in the order of the levels presented in the model. Moreover, one might have an awareness/skill in one case but lack it in another, highlighting the indefiniteness and complexity of ICA. Finally, as demonstrated through some of the extracts above, although ICA is specifically designed to account for intercultural communication in ELF, it could have wider applications in settings in which partners, while speaking the same language, have different cultures.

6. Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to investigate how learners of English as a foreign language in Iran understand culture, and the extent to which this understanding supports meaningful intercultural communication in an ELF setting. The terms English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a lingua franca (ELF) are "on opposite sides of the same coin": the English that is taught to or learned by non-native speakers (EFL), and the English that non-native speakers use in international communication (ELF) (Swan, 2012). According to Swan (2012), "the more we learn about efficient lingua franca communication in English, the better able we are to make informed decisions about priorities: what do we need to teach and what can we safely ignore?" (p. 388). In this sense, the findings of this study have implications for both fields.

The participants had access to various sources for learning about different cultures as well as the complexities of cultures in general; however, not all of these sources were equally useful for them. Most of what they had learned was outside the classroom context, through self-study and personal experiences. Moreover, the language textbooks, which fail to underscore the complexities of cultures, had created or reinforced cultural stereotypes, mainly on the national level. This calls for a purposeful revision of EFL education in Iran, directed towards the needs of ELF communication at both the policy and practice levels and involving material design and curriculum development as well as teacher education.

Moreover, the findings reveal that cultural stereotypes are the most prevalent issue in ICA. As stated earlier, although such stereotypes are present in Baker's (2011) model of ICA, their different aspects and complications are largely underestimated. Therefore, more research on cultural stereotypes in an ELF setting seems necessary. The outcome of such research could in turn help to reform EFL language planning.

Conflict of interest

There is no personal, commercial, political, academic, or financial conflict of interest to disclose.

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Appendix

Participants' backgrounds related to learning and using English

Essi (male) was 22 years old. He had been studying English at the institute for almost 15 months. Before that, he had been self-studying English using films and music and similar media. He had had few interactions in English and never travelled outside of Iran.

Frans (male) was 28 years old. He had studied English at the institute for eight months, which ended four months before the interview. He started watching movies and shows in English when he was 17 and focused on doing so for about four years. He had recently travelled to Turkey two times, and he had been a host for CouchSurfers for more than a year.

Sanni (female) was 26 years old. She started studying English at the institute four years ago. First, she took courses for a year, and after a one-year interval, she took some additional courses for another two years. Before that, since childhood, she had been going to other language institutes for short periods intermittently. She had recently travelled to Turkey two times, and she had been a host for CouchSurfers for more than a year.

Noora (female) was 31 years old. She had studied English at the institute for two or three years intermittently but stopped about two years ago. Before and after that, she had been self-studying. She had travelled to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and India. Moreover, she had experienced several intercultural interactions in English in Iran and online.

Jenni (female) was 30 years old. She had studied English at the institute for a year about four years ago, and at the time of the interview, she had been taking courses again for about seven months. She had not travelled outside of Iran and had few interactions in English.

Saara (female) was 21 years old. She had studied English at the institute for nine months, which ended three months before the interview. Before that, she had been taking courses in different institutes intermittently between the ages of 10 to 17. She had not travelled outside of Iran and had not experienced interactions in English.

Hanna (female) was 29 years old. She had studied English at the institute for a few months about four years ago, and she had started again about eight months before the study. She had also studied in other institutes between the ages of 13 to 18 continuously. She had travelled to China, Turkey, Dubai, and Russia and had experienced several intercultural interactions in English in Iran as well.

Leila (female) was 23 years old. She had started studying English at the institute about two years ago and continued for 15 months. Before that, since she was a child, she had been taking courses in different institutes intermittently. She had not travelled outside of Iran, but she had experienced several intercultural interactions in English with her sister's CouchSurfer guests.

III

ON THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN LEARNERS' INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE POSSIBLE

by

Zahra Edalati Kian 2019

ON THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN LEARNERS' INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE POSSIBLE

Abstract: Intercultural awareness is a particularly relevant issue in today's world, where not only globalization and mobility, but also discrimination and injustice are growing. Although culture and intercultural awareness are now theoretically well established in the field of English language education, the theory has not yet been realized in practice. The present study investigated in what ways learning and using English enhance or hinder learners' intercultural awareness. Employing Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness as the theoretical framework, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Iranian adult learners of English as a foreign language. Employing a hybrid approach of both inductive and deductive orientations, the data was analyzed thematically. According to the findings, learning and using English enhanced learners' intercultural awareness, specifically their understanding of their own cultural identity as well as of cultural complexities. However, a hindering role of English was also detected, highlighting the need to address the issue of cultural stereotypes, especially in formal education. Finally, the findings drew attention to the complex role of English in the global flow of knowledge and culture.

Keywords: English language learners, intercultural awareness, cultural stereotypes, globalization, English as a foreign language

1. Introduction

> Music is quite significant for me, because I myself play rock and metal, well not professionally, but at least for now I do it as a hobby […] if I leave Iran one day, this might become more serious for me, and English might come in handy then…this might actually have been one of the main reasons [for learning English] besides immigration…after all I am not the kind of person who listens to music just to pass time. When I listen to some music, I need to know what it is based on, how much work has been done for it, and what it wants to say.

In this quotation, one of the participants in the study (Participant 1, a 28-year-old male) reflects on why he is interested in learning English. His desire to reach outside his own country, to different spaces and cultures through music, to know "what it is based on" and "what it wants to say", requires more than just language knowledge. In a way, English becomes a means for him to learn about music, which in some cases, such as protest songs, is a medium for expressing cultural, social and political concerns. Knowing more about music, in turn, could improve his intercultural awareness. The present study is about the influence of this kind, whether enhancing or hindering, that learning and using English can have on learners' intercultural awareness.

In Iran, English as a foreign language education has come a long way since the Islamic Revolution in 1979; from the indigenization and localization movement in the early 80s – when the attitude towards foreign languages, and especially English, was extremely negative, as they were regarded as major tools of cultural imperialism – to the government's neoliberal economic policies that have led to a proliferation of private language institutes, largely favoring the international or Anglo-American model of English (Borjian 2013, 2015). The tension between the local imperatives of political preferences and global economic demands, which Kramsch and Yin (2018) call the "glocal contact zone", has led English as a foreign language education in Iran to be marked by two very different models: the indigenized one in the public sector lacking any element of *foreign* culture, and the internationalized one in the private institutes, the latter being extremely popular (Borjian 2013). However, Iranians' leaning and use of English is not necessarily limited to what they receive in formal education contexts. Depending on their socio-economic status and personal interests, they can have access to sources in English through various ways, such as music, movies, books, and the Internet.

As globalization and the development of new technologies continue to bring people closer together than ever, in the field of foreign language education the goal of learning languages is no longer to achieve native-speaker competence, but to learn to communicate with people of different cultural backgrounds (Byram, 1997, 2009; Kramsch, 2014; Sharifian, 2013), and the ideal is no longer the standard monolingual native speaker, but rather the multilingual subject (Kramsch 2009). The world we live in today, however, is not just characterized by technology and facilitated mobility. It is one where racism, discrimination of different kinds and injustice are also on the rise, and so students need to be educated appropriately to become "real *interculturalists* who can question these

phenomena and act critically, ethically, and responsively" (Dervin 2016: p. 2). Whether or not these goals are achieved is debatable. The question, however, is especially relevant in the polarized Iranian context referred to above. Although there have been studies examining the representation of culture in English textbooks used in Iran (e.g. Aliakbari, 2005; Rashidi & Najafi, 2010; Zarei & Khalessi, 2011, Dehbozorgi et al., 2014; Gholami Pasand & Ghasemi, 2018), no previous research has investigated how learners' experiences in learning and using English outside of the classroom context influences their understanding of culture and intercultural awareness. Accordingly, this study attempted to fill this gap by answering the following question:

In what ways does learning and using English enhance or hinder Iranian learners' intercultural awareness?

In what follows, first comes a brief overview of the place of English in the era of globalization. Then, the theoretical framework of the study is presented and the research methodology is explained. After that, the findings are presented using some extracts from the data, and then they are discussed in the light of the research questions. Finally, some of the implications of the findings are reviewed before the concluding remarks.

2. English in the age of globalization

With the rise of global information technologies, global migration, and the increasing multiculturalism and declining homogeneity of nations, the fundamentals of foreign language teaching and learning have been changing (Kramsch 2013). It is becoming more and more problematic to prepare foreign language learners for the challenges of the real world outside, where the connection between notions of language, culture, identity and communication is more unsettled than ever (Kramsch 2017), and political efforts to connect one, usually consolidated, language with one culture are being undermined (Lo Bianco 2014). Even the very concept of foreignness is now being challenged by globalization, as it is not clear what is actually "foreign" about a culture (Lo Bianco 2014).

According to Blommaert (2010), in the age of globalization, "the world has not become a village, but rather a tremendously complex web of villages, towns, neighborhoods, settlements connected by material and symbolic ties in often unpredictable ways" (p. 1). One of the many ways in which this "complex web of villages" is connected is through English. The multitude of users and contexts makes the traditional assumption that there is an 'inexorable' link between a language and a culture, and thus identity, even more simplistic in the case of English as a lingua franca (Baker 2015). This does not mean, however, that English as a lingua franca is culturally neutral: it is, by its nature, a form of intercultural communication (Baker 2017). As Dörnyei et al. (2006, cited in Jenkins 2007) point out, losing its national cultural base means that English is now becoming more connected to a global culture. Everybody communicating through English in this "complex web of villages" contributes to this living

discourse by bringing their own values and cultures, and potentially claiming those shared by others.

In the age of globalization, English is in a different position from any other language. It has spread around the world like no other language before it and it is spoken more as a second or additional language than as a mother tongue. It is unique because of the infinite purposes it serves in numerous fields, the way it has diffused geographically, and for the vast cultural diversity of its users (Dewey, 2007). It therefore stands out as the global default lingua franca, used in politics, international business and academia, as well as in the daily lives of tourists, migrant workers, asylum seekers and anyone using digital media (Mauranen 2017).

Closely linked to processes of globalization, Pennycook (2007, p. 5) contends, English is the "language of threat, desire, destruction and opportunity". As he describes, on the one hand, being the language of *threat* and *destruction*, it is the dominant tool of cultural imperialism responsible for the exclusion of local cultures in favor of the Western hegemony, potentially leading to cultural homogenization. In this sense, he agrees with Phillipson (1992, 2009) who sees the linguistic imperialism of English intertwined with a structural, ideological and exploitative imperialism in other fields, including culture, politics and media. However, Pennycook (2007) argues that the status of English in relation to globalization is twofold. Being the language of *desire* and *opportunity*, English is, on the other hand, the primary language in global flows of knowledge and culture, which could be used and appropriated by individuals and communities as a bridge to vast possibilities, including the possibility to resist cultural imperialism. It is only by recognizing this complex role, and the implications it has that we can train learners of English who are *real interculturalists*.

3. ICA, a model of intercultural awareness

In today's globalized world, culture and interculturality have a well-established place in the field of foreign language education, where multiple models and frameworks have been put forward to explain the competences needed for intercultural communication. The one used in the present study is Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness (ICA), which is based on what had previously been done in the field, especially Byram's (1997) *critical cultural awareness* as part of his model of intercultural communicative competence. However, it departs from them in drawing on fluid, dynamic and emergent notions of cultures and cultural identities. Baker proposed this model to account for the needs of intercultural communication through English as a lingua franca. Baker (2011) defines intercultural awareness as "a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices, and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context-specific manner in real time communication" (p. 202).

The model consists of three levels, namely, *basic cultural awareness*, *advanced cultural awareness*, and *intercultural awareness*. It is also divided into conceptual

versus practice-oriented intercultural awareness. However, Baker (2011) contends that the model is not a developmental one, meaning that the types of awareness and abilities are not supposed to follow the three levels in a linear pattern. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, it made sense to summarize the model into four key concepts/themes that capture the essence of intercultural awareness; namely, *one's own culture*, *cultural complexities*, *cultural stereotypes*, and *negotiation and mediation between cultures*.

Firstly, knowing *one's own culture* as a significant component of intercultural awareness is more complex than only knowing one's first culture and the way it influences behaviors and values and the role it plays in communication (Baker 2011). As used in this study, it is closely related to the concept of identity. According to Baker (2016), the network of social groups that we identify with or orient towards shapes our identity, making it something external that is always in process. Identity, therefore, refers to one's sense of self and positioning in life, which could have multiple dimensions (e.g., ethnic, national, linguistic, religious, gender), some gaining salience over others in a specific context; it is constantly being reconstructed (Dervin & Jackson 2018).

Secondly, knowing about *cultural complexities* is more than just an awareness of the similarities and differences between cultures. According to Baker (2011), it involves an understanding of the relative, dynamic and fluid nature of cultural norms – as opposed to essentialist positions – and an awareness that cultural understanding is provisional and open to change. It also entails an understanding of the concepts of diversity (diversities) and intersectionality, of how every individual is comprised of complex experiences and comes from different origins, and how different identity markers such as race, gender, and social class come to cross each other (Dervin 2016).

The third central concept in Baker's (2011) model of intercultural awareness is *cultural stereotypes*, which is mentioned at the second level: "the ability to move beyond the cultural generalizations and stereotypes that may be a feature of initial interaction in intercultural communication" (p. 203). The issue is linked to the phenomenon of othering (sometimes referred to as etherizing), which could be the underlying reason for ethnocentrism, (hidden) racism, and (hidden) xenophobia (Dervin 2016).

Finally, Baker (2011) argues that *negotiation and mediation* are essential to successful communication. Negotiation, as he presents it, includes not only linguistic forms and meanings but also all sorts of social and cultural frames of reference (Baker 2015). As Zhu (2015) elaborates, in interactions involving participants with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, negotiation "is the key to the process whereby participants adjust their (cultural) ways of speaking, apply and refine their cultural schemata, and orient to, assign, or reject social, cultural, or situational categorizations" (p. 6).

4. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach to address the research question. We live in an *interview society* (Silverman 1993), in which there is the relatively new

understanding that each and every individual is an important source of knowledge (Gubrium & Hoilstein 2012). When the type of knowledge sought is "authentic accounts of lived (subjective) inner experience" (Schwandt 2007: p. 164), as was the case in the present study, the interview can be a particularly useful tool. Besides, compared with questionnaires, interviews offer participants more flexibility and spontaneity, which were important for meeting the objectives of this study. The epistemological assumption behind the interviews was based on postmodernism, where there is no clear-cut boundary between the interviewer – myself – and the interviewees, as they both participate in constructing the narratives (Borer & Fontana, 2012). In other words, by sharing commonalities with the participants, in their language and some cultural groupings they belonged to, I was able to make sense of most of the cultural references they made, and in so doing, I collaborated in assembling their accounts of experiences. Consciously bringing my subjectivity to the research process helped me in analyzing the interview data in a more meaningful way as well (see Braun & Clarke, 2013 for a discussion of the elements of qualitative research and Peshkin, 1998 for a discussion on the significance of subjectivity in research).

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight participants. The interviews were designed in accordance with the theoretical framework of the study, namely, Baker's (2011) model of ICA. More specifically, four main themes, namely one's own culture, cultural complexities, cultural stereotypes, and negotiation and mediation, which were considered to have captured the essence of intercultural awareness, were used to design interview questions. The first draft of interview questions was reviewed by some colleagues and then piloted in one interview – not included in the final data –, and this provided the basis for the final questions. The key concepts – the four main themes – in all the interviews were the same, but despite having some common questions, the interviews turned out to be quite different from each other due to the participants' different experiences and the subsequent follow-up questions. The interviews were done online, in the spring and summer of 2016, using audio/video applications, Skype and WhatsApp. They were all audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for the purposes of the analysis. The interviews were conducted in Persian, the participants' mother tongue, and some extracts of the interviews were translated into English by the researcher. The interviews took between 30 and 90 minutes – on average one hour – as the participants differed in the kinds of experiences they had had and their ability and willingness to elaborate on them.

To select the participants, Robinson's (2014) guide was used. Firstly a target population was defined with two inclusion criteria: being an adult English language learner from Iran, and having attended English courses in a private language institute in Iran. After that, considering the theoretical and practical issues, a sample size range of six to ten participants was selected. Online advertising was the main method used to find the participants, and it involved convenience sampling as well as snow ball sampling. According to Robinson (2014), convenience sampling is based on the principle of first-come-first-served

for anyone who meets the criteria, until the required size is reached. Snowball sampling or referral chains refer to a practice in which participants are asked to recommend others who also qualify for participation. In practice, I asked my followers on my public Twitter account if they met the inclusion criteria and if they were willing to participate in the interview. Four of the participants contacted me through Twitter. One of these participants introduced me to another four, making the final sample of eight participants.

The participants in the study were eight Iranian learners of English, two males and six females, who were between 21 and 31 years old at the time of the interviews. They all came from the same socio-economic class, middle-class, which meant they could financially afford attending courses in private institutes, and their social interests included certain activities involving English language. Apart from studying English at a public school, all the participants had attended English courses at one or more private language institutes during the previous few years. However, public and private schools were not the only sources of English to which they had access: the Internet, social networks, movies, music, books, and interaction with other people were among other sources to which the participants had access in order to learn and use the English language. The extent to which they used each of these sources varied from one participant to another.

In analyzing the data, Braun et al.'s (2018) guide to how to carry out a reflexive and recursive thematic analysis was consulted. A hybrid approach of both inductive and deductive orientations was employed. The starting point for the analysis was the data itself. In a bottom-up approach, the transcription of each interview was studied several times in order to find any data relevant to the participants' experiences of learning and using English and how, if at all, their experiences were connected to their understanding of culture in general. Then in a top-down approach, the data relevant to learning and using English was deductively analyzed to find any representation of the four main themes of the theoretical framework, Baker's model of intercultural awareness, presented in the previous section.

All the participants in the research were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and of the uses and purposes of the study before verbally consenting to take part. Their anonymity was protected by the use of pseudonyms. More information about each of the participants is provided in the appendix.

5. Findings

The findings of the present study show that learning and using English contributed to the learners' intercultural awareness mainly by helping them understand their own cultural identity, as well as cultural complexities. As far as cultural stereotypes were concerned, learning English had mainly had rather adverse effects on the learners' intercultural awareness. Regarding negotiation and mediation between cultures, apart from one or two cases in which the learners' skills of negotiation and mediation could be indirectly traced back to learning and using English, there was no data supporting a relationship between

the two. In what follows, the three relevant themes are discussed using extracts from the interviews.

5.1 One's own culture

During the interviews, discussion about learners' own values and cultural identities, and how they were being shaped and changed, came up many times. In this section, aspects to this that were connected to learning and using English are presented. In the first three extracts from the interviews, participants reflect on how – if at all – English influenced them as a person. Consider Participant 2 (31-year-old female), for instance:

Extract 1 Participant 2**:**

> It makes me more hopeful. I become more hopeful that I can have other relationships, or I think that I can discover the things that I like…because I am tired of all this uniformity…perhaps I think that it's like an escape.

There are three words in this quotation that are particularly significant: *discover uniformity* and *escape*. For Participant 2, the English language opens up opportunities to *discover* the other: she is no longer restricted to the mainstream culture, the *uniformity*, in which she does not seem to be interested, because now she knows an *escape* route, i.e. English. *Escape* is a particularly strong expression, but it is not very difficult to understand why she used it, considering the fact that she is a woman living in a deeply misogynist, sexist society.

Similarly, in the next extract, Participant 3 (26-year-old female) talks about how English changed her personality:

Extract 2 Participant 3:

> It changed my ambitions a bit…before, I used to be carefree, but interacting with these people [guests from CouchSurfing] made this side of me much stronger…that I wouldn't care about luxuries and I would live my life the way I like.

A connection between choosing to live a specific lifestyle and simply knowing English might at first sight seem a bit far-fetched, but at least according to Participant 3, it is possible. She was able to have CouchSurfers as guests because she knew how to interact with them in English, and this gave her an opportunity to learn about different cultures, from different people, which subsequently changed and shaped her own values and culture as well.

As in the previous example, in the next one, Participant 4 (22-year-old male) elaborates on the role of English in forming his values:

Extract 3 Participant 4:

> You open Yahoo, see a number of articles, read them…and this influences your thoughts…I am somehow repeating myself, but for instance, you watch a movie, you feel like…I don't know…like their lifestyle is better than yours, or I don't know… some things are wrong in your culture… actually, I am not a kind of…a traditional person…and when I say traditional, I don't mean just religious…I don't really care about the taboos or the values in society…I try to have my own discipline, my own lifestyle…so I definitely appreciate it if I can learn something else from other cultures…to see if that is better than what I am living now, then I change it…there have been many examples…like even in a TV show like Friends…you see their kind of relationships…like how they treat each other when they break up…well it's good to see these and to learn from them…there are more than a few such examples, perhaps many…like the very issue of not meddling in each other's lives…perhaps, in fact a big part of it came from such things…the interactions, the films, etc.

In the case of Participant 4, what is interesting and of course important is the fact that he seems to be fully aware of how learning English is, perhaps continually, changing and forming his views and values, building his culture and his identity, and he "definitely appreciates" the privilege. He even emphasizes the difference between his own personal culture and that of the society he lives in (like the issue of meddling in each other's lives), showing that although he belongs to the larger cultural group, he does not necessarily subscribe to all its tenets.

In the next extract, Participant 2, who had referred to English as an escape that lets her discover other things, gives an example of such a discovery.

Extract 4 Participant 2:

> One thing that I saw just a few days ago and that had a strong impact on me was a video I saw on Facebook. It was Japanese, about Zen philosophy. There was a Japanese man with all his possessions in life […] he talked about some sides of Zen, for instance that one should not have a lot of stuff…if you don't need something, why do you keep it? It had a strong impact on me…I thought it's much better to be like that.

In this case, the role of social networks in shaping one's culture is highlighted. Knowing English, Participant 2 has access to a lot more sources to learn from; in this case, it is a video on Facebook. She says twice that it had "a strong impact" on her. Not only is she able to identify the influence of a specific culture on a person's values and behavior, but she is also open to following up something new that she discovers , because she believes "it's much better to be like that". The way she eventually chooses to live her life might not exactly follow Zen culture and philosophy, but she seems to have adapted to one specific aspect of it, minimalism.

5.2 Cultural complexities

In more than a few cases in the interviews, the participants showed an understanding of cultural complexities, which might have started off with superficial distinctions between 'our culture' and 'their culture' and comparisons

between the two, but led to recognizing the evolving nature of cultural norms and practices, and in some cases to changing their own way of doing things. In this section, parts of the interviews are presented that show how such understandings were influenced by the participants' knowledge and use of English. In the next two extracts, the participants talk about how their views about homosexuality changed once they realized how differently it is viewed in other cultures. Firstly, consider Participant 5 (30-year-old female):

Extract 5 Participant 5:

> In fact, my view of homosexuality changed in the social media; in Twitter, in Facebook, the articles that I read, or the discussions that I saw. Some 10 years ago, I wouldn't have understood such a thing, but after I learned about other people's ideas I got a more open mind.

As in Extract 4, the role of social media in shaping one's understanding of different cultures is indicated here as well. In this case, too, it is tied to English. Participant 5 said that she began to take a different attitude to homosexuality because of the information and discussions she had access to in Twitter and Facebook. However, without knowing English, she had a much lower chance of finding relevant sources, especially on such a controversial issue. Moreover, it is interesting that she is aware of how she has changed, and why. In this example, it is also important to notice the difference between her own culture and that of the larger cultural groups she belongs to, such as the country, where homosexuality is illegal, is punishable by imprisonment, corporal punishment or execution, and is also contrary to religious teaching.

Now let us look at the next extract, from Participant 6 (23-year-old female), who had a comparable experience:

Extract 6 Participant 6:

> Well some things had a huge effect on me. For instance, when I saw the TV show Friends, it was then I guess that my view on homosexuality changed. Although it was comedy, they talked about some issues that influenced me greatly.

This example is very similar to the previous one. The difference is the source of knowledge (a TV show as opposed to social networks), but the medium for such awareness is the same in both cases: the English language.

In the next extract, Participant 2 talks about her encounter in Iran with two young visitors from France, a brother and sister:

Extract 7 Participant 2:

> They were living separately from their parents. I asked them how old they were when they moved out of their parents' home…one of them said 18, and the other one 21, which they thought was too late…and then we thought and we talked about it, and I was embarrassed to even say that I am still living with my parents [she was 31at the time]…after that I thought about it a lot, and I think that it's the right thing to do…that

> people should become independent…why is it that in Iran, when someone is 30 or 32 years old, they still don't know what they want from this life, what their goals are?

In this case, meeting two people from a different cultural background and having the chance to talk to them about some of the differences between the two cultures contributed to Participant 2's awareness of the relative nature of cultural norms. At the age of 31, she was still living with her parents – which is quite common in Iran for cultural as well as financial reasons – while one of the people she was talking to thought 21 was too late to start leading an independent life. Having thought about this – perhaps as a result of feeling embarrassed – Participant 2 began to realize what she herself actually believes (her own culture), despite the environment in which she lives (the so-called national culture). This was a recognition of the fact that there can be some kind of conflict between the values and beliefs of an individual and the norms and conventions – the culture – of the wider society in which they live, from the family to the national level. This awareness/revelation was made possible because she knew English and was able to interact with people from a different cultural background.

In the following extract, Participant 6 talks about an experience she had interacting with two CouchSurfers who were her sister's guests:

Extract 8 Participant 6:

> I remember it was a winter afternoon, I was sitting with two of those Spanish guys, my sister was asleep, and I was drinking coffee and we were…Do you know Miyazaki? He's a Japanese director who makes anime. We were talking about Japan, and I could not believe it…I thought to myself…Bravo English …I'm sitting here with these people, having coffee and talking about culture in Japan…I enjoyed it a lot, and those two guys were studying history and art, and they were well-informed, well much more than me, and I enjoyed it a lot…in general, when you talk to foreigners you realize what a big blessing it [knowing English] is.

In the extract above, Participant 6 shows an awareness of how learning and using English has helped her develop her awareness of different cultures. In fact, she had a concrete example: anime culture in Japan. Interestingly, none of the participants in the interaction presented here were actually from Japan, so they were not native to the culture, but through the English language they got to share their experiences and understandings.

5.3 Cultural stereotypes

In all the interviews, there were many examples that showed that learning and using English in different contexts could have led to the participants having stereotypical views of cultures, mostly on essentialist national bases.

In the next three extracts, the participants talk about what they learned about different cultures from language textbooks. Notice the similarities in all of them.

Extract 9 Participant 5:

> One thing that I learned for instance was that greetings are done differently in Japan than in another country like India…or it is different in England or an American country. Perhaps our way of greeting is sometimes insulting for them, or not ok.

Extract 10 Participant 2:

> For instance, Japanese eating culture, like in what way they eat food, and what is considered disrespect for them…or for instance if you are in Algeria or I don't know another Arab country, if you see your friend in the taxi, you should pretend that you haven't seen them because otherwise when you are getting out of the taxi you have to pay for them too. That's why people pretend that they don't know each other in the taxi, it's their culture.

Extract 11 Participant 3:

> We had some units about culture in other countries…yes we had something like that…whether about Asian countries or European countries, for instance their eating habits, or how they party…we had things like that, but that's all.

As shown in the extracts above, most of the things the interviewees mentioned that they learned from the language textbooks were bits and pieces of information on cultural differences, mainly on national paradigms: how people in a specific country behave in a specific situation (eating, greeting, partying, etc.). Although this knowledge of different cultural behaviors and habits might contribute to learners' intercultural awareness, it could just as easily lead to national/cultural stereotypes if not approached critically. As we see in Extract 10, for instance, Participant 2 referred to the complexity of a particular social situation in an "Arab country". In other words, the whole Arab community was lumped together. There is no gainsaying the fact that some people might actually behave in the way described there, in that specific country, but nowhere in Participant 2's words was it clear whether or not she was aware of the existence of "multiple voices or perspectives within any cultural grouping" (Baker 2011), 'because it's their culture'.

In the next extract, Participant 1, who used to host CouchSurfers from different parts of the world, shares an example of what he learned through those experiences.

Extract 12 Participant 1:

> This has been a very interesting experience. I believe that for learning about cultures the best way is meeting in person…In fact, perhaps I have kept in mind every single thing I learned from them, and it has been much easier for me to believe…compared with something I read, or watch in a movie […]For instance about Spanish people…how much they love having fun and partying, and in fact they have very low-stress and fun lives…both our young guests and older, middle-aged ones…they all were good-time people.

Although meeting people in person – intercultural encounters – could improve learners' intercultural awareness, it could have adverse effects as well. Participant 1, who is interested in hosting CouchSurfers, is able to do so mainly because he knows English. This has given him a great opportunity to see and learn about different cultures first-hand. However, although he seems to have a critical approach, since he does not easily believe what he reads or sees, he too makes the mistake of making cultural generalizations and accepting stereotypes. The reason could be that it might be easier to do so when you have seen something with your own eyes, no matter how limited what you have seen is.

Another example of such overgeneralizations based on personal experience is shown in the next extract, in which Participant 7 (29-year-old female) talks about her intercultural encounter with two men, one Swedish, and the other half Swedish and half Bosnian.

Extract 13 Participant 7:

> That was also very interesting. They also changed my view of Swedes, because I had the same view of Swedes as I did of Russians. At first I thought the same…I thought that…well the one who was originally from Sweden, was too cold and too serious…but then after a week or 10 days, I realized that no…if he doesn't talk or doesn't react as much, it's that he is shy […]or about the Bosnian guy…I had no idea…I learned how beautiful their country is, how warm-hearted the people are, how similar they are to us.

In Participant 7's case, while it is significant that she seems ready to modify her presuppositions about people from other cultural backgrounds, it is also quite alarming how confident she seems now about her new opinions. Like in the previous case, she has seen only one person from a country (Bosnia), and on the basis of such limited observation she produces cultural stereotypes about the whole nation (warm-hearted people). She also extends the national/cultural stereotypes onto another level by comparing Bosnians to "us" Iranians, ignoring the fact that not all people in a particular group are culturally the same.

6. Discussion

In this section, I will go back to the research question to discuss the ways in which learning and using English enhance or hinder learners' intercultural awareness, and also what else could be possible.

As discussed in the previous section, learning and using English had a positive role in enhancing learners' intercultural awareness, mainly on their understanding of their own cultural identity as well as of cultural complexities, by giving them the opportunity to open new doors and expand their horizons. English in this sense could become a medium in what Pennycook (2007) calls transcultural flows, which he uses "to address the ways in which cultural forms move, change, and are reused to fashion new identities in new contexts" (p. 6). Based on the participants' experiences, the positive role of English was mostly through self-learning and using their albeit limited knowledge rather than

through formal teaching of the language in either public-sector schools or private-sector institutes. According to the findings, listening to music and playing it, reading, watching movies and TV shows, using social networks, engaging in online discussions, and interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds were among the ways of using English that contributed to developing the participants' intercultural awareness. What the participants learned about cultures was not merely about the so-called national cultures of English-speaking countries, nor was their access limited to native speakers/writers of English. English was instead a bridge between different people from different cultures, speaking different first languages.

While recognizing the ways learning and using English enhanced learners' intercultural awareness, the data also showed that it had hindering influences too, specifically by feeding into cultural stereotypes. According to the participants, the way cultures were represented in their language textbooks, and also how they made sense of other cultures in their personal encounters, at least to some extent, was through othering. According to Dervin (2016), othering means "turning the other into an other, thus creating a boundary between different and same, insider and outsider" (p. 45). By concentrating on differences, such as nationality, race, religion, and language, rather than all the similarities people share, othering gives the impression that people's behaviors and opinions are only influenced by the cultural groupings they belong to (Dervin 2016) and discounts the possibility of different voices within such groups (Baker 2011). In daily interactions, othering and stereotypes can result in prejudice, discrimination, power imbalance, and even patronizing attitudes (Dervin 2016). The findings of this study, however, highlight the interesting point that, in most cases, the very participants who expressed some stereotypical views seem also to have had a quite deep understanding of cultural complexities in general, and their own cultural identities in particular. Therefore, holding culturally stereotypical views seems to be a common problem, even for those who otherwise have a high level of intercultural awareness.

Finally, the data highlighted the vast and varied opportunities opened up through English. In his review of Crystal's (1997) book, *English as a Global Language*, Phillipson (1999) criticizes him for seeing English as symbiotically connected to progress, ignoring how it achieved the position it has now and the ecological and cultural effects of the homogenized, globalized world. Pennycook (2007), on the other hand, sees Phillipson's view of the complexity of English in relation to globalization as being reductionist as well. He contends that it is important to understand the various ways in which English is involved in global flows of knowledge and culture, being used and appropriated by people in various domains of globalization. According to the findings of the present study, besides being a medium for accessing mainstream, consumerist and *Coca-colonized* cultural products, such as the TV show Friends, English has also functioned as a tool for understanding more complex, sometimes countercultural phenomena, such as LGBT movements, Zen philosophy, and Japanese anime. Therefore, while acknowledging the destructive effects of globalization in

general and of the spread of the English language in particular on social and economic policies, on educational systems and on other languages and cultures, we should remain alert to the possibilities that they provide outside of such fields (Pennycook 2007). As Kramsch (1999) put it, "If there is one thing that globalization has brought us, and that the teaching of English makes possible, it is travel, migration, multiple allegiances, and a different relationship to time and place" (p. 138). The new horizons are not open only to the Americanized, homogenized world as long as learners are critical thinkers and interculturally aware.

7. Implications

The findings of this study could have implications for policy-makers in the field of English language education, including teacher education, curriculum design and materials development, not only in Iran but also in other comparable contexts.

The first implication relates to the significance of learners' experiences in self-learning and using English. As shown in this study, there are numerous opportunities outside of formal education which could enhance learners' intercultural awareness. The Internet, for instance, as an integral part of globalization plays a crucial part in setting the scene for language and intercultural learning. As Kern (2014) argues, it provides access to almost unlimited information, texts, films, music, images, and other pedagogical resources, as well as opportunities for low-cost, direct communication across vast distances. The potential promises and perils in the everyday use of language are too many and too large for policy makers in foreign language education to ignore. This being the case, policy-makers in English language education could take up a hybrid approach to teaching, including both the benefits of formal education under well-trained teachers, using traditional materials such as textbooks, and the whole range of potential outside the classroom environment, such as the Internet and social networks.

Another implication is about the issue of cultural stereotypes. Although the significance of culture and intercultural awareness in language education is well recognized and established, when translated into practice it appears mainly in the essentialist forms of comparisons between national cultures (Baker 2015), which potentially leads to cultural stereotypes. This could be a barrier to the development of learners' intercultural awareness. Ideally, such a reductionist portrayal of cultures in formal education in general and in teaching materials in particular should be avoided. It is here that the role of teachers becomes very significant. Teachers need to be trained to be able to teach learners about the complex, dynamic and relevant nature of culture and to explore cultural complexities in order to help learners move beyond cultural generalizations and stereotypes.

8. Concluding remarks

In this small-scale study, the ways in which learning and using English enhanced or hindered Iranian adult learners' intercultural awareness were investigated. This study inevitably has some limitations, mainly in relation to the participants. The first one concerns the sample size. Interviews were conducted with only eight participants, and one of the interviews did not include any data relevant to this specific study. However, although a larger sample size could have provided more data, the study was less concerned with generalizability than with in-depth individual accounts. As Malterud et al. (2016) argue, a research needs the least number of participants in case the study has a narrow scope, the participants, while having various experiences are homogeneous regarding the research aim, the research is based on solid theoretical background, the data is rich and the purpose of analysis is in-depth examination of narratives. Another limitation regarding the participants, was that, as already mentioned, they were are all from middle-class with specific financial status and social interests or concerns. It is important to make note that other young Iranians from different socio-economic classes might have different concerns and financial affordability affecting their access to the English language. This issue could be taken up in further research. Finally, there was no prior research addressing the same topic in the same context, which made the evaluation of the findings to some extent challenging. This highlights the need for further research in this specific area.

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Appendix

Participants' backgrounds with regard to learning and using English

Participant 1 (male) was a 28-year-old engineer. He had attended English courses specifically designed for the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) exam for 8 months in a private language institute. Other than that, he had mainly learned English through watching movies and shows in English since he was 17, and focused on doing so for about four years. He had recently traveled twice to Turkey, and he had been a host for CouchSurfers for more than a year, due to which he had had several intercultural interactions in English. He was planning to leave the country in a few years.

Participant 2 (female) was a 31-year-old graphic designer. She had studied English in a private language institute for two or three years intermittently but stopped about two years ago. Before and after that, and apart from the public schooling, she had taught herself English. She had traveled to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and India. She had also experienced several intercultural interactions in English in Iran and online.

Participant 3 (female) was a 26-year-old interior designer. Since childhood, she had been attending different English language courses in different institutes for short periods of time. Recently she had attended classes in preparation for the IELTS exam. She had recently been to Turkey twice, and she had been a host for CouchSurfers for more than a year, due to which she had several intercultural interactions in English. She was planning to leave the country in a few years.

Participant 4 (male) was a 22-year-old engineer. He had been studying English at a private language institute for almost 15 months. Before that, he learnt English independently through watching movies, listening to music and using similar media. He had had few interactions in English outside the classroom context, and had never traveled outside of Iran. He was planning to leave the country in about four years.

Participant 5 (female) was a 30-year-old architect. She had studied English at a private language institute for a year about four years ago, and at the time of the interview she had been taking courses again for about seven months, preparing for the IELTS exam. She had not been outside of Iran and had had few interactions in English. She was planning to leave the country in a few years.

Participant 6 (female) was a 23-year-old student of theology. Since her childhood she had been intermittently taking English courses in different private language institutes. She had not travelled outside of Iran, but she had experienced several intercultural interactions in English with her sister's CouchSurfer guests. A few years back, she had had a plan to leave the country, which was cancelled. Now she really wanted to try again, but did not have any specific plans.

Participant 7 (female) was a 29-year-old student of geophysics. She had studied English in different language institutes continuously between the ages of 13 to 18, and then now and then, with sometimes a few years' in between. She had visited China, Turkey, Dubai, and Russia and had also experienced several intercultural interactions in English in Iran.

Participant 8 (female) was a 21-year-old student of engineering. She had attended English courses in different language institutes off and on since she was 10 years old. She had not traveled outside of Iran and had not experienced any interactions in English. She was planning to leave the country in a few years.