

ANALYSIS OF THE "GET SMART PLUS 4" TEXTBOOK FROM THE EIL PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Textbooks are crucial ELT resources for instructors and students to comprehend the subject being learned since they are filled with linguistic knowledge and cultural aspects. From the English as an International Language (EIL) perspective, English textbooks need to expose students to a variety of English language variations, including a variety of characters from different cultural backgrounds and a variety of cultural representations. This qualitative study employs a content analysis method to evaluate the extent to which the Get Smart Plus 4 textbook incorporates linguistic and cultural diversity. The research objective is to examine the textbook's content, including characters and language varieties, and assess its alignment with the goals of EIL and lingua-cultural dialogue. By analyzing the textbook's content, the study aims to identify the presence or absence of linguistic resources that implicitly display variation in English varieties. The findings reveal that while the textbook includes characters from various cultural and geographic origins, it tends to favour the inner circle form of English, thereby overlooking other English varieties. This absence of linguistic resources undermines the goal of EIL, which stresses the importance of lingua-cultural dialogue. These findings highlight the need for ELT materials to foster a broader range of English language variations to promote a more inclusive and culturally diverse learning environment.

Keywords: *English as an International Language (EIL), Pronunciation, Cultural representation, CEFR-aligned curriculum, Inner Circle (IC), Outer Circle (OC), Expanding Circle (EC)*

Introduction

English as an International Language

One of the key instruments in an increasingly interconnected world is language. To communicate with one another, people require an understandable, universal language. Hamid and Nguyen (2016) believe that English is now a global language that is used to connect people across the globe. They also posit that English provides the "communicative infrastructure for globalization," and this will allow more participation in "globalized networks, markets, and resources" (p. 28). English is no longer an exclusive language that solely belongs to native English speakers. It is now widely used around the world and is a crucial language for communication. McKay (2018) highlights three major perspectives on the use of English in global contexts: English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), World English (WE), and English as an International Language (EIL). The WE perspective describes the three contexts where English is used: "inner circle (IC)" (native English-speaking contexts), "outer circle (OC)" (English is treated as one of the official languages), and "expanding circle (EC)" (where English is taught as a foreign language). The ELF perspective focuses on the interactions between two speakers from different backgrounds. However, it excludes native speakers of English. The EIL perspective, nonetheless, covers the broader area of how English is used globally. It takes into

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account the speakers' first languages, cultures, and proficiency levels. lists three principles of EIL: a) gain knowledge and awareness of the "plurecentricity of English" and the "plurilingual nature" of today's communication; b) inspire students to give equal and legitimate recognition of all varieties of English; and c) develop the ability to negotiate and communicate respectfully across all cultures and Englishes (p. 254).

Li (2017), who discusses the implications of EIL on education, claims that "such efforts will require multiple levels of educational reform, including national policy support, curriculum provision, receptivity of assessment and testing policies and practices, availability of texts and materials, and teacher development" (p. 255). Matsuda (2012) urges that learners who are culturally and linguistically diverse need to be exposed to the different varieties of English, and it is the responsibility of the education system to tailor the concept of diversity to classroom practices. This is supported by McKay (2003), who asserts that in EIL education, the cultural content of materials should not be restricted to native English-speaking countries but should also include local cultural content. Matsuda (2012) also emphasizes the effective use of teaching materials as the core element of EIL instruction; the materials need to be selected and evaluated so they will bring benefits to learners. She also outlines several questions for teachers to think about while evaluating teaching materials:

- i. Which variety of English is the material based on?
- ii. Does the material raise awareness of the diverse linguistic patterns?
- iii. Does the material show a wide range of speakers from different cultural backgrounds?
- iv. Is the material suitable for local contexts?

Rose and Galloway's (2019) questions concerning the models of English, the "interlocutors" in the material, the utilization of local settings as components of the material, and the linguistic patterns shown share parallels with the issues mentioned above. The Matsuda, Rose, and Galloway questions will act as the foundation for the chosen textbook used in this study, which will be scrutinized for its portrayal of users, language usage, and cultural practices.

Textbooks in English Language Teaching in an EIL context

The textbook is essential to the teaching and learning of English, according to Hutchinson and Torres (1994). It also plays a significant role in students' academic development and performance at all levels of school (Azizifar et al., 2010). Textbooks provide an educational program's structure and curriculum through a variety of tasks, readings, and explanations (Zohrabi et al., 2012). According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), the framework and syllabus provided by the textbook determine the impact of a particular learning program. For both instructors and students, this framework paves the road ahead in the direction of the objective of language acquisition (Takal et al., 2021). In a nutshell, the textbook should serve as a resource for both the teacher and the students in an educational context.

From an EIL standpoint, exposing students to different English varieties can help them comprehend the range of dialects and cultures prevalent in the world of Englishes, which is a crucial necessity for the development of EIL textbooks (Tajeddin & Pakzadian, 2020). Cortazzi and Jin (1999) suggest three approaches to presenting culture in ELT textbooks and materials: (a) source culture, which takes into account learners' native cultures; (b) target culture, which draws on the cultures of Inner Circle nations; and (c) international culture, which alludes to

various cultures from around the world. Furthermore, Matsuda (2012) emphasizes the necessity of selecting cultural content from a range of sources in order to appropriately prepare students for intercultural communication in global contexts. These materials may address a range of topics relating to the environment and peace that aid in students' development of a sense of global citizenship. Having said that, there are researchers who have found that cultural resources from a variety of countries have a tendency to overrepresent the cultures of colonial countries or other countries with power comparable to that of a colonizer, such as the United States (Bose & Gao, 2022).

CEFR-Aligned Curriculum in Malaysia and Get Smart Plus 4

Malaysia is gradually internationalizing its citizens. In realizing the dream of having a more globalized society, there is a move to transform its language education. The English Language Standards and Quality Council (ELSQC), which involved the experts chosen by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the director of the English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC), was founded to investigate the issues related to the declining proficiency of English among ESL learners (Abd Aziz & Mohamad Uri, 2017; Hadi & Shah, 2020). Based on the study, the council has come up with a solution to adopt the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for English. The new policy strives to "uphold Bahasa Malaysia and strengthen the English language" by making sure learners in Malaysia can achieve certain standards of English proficiency: B1/B2 for secondary school leavers and A2 for primary school leavers (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012). In achieving the CEFR standards, the MOE has agreed to use the non-Malaysian-based textbooks (Hadi & Shah, 2020): a) 'Super Minds' and 'Get Smart' for primary school, and b) 'Pulse 2', 'Close-Up', 'Full Blast', and 'Download' for secondary school.

This paper will critically evaluate the 'Get Smart Plus 4' textbook to see how the interactions between how the characters are organized, how the language is presented, and how the diverse cultures are portrayed. Get Smart Plus 4 is a CEFR-oriented textbook that has been chosen by the MOE to be the prescribed textbook for year four primary school pupils in Malaysia. The textbook consists of ten modules, and each module covers all four main skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing), grammar, and phonics. There is also an audio CD provided for instructional use. The specific foci of each module are stated on the content page. The content page covers the areas of communication objectives, structures, vocabulary, cross-curricular connections, and 21st century competencies for teacher and learner reference.

Methodology

This study took a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is "an umbrella term for a wide variety of approaches to and methods for the study of natural social life" (Saldana, 2011, p. 3). Saldana (2011) further explains that "the information or data collected and analyzed is primarily (but not exclusively) non-quantitative in character, consisting of textual materials such as interview transcripts, field notes, and documents, and/or visual materials such as artefacts, photographs, video recordings, and Internet sites, that document human experiences about others and/or one's self in social action and reflexive states" (p. 3).

The genre of this qualitative study was content analysis. Content analysis is defined as "a family of research techniques for making systematic, credible, valid, and replicable inferences from texts and other forms of communication" (Drisko & Maschi, 2016, p. 7). Textbooks, newspapers, online pages, speeches, television shows, commercials, musical

compositions, and a wide variety of other forms of documents can all be included in the materials being studied.

This study examined how the Get Smart Plus 4 textbook represented users, language, and cultural behaviours. The aim of this content analysis is to identify particular characteristics in textual or visual material from the textbook. Matsuda (2002) and Rose and Galloway (2019) provide an outline for evaluating a textbook from the EIL perspective which became the reference for this analysis. The 'Get Smart Plus 4' textbook was analysed based on:

- i. The representation of characters
- ii. The variety of English used in conversations
- iii. The portrayal of diverse cultural elements

Findings

Users Representation

The first module of the textbook presents characters from multiple nationalities: Mexican, Korean, Chinese, Brazilian, Malaysian, British, and American. The portrayal of individuals from different backgrounds from the viewpoints of EIL might help learners become aware of "lingua-cultural" diversity (Marlina, 2021) outside of their immediate social group. There is an attempt to use names that resemble the characters' backgrounds, for example, Carlos from Mexico, Lin from China, and Paolo from Brazil. As one moves to the next modules, the focus on speaker diversity in interaction becomes less explicit (see table 1.0); for example, the names 'Greg' and 'Carlos' are repeatedly used. Interaction between Asians and Malaysians is also underrepresented because there is no clear evidence in the textbook. Nevertheless, the attempt to include a variety of speakers should be commended since it provides students with a glimpse of the people they will face in the outside world.

Table 1: The representation of characters and their backgrounds in Get Smart Plus

Module	Characters	Backgrounds
1	Carlos Sandy Greg Anna	Mexican Korean (not mentioned) (not mentioned)
2	Sandy Anna	Korean (not mentioned)
3	Greg Anna Tony	(not mentioned) (not mentioned) (not mentioned)
4	Joe Layla Ahmad	(not mentioned) (not mentioned) (not mentioned)
6	Mrs Rama Greg One blonde boy and one blonde girl	(not mentioned) (not mentioned) (not mentioned)
7	A group of children going camping (two boys and three girls). The only character introduced is Carlos.	(not mentioned)
8	Greg Anna	(not mentioned) (not mentioned)

9	A group of children having a conversation during the sports day. The only characters introduced are Carlos and Greg.	(not mentioned) (not mentioned)
10	Anna Greg Sandy	(not mentioned) (not mentioned) Korean

Language Representation

Get Smart Plus 4 is supplied with an audio CD. Based on the analysis of the audio, it could be implied that the textbook is trying to orient learners to Received Pronunciation (RP) (more British-based pronunciation). Although there are many characters from different cultural backgrounds presented in the audio, such as a Mexican boy, a Korean girl, and a Chinese girl, all of the characters use the same accent (i.e., 100% of the characters presented use RP). There are no distinct accents from other IC, OC, or EC countries that can be heard in the recording. ELT textbooks for EIL should include linguistic variety so that students are aware of the different varieties of English (Marlina, 2021). According to Nguyen et al. (2021), using IC pronunciation models in recordings of interactions between individuals of various nations would demonstrate communication inauthenticity since it would not accurately reflect the intercultural communication environment.

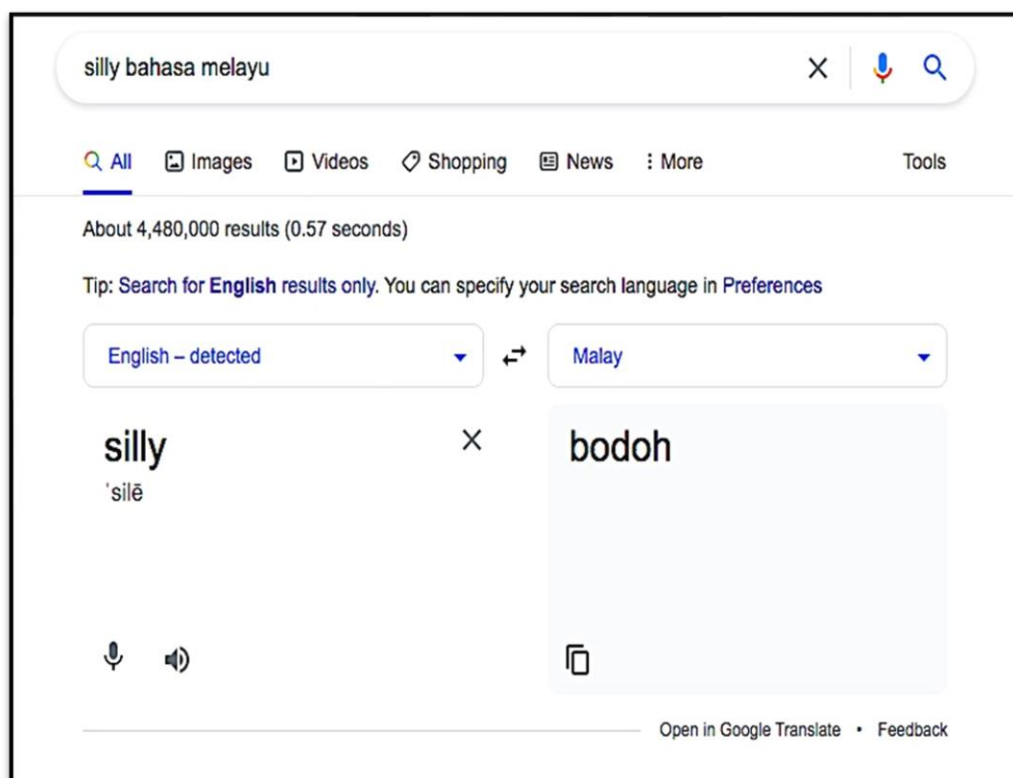
In module 2, the two passages use British expressions of time, such as "a half past six in the morning" and "a quarter past eight." Mittmann (2011), whose study compares the British National Corpus (BNCSD) and the Longman Spoken American Corpus (LSAC), claims that "in the BNCSD, the time of day is usually given with the help of expressions such as half past, quarter to, and (quarter) of an hour, while the LSAC contains more combinations such as six thirty" (p. 200). This shows how Get Smart Plus 4 is trying to align the learners with British expressions of time. Nevertheless, there are no notes provided for the teacher or learners to know that such expressions are only used by British speakers. A note should be provided so the textbook users will know that it is just one of the ways to tell time. When there is no attempt to provide information on that, learners would think that this is the 'correct' way of telling 'time' because English people say it that way, as opposed to this being how 'we' tell time.

One of the important questions that teachers need to ask themselves when evaluating a textbook is whether or not it paves the way for learners to access the world of *plurecentricity*. Although Get Smart Plus 4 provides good access to the world, the linguistic patterns are still constrained to the IC country (i.e., Great Britain). Grammatical constructions are more likely to be the target sentence constructions of how native English speakers from the IC ecosystem would use the language; for example, on page 5, the learners are directed to the form of *contractions* in introducing oneself: "My name's", "His friend's," and "My friend's." Contractions are believed in some contexts to be "ungrammatical" and "informal" (Aman & Tan, 2018).

It is plausible that the textbook tries to raise awareness of the pragmatic dichotomy, but the way it is presented should not be the one that downgrades others because all of these learners are going to use the language in a variety of contexts, and this process demands cultural sensitivity. There is a word that is not suitably used in the Malaysian context: *silly*. Silly is a strong word for a lot of Malaysians, although it is probably a common word in the IC countries. It refers to "bodoh" in the Malay language—or "stupid" based on an internet search (refer to

figure 1.0). It is believed that "Google" is now the main source of information, and just in case, if learners are to use Google to look it up, they will find a word that is culturally inappropriate in Malaysia. So'od et al. (2020) assert that 'bodoh' is "considered a taboo term among Malaysians (specifically the Malays), given that it can challenge someone's sensitivity if the word is used on them" (p. 284). This is just an example of how a word can lead to multiple interpretations depending on the context of use, which, if not handled with care by the teacher, would lead to misunderstanding.

Figure 1: The Internet Translation of "silly"



Cultural Representation

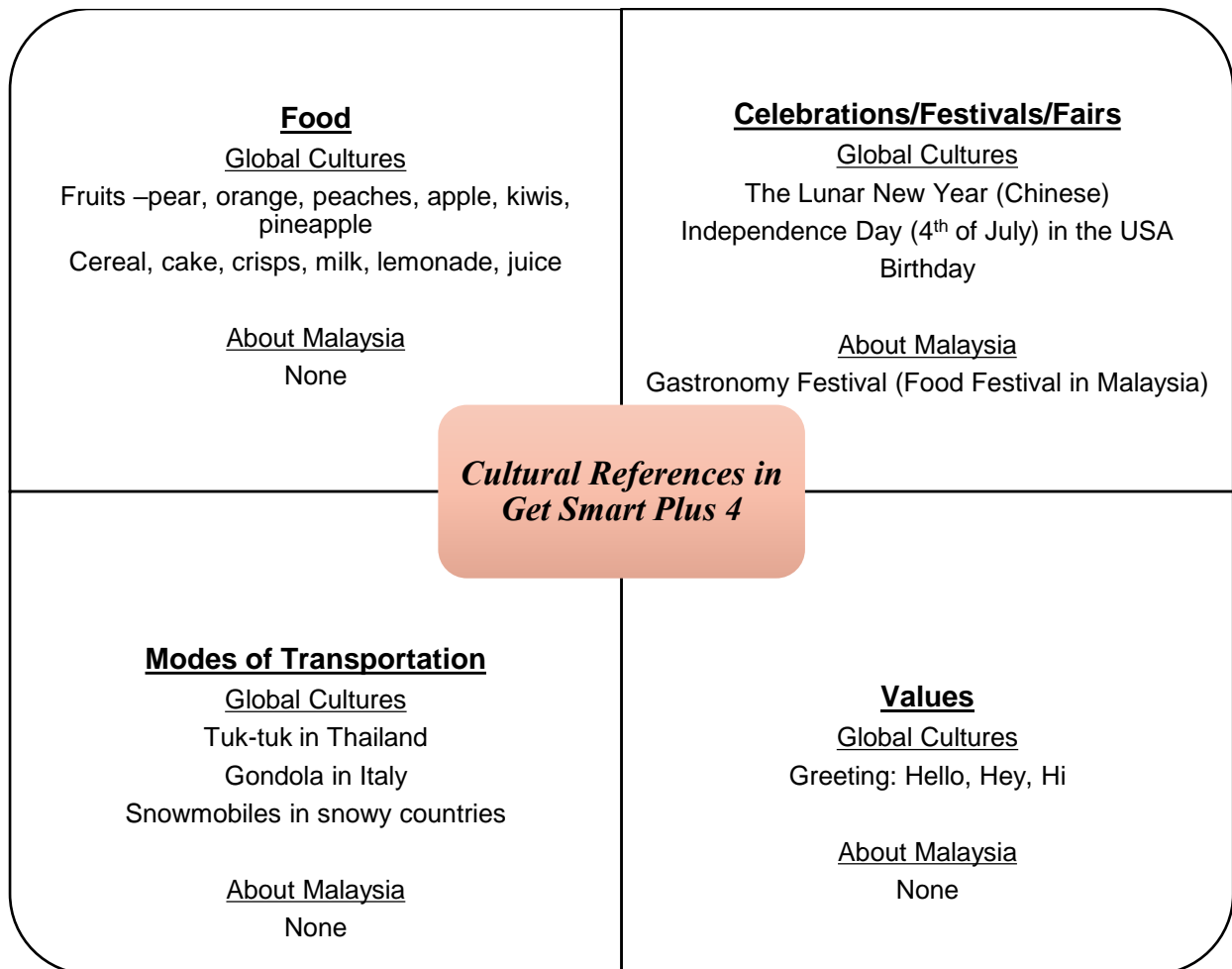
Cultural representation in English language teaching (ELT) plays a crucial role in exposing learners to diverse communicative events. It is essential for teaching materials to explicitly incorporate a wide range of cultural contexts. This approach allows learners to develop "communicative competence" across various situations, gain insights into the nature of language, and foster positive attitudes towards individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999).

While Get Smart Plus 4 makes efforts to include international cultural elements throughout its modules, it is worth noting that there is still room for improvement. Figure 2.0 provides examples of cultural references, aiming to direct learners' attention to the existing differences in the world beyond their immediate community. However, one aspect that requires attention is the limited inclusion of local cultural elements. Marlina (2018) refers to cultural communication as an "exchange," suggesting that learners should possess a solid understanding of their own culture before sharing it with people from other countries. Unfortunately, the

textbook lacks sufficient input to help learners grasp their own cultures comprehensively. Even the greetings fail to highlight the diversity and connection to local practices.

By further incorporating local cultural elements and providing comprehensive guidance on learners' own cultures, the teaching materials can offer a more holistic approach to cultural representation in ELT. This enhancement will enable learners to develop a deeper understanding of their own cultural heritage while fostering the intercultural competence necessary for effective communication in today's globalized world.

Figure 2: Cultural References in Get Smart Plus 4



Conclusion

The textbook is an important ELT material for teachers and learners to understand the content of learning as it is rich in "linguistic knowledge" and "cultural aspects" (Al-Sofi, 2018, p. 184). Marlina (2018), a key proponent of EIL, agrees that textbooks need to expose learners to different varieties of English, incorporate multiple characters from different backgrounds, and include a variety of cultural representations. Based on this textbook evaluation, it could be concluded that Get Smart Plus 4 has attempted to include users from different backgrounds and cultural practices in different countries. Nonetheless, there is still a lack of linguistic resources as the language used is oriented to IC settings, and this defeats the purpose of EIL, which emphasizes lingua-cultural communication.

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