



The Impact of African Culture on the English Language Teaching Textbooks and the Learning/Teaching Process in Côte d'Ivoire

Siéllé SORO,

Université Alassane Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire)

Email: sorosielle19@gmail.com

Résumé: Cet article analyse la présence de la culture africaine dans les manuels d'enseignement de l'anglais au cycle secondaire en Côte d'Ivoire; ceci dans l'objectif de vérifier si la présence de la culture africaine est facteur facilitateur du processus apprentissage-enseignement ou non de l'anglais. Pour atteindre cet objectif, un questionnaire a été conçu et administré à un échantillon de cent (100) enseignants dans différentes zones du pays afin de recueillir leur point de vue sur la question. Ainsi, les résultats ont confirmé non seulement la présence de cette culture dans les manuels mais, aussi son rôle de facilitateur du processus d'apprentissage-enseignement de l'anglais en Côte d'Ivoire.

Mots-clés : culture, langue, manuels, facilitateur, enseignement, apprentissage

Abstract: This article analyzes the presence of African culture in the English language teaching textbooks at the second cycle in Côte d'Ivoire; this with the objective to check whether the presence of the African culture is a facilitating factor of the learning-teaching process or not of the English language. To reach this objective, a questionnaire has been designed and administered to a sample of one hundred (100) teachers in different areas in the country in order to have their point of view about the question. Thus, the results confirm not only the presence of the African culture, but also its role of facilitator of the English language learning-teaching process in Côte d'Ivoire.

Key words: culture, language, textbooks, facilitator, learning, teaching.

Introduction

There is no society without language and culture. This indicates that there is surely a close relationship between these two realities. This connection seems to be perceptible in language teaching materials. In other words, materials designers take into account the cultural aspect of the people who learn the given language in the materials production. However, the fact of including African culture in the English language teaching materials because of its impact on the students' learning outcomes is interpreted differently among teachers. In fact, many teachers consider the issue of culture in the teaching materials as an advantageous factor for facilitating learning process due to the fact that it can be a source of motivation for learners. This can also be explained by the fact that it has been a time where the English language teaching materials were criticized by the fact that the content of these materials was based on European cultures and realities. This was not in favor of the learners since these cultural realities was too far from their realities and environment. In order to find out whether or not the integration of African culture in the teaching materials is profitable for African students who learn English as a foreign language, the objective of this paper is to verify the hypothesis that the presence of African culture in the English language teaching materials at secondary school can facilitate the learning process. For this reason, the question that guides this paper is the following: Do the English language teaching textbooks contain African culture? If yes, what is the impact of this culture on the students' learning process?

This paper is organized around three main parts Literature Review, Methodological approach and Discussion of the results.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Multiple views about the concept of culture

Many definitions have been given to the concept of culture. In the present study, some of them are explored. E. B. Taylor (1903, p.1), who is considered as one of the first researchers in social anthropology, writes that “culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” From this definition, it can be indicated that culture and society are interconnected in that all the components of the term culture are found among members of a social group. In fact, it is through the behaviors or attitudes that one can study a given society.

Next, E. Sapir (1970) supports the view that there are three main senses or groups of senses concerning the concept culture. In his first sense of the term culture, E. Sapir (1970, p.79-80) writes that

... culture is technically used by the ethnologist and culture-historian to embody any socially inherited element in the life of man, material and spiritual. Culture so defined is coterminous with man himself, for even the lowliest savages live in a social world characterized by a complex network of traditionally conserved habits usages, and attitudes.

From this definition, it important to notice that the term culture includes many aspects of human being beginning by anything taken from the parents who live in a given society. In other words, culture takes into account the beliefs and the way of manufacturing objects in everyday life of the members of the group or society. As such, one cannot talk about culture out a given society.

1.2. Definitions of language according to specialists

Many linguists have tried to define the concept of language according to the way they consider it through its manifestations and their research projects. Thus, for E. Sapir (1921, p.8), “language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desire by means of voluntarily produced symbols.” In fact, E. Sapir (1921) believes that language is a distinctive feature of human being because human language is conscious but not instinctive as the other species like animals. The consciousness feature of language can be justified by the fact that human language is spontaneous, and has metalinguistic and poetic functions.

Next, B. Bloch and G. L. Trager (1942) are interested in the social dimension of language. For this reason, they say that “a language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates.” (1942, p.5) So, for them, language is seen as a delimiting feature of human societies and that it is difficult even impossible for someone to portray a society without the referring to the language the members of this society speak.

Another definition is from, R. A. Hall (1968, p.158) who tells us that language is “the institution whereby humans communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory arbitrary symbols”. In this perspective, language is considered as an institution linked to human beings because when someone is member of a community he/she generally shares the same language. So, language is a human factor and it can be viewed as the dividing line between mankind and other species



From these different definitions, it can be concluded that language is a means of communication among member of a given community or social group. Thus, it is not to have a society without a language and vice-versa as supported by C. Baylon and P. Fabre (1990, p.73) who show that “there is neither society without language nor language without society that speaks¹.”

1.2.1. Defining Textbook in Language teaching

According to J.C. Richards and R. Schmidt (2002, p.550), a textbook can be defined as “a book on a specific subject used as a teaching learning guide, especially in a school or college. Textbooks for foreign language learning are often part of a graded series covering multiple skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking, and grammar) or deal with a single skill (e.g. reading)”.

A similar definition of the term ‘textbook’ has already been suggested by A. Cunnindsworth (1995, p.7) who writes that “a textbook serves as a guide for reaching set goals and objectives based on the needs of the students”. In the same line with the previous definition, S. N. Anisa (2019, p.8) defines a textbook as being “a form of published printed material most commonly used as teaching and learning media in schools or any educational institution. It is one of the most important media in learning and teaching process as it serves as a source and guideline to both students and teacher.”

From these definitions, it can be understood that a textbook is a printed document that serves as a guide in order to help both the teacher and learner in the learning and teaching process. Another aspect of the textbook is that it must be based on the learners’ needs.

1.3.Relationship between culture and language teaching and learning

The relation between language and culture in general has always drawn the attention of some researchers such as E. Sapir (1921), B. L. Whorf (1952). In fact, for them the language we speak is determined by our thoughts. This idea is supported by K. Risager (2006) who contends that language is a part of culture and a part of epidermal behavior because the task of language is to put thoughts into words, to communicate pieces of information and to express feelings.

¹ - il n’y a pas de société sans langue ni de langue sans société qui parle.



Talking about the relationship between language acquisition and culture, J-P. Cuq (1991) claims that language is the means by which one can get access to a foreign culture. This is what is expressed in the following lines “even more than the acquisition of an instrument of communication, the learning of a foreign language has, for long time been presented as the privileged means to get in touch with a foreign culture²” (J-P. Cuq, 1991, p.104). In the same way, M. Antier et al (1972) claims that the teaching of English language deals with the cultural aspects of the language. For them, one cannot teach any language without taking into consideration the cultural elements of the target language. This is why they write that

Teaching English, it is before all, teaching the English language by considering that the cultural elements, for which language is the privileged support, will be progressively apprehended and deepened, on the one hand, thanks to the more and more mastering of this language; which is itself a an object of culture of the most interest, and on the other one, by using the language that has been mastered as a powerful means of exploration of the multiple aspects of the foreign civilization.³ (M. Antier et al, 1972, p.11).

2. Methodological Approach

2.1.Sampling methodology of the study

This section is essentially based on two major aspects that are target population and the instruments of data collection. For the target population, it is concerned with the secondary English teachers in Côte d’Ivoire. Based on randomization as the sampling methodology. In fact, according to Y. K. Singh (2006, p.84) “randomization is a method of sampling in which each individual of the population has the equal chance or probability of selection of the individuals for constituting a sample.” To be more explicit about this aspect of the methodology, A. M. Sadia (2023, p.138) explains that “in a probabilistic sampling methodology, each element of the target population has a known probability and different from zero to be chosen during a random selection in order to be part of the sample⁴”. Thus, one hundred (100) teachers have

² - plus encore que l’acquisition d’un instrument de communication, l’apprentissage d’une langue étrangère as longtemps été présenté comme le moyen privilégié d’accéder à une culture étrangère.

³ - Enseigner l’anglais, c’est avant tout enseigner la langue anglaise, en considérant que les éléments culturels dont la langue est le support privilégié seront progressivement appréhendés puis approfondis, d’une part grâce à une maîtrise de plus en plus grande de cette langue – qui est en soi un objet de culture du plus grand intérêt – d’autre part en utilisant la langue ainsi maîtrisée comme un puissant moyen d’exploration des multiples de la civilisation étrangère.

⁴ - Dans un échantillonnage probabiliste chaque élément de la population cible a une probabilité connue et différente de zéro d’être choisie lors d’un tirage au hasard pour faire partie de l’échantillon.



been selected on the basis of the probabilistic sampling methodology and constitute the sample of the study.

2.2. Instrument of data collection

As far as the tool of data collection, a written questionnaire designed on the software called SPSS, has been used. The questionnaire has been sent online in the different “whatsapp” groups of English teachers and this facilitated the procedure of data collection. So, the present study adopts a quantitative method of data collection and analysis because the instrument of data collection and its way of analysis. The choice of the questionnaire can be justified by the fact that with a questionnaire, more information can be collected rapidly with less effort than using an interview. That is the idea supported by Z. Dörnyei (2003, p.9) as follows: “by administering a questionnaire to a group of people, one can collect a huge amount of information in less than an hour, and the personal investment required will be a fraction of what would have been needed for, say, interviewing the same number of people.”

2.3. Data presentation and analysis

The data are presented in some tables containing the number of participants as well as the percentages because they summarize each aspect of the phenomenon investigated. Thus, these tables are commented upon just after each of them in order to make the data significant and expressive.

Table 1: Participants’ locations in the country.

1. Participants’ working areas in the country.		
Areas	Number of participants	Percentage (%)
Center	35	35
North	30	30
South	17	17
West	13	13
East	05	05
Total	100	100



From the table, it comes out that the teachers who accepted to fill in the questionnaire are from different parts of the country and this can be well justified by the fact that in the center of the country, there 35 participants that represents (35%) of the sample. Next, in the Northern part of the country, (30%) of the sample have participated in the study. Then, in the Southern part of the country, there (17%) of the sample. Finally, in the West and East there is respectively (13%) and (5%) of the sample.

Table 2: Participants' professional experience

2. How many years have you been teaching English?		
Years	Number of participants	Percentage (%)
1 – 5	30	30
6 – 10	28	28
11 - 15	26	26
16 - 20	16	16
Total	100	100

From the observation of the table, it can be noticed that (30%) of the participants have been teaching for five years. Then, (28%) of them have ten years of professional experience. Next, the percentage of those who have fifteen years of professional experience is (26%). Finally, (16%) percent of the participants have been teaching for at least twenty years. These results implied that even if the many participants have been teaching for five years, however, almost (70%) of them have at least ten years of teaching experience. This can means that the study was not focused on beginner teachers.

Table 3: Different textbooks used by the teachers of English

3. Which textbook do you use to teach?		
Titles of Textbooks used	Number of participants	Percentage (%)
<i>English For All</i>	8	8
<i>English For ever</i>	25	25
<i>English For Success</i>	1	1
<i>Far Ahead</i>	13	13
<i>Go For English</i>	1	1
<i>Learn it Do it</i>	2	1
<i>Win Skills</i>	50	50
Total	100	100



When we observe the table, we are bound to say that there are many textbooks for the teaching of English in Côte d'Ivoire within the last two decades. Thus, as it can be noticed, the most used textbooks at the first cycle of the secondary schools are respectively, *English For Ever* (25%) and *Win Skills* (50%). These percentages can be accounted for by the fact that these books are similar in terms of content and designed according to the current teaching approach; the competency-Based Language Teaching. Whereas in the second cycle, it is *Far Ahead* (13%) which is recommended. That is why we have this percentage

Table 4: Opinions about the African names in the books.

4. Do you think that the African names used in the textbook make learning easier?		
Answers	Number of participants	Percentage (%)
Yes	92	92
No	8	8
Total	100	100

The table indicates, through the results, that (92%) against (8%) of the participants agree with the fact that the African names of persons and objects used mentioned the different textbooks have a significant impact on the students' learning process. This implies that these African cultural elements help students to assimilate the target language.

Table 5: Opinions about the impact of African realities in motivating students to learn.

5. Do the pictures showing African realities in the textbook motivate your students to learn?		
Answers	Number of participants	Percentage (%)
Yes	93	93
No	7	7
Total	100	100

Talking about African realities, they include the different activities, events and habits bypassing their ways or modes of living. Thus, from the table, we notice that (93%) of the participants recognize that the textbooks contain some pictures showing African realities. In fact, pictures help learners to assimilate easily the meanings of new words because they illustrate meanings entirely. As far as the (7%) of the participants who believe that the pictures related to African realities are not significant because they are not present everywhere in the



textbooks can be justified simply because as English is a foreign language, some foreign cultural traces are also present in the textbooks.

3. Discussion of the Results

After the analysis of the data, the results show that the study has been spread in the country that is why the participants are from different parts of the country. Next, the teachers who took part in the study have at least five years of professional experience; this means that they know something about the domain. From the results, it has been also noticed that many textbooks are being used in the last decades to teach English.

In the analysis of these textbooks, the respondents confirmed that these teaching materials contain African person and objects names that facilitate the learning process at (92%). In the same way, the results indicate that the different textbooks used cover African realities such as the daily activities, the events, and every day the facts or ways of living. This is represented at (93%).

As far the discussion is concerned, it deals with the importance of the findings. Thus, the results obtained are important in that they will help material designers to take into the cultural aspect of the persons who learn the target language. In fact, language and culture are two faces of the same coin. This is supported by Moreover, these results can help material designers in taking in consideration the African realities through the everyday activities, events, names of objects and persons because the fact of integrating African culture in the English textbooks can facilitate the teaching and learning process. In a previous study, S. Soro (2020) showed that the presence of African culture in the English textbooks from 1970 to nowadays is a quest of identity because in the current textbooks, there are traces of any kind of African cultures.

Conclusion

The present study aimed at analyzing the presence of African cultures in the English language textbooks. Thus, in order to this, a written questionnaire has been designed and administered to one hundred (100) practitioners or teachers all over the country. This has been done for the collection of data. Through a quantitative analysis, of the data collected, the results are of twofold. First, the results indicated that the textbooks used in Côte d'Ivoire for the



teaching of English language contain actually some cultural elements at more than 90%.

Second, the results show that the fact there are some African cultural elements in the English language teaching materials, facilitates the learning and teaching process because this motivates the learners to be interested in the foreign language. In fact, when the learners find themselves in a cultural total immersion, the only thing for them to do is to use English words to express their ideas since the characters as well as the realities that are described in the textbooks are directly connected to their daily life. In one word, the presence of African culture in the English language teaching textbooks in Côte d'Ivoire is a facilitating factor for both learners and teachers because it facilitates the learning and teaching process.

Bibliography

ANISA Novita Sari, 2019, *An Analysis of Textbook Entitled "Headline English" Published by Srikandi Empat of Seventh Grade of Junior High School*, (A Thesis Submitted as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for S1-Degree, Raden Intan State Islamic University of Lampung), Advisors: Iwan Kurniawan, M.Pd, Rohmatillah, M.Pd.

ANTIER Maurice, 1972, *Pédagogie de l'anglais*, Paris, Classiques Hachette.

BAYLON Christian, 1990, *Initiation à la linguistique avec travaux pratiques d'application et leurs corrigés*, Paris, Nathan.

BLOCH Bernard and TRAGER Leonard George, 1942, *Outline of Linguistic Analysis*, Baltimore, Linguistic Society of America.

CUNNINGSWORTH, Alan, 1995, *Choosing Your Coursebook*, Oxford, Macmillan Heinemann.

CUQ Jean-Pierre, 1991, *Le français langue seconde : origines d'une notion et implications didactiques*, Paris, Hachette.

DÖRNYEI Zoltán, 2003, *Questionnaires in Second Language Research Construction, Administration, and Processing*, Mahwah, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

HALL Anderson Robert, 1968, *An Essay on Language*, Michigan, Chilton books.

RICHARDS C. Jack & SCHMIDT Richard, 2002, *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (3rd Ed.), London, Pearson.



RISGER Karen, 2006, *Language and Culture: Global Flows and Local Complexity*, Roskilde, Multilingual Matters.

SADIA Martin Armand (2023) *Manuel pratique de méthodologie de la recherche en sciences de l'éducation*, Abidjan, Les Éditions Matrice.

SAPIR Edward, 1970, *Culture, Language and Personality*, (Edr. D. G. Mandelbaum), California, University of California Press.

SAPIR Edward, 1921, *Language: An introduction to the Study of Speech*, New York, Harcourt.

SINGH Kumar Yogesh, 2006, *Fundamental of Research Methodology and Statistics*, New Delhi, New Age International.

SORO Siéllé, 2020, « La quête identitaire en Côte d'Ivoire à travers les manuels d'enseignement de l'anglais de 1970 à nos jours », *Inter-textual*, Numéro spécial colloque : « Du sens à l'identité ».

TAYLOR B. Edward, 1903, *Primitive Culture Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion Language, Art, and Custom*, (4th Ed.), London, Murray.

TOMLINSON Brian, 2011, *Materials Development in Language Teaching*, (2nd Ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

WHORF Lee Benjamin, 1952, *Language Thought and Reality*, New York, John Wiley & Sons.