

Cultural Conceptualizations in EFL textbooks

Conceptualizaciones Culturales en Libros de Texto de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera

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RESUMEN

Este artículo se centra en la comparación de dos de los libros de texto de inglés como lengua extranjera más utilizados en 4º de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria en La Rioja para explorar cómo las actividades de lectura moldean los procesos cognitivos culturales de los estudiantes a través del vocabulario. Así, este estudio utiliza el marco de análisis de la Lingüística Cultural (Sharifian, 2011) con los siguientes objetivos: (i) determinar qué conceptualizaciones culturales se activan a través del vocabulario en las lecturas de los libros de texto de 4º de ESO de inglés, (ii) establecer si los esquemas y categorías se desarrollan en más detalle con la inclusión de sub-esquemas e instancias respectivamente y, (iii) definir qué culturas predominan en las lecturas. Los hallazgos revelan que los esquemas y categorías culturales se activan a través del vocabulario, siendo los esquemas más frecuentes mientras que la presencia de sub-esquemas e instancias acentúa significado cultural de estas conceptualizaciones. No hay consenso en el abordaje de los elementos culturales en los libros. Nuestros resultados evidencian que la presencia de sub-esquemas e instancias facilita que el alumnado se desenvuelva de forma más efectiva en situaciones interculturales.

Palabras clave: conceptualizaciones culturales, libros de texto de inglés, vocabulario, esquemas culturales, categorías culturales

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comparative study of two widely used EFL textbooks in the 4th year of Compulsory Secondary Education in La Rioja, Spain, examining how their reading activities influence learners' cultural cognitive processes through their vocabulary input. Employing Cultural Linguistics' framework (Sharifian, 2011), the study aims to: (i) identify the activation of cultural conceptualizations in the reading passages, (ii) assess the development of schemas and categories with the inclusion of sub-schemas and instances, and (iii) explore what cultures are enhanced by these cultural conceptualizations. Results indicate the activation of cultural schemas and categories, with schemas being more prevalent, and the inclusion of sub-schemas and instances enriching cultural meaning. The approach to addressing culture in EFL textbooks varies

in each book. Our findings show that the presence of sub-schemas and instances may facilitate learners in effectively navigating intercultural encounters.

Keywords: Cultural conceptualizations, EFL textbooks, Vocabulary, Cultural schemas, Cultural categories

1. INTRODUCTION

During intercultural interactions, individuals activate and negotiate their cultural conceptualizations (Sharifian, 2009). As a result, they rely on their existing cultural schemata to interpret and evaluate unfamiliar information (Sharifian 2003; 2009). Consequently, EFL learners must broaden their cultural conceptualizations to effectively engage in cross-cultural communication. Teaching vocabulary with cultural connotations may facilitate this process by providing students with a tool to understand new cultural contexts and realities (Porto & Byram, 2016). Examining the cultural concepts embedded within the vocabulary of EFL textbooks can offer insights into how these materials contribute to the formation and enrichment of cultural perceptions. Despite various studies exploring intercultural competence in EFL materials (Wu, 2010; Canga Alonso & Cifone Ponte, 2015; Amerian & Tajabadi, 2020), there appears to be a gap in linguistic circles concerning the construction of cultural conceptualizations through vocabulary input in EFL textbooks.

This study employs the framework of Cultural Linguistics, more specifically drawing on Sharifian's concepts of cultural conceptualizations: schemas and categories (2003, 2017), to explore how reading activities in EFL textbooks for Spanish learners may influence and shape learners' cultural conceptualizations through their vocabulary input. This study examines the vocabulary content of reading comprehension activities in two of the most used 4th of ESO textbooks in La Rioja to determine whether: (i) cultural conceptualizations are activated by the vocabulary input of EFL textbooks, (ii) schemas and categories are further developed with the inclusion of sub-schemas and instances respectively and, (iii) what culture or cultures are enhanced in the textbooks' reading passages.

The paper is divided into four sections: the first one establishes the foundation by delving in the relationship between cultural conceptualizations and lexicon and how EFL textbooks commonly address cultural information. Following this, the second section details the methodology employed in the research, providing insights into the sample and data analysis. This third section unveils the results and the discussion where the key findings are described and interpreted. A final section contains the main conclusions drawn from the study and educational implications.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cultural conceptualizations and lexicon

The concept of conceptualization serves as an umbrella term encompassing basic cognitive processes such as categorization and schematisation (Sharifian, 2011). Sharifian (2009; 2011) proposed the concept of cultural conceptualizations to denote cognitive processes originating within individuals' minds but also emerging as cultural cognitions. In Sharifian's words: "cultural cognitions may be best described as networks of distributed representations across the minds in cultural groups" (2011, p. 5). Cultural conceptualizations emerge through the dynamic interactions among various members within a cultural group, facilitating a shared cognitive framework that enables individuals to perceive and comprehend experiences as if operating within a collective mind. These conceptualizations have a changing nature, subject to continuous negotiation and renegotiation among the members of a particular community.

These cultural cognitions comprise cultural schemas and cultural categories, which, in turn, are composed of sub-schemas and instances, respectively. Schemas, as defined by Sharifian, are culturally constructed patterns of distributed knowledge across a cultural group, which capture encyclopaedic meaning for lexical items (Sharifian, 2011, p. 5). They are usually based on experiences, common to a cultural group and they allow speakers to communicate cultural meanings and negotiated and renegotiated over time and space. An illustrative example frequently employed by Sharifian is the 'the restaurant schema', this schema includes knowledge about various events (e.g., eating, tipping), customary behaviours, type of food served, among others. The restaurant schema may vary from individuals and cultures; however, this schema is not fixed in the speaker's mind as it may evolve depending on their experiences (e.g., travelling, going to different type of restaurants, having contact with other cultures, etc.). Another type of cultural conceptualization lies in cultural categories. Individuals rely on categorization to shape their understanding of reality and guide their behaviour (Lakoff, 1986). In this sense, Sharifian (2011) argues that the classification of many objects, events and experiences into categories and their prototype instances are usually culturally constructed. Cultural categories as well as categorisation are intricately intertwined with language, particularly the lexicon, as lexical items serve as labels for the categories and their instances. Building upon the 'restaurant schema' example, 'food' could serve a categorical label, with 'fried rice' representing an instance within this category.

These processes acquire relevance in the field of foreign language communication, where interlocutors often rely on their native language's (L1) sets of cultural conceptualizations to construct, interpret, and negotiate cultural meaning. Consequently, miscommunication may arise as language users navigate different cultural schemas, categories, and metaphors (Sharifian, 2013). In this context, proficiency in intercultural communication extends beyond mere mastery of linguistic and lexical notions; it also entails a nuanced understanding and familiarity with various systems of cultural conceptualizations. Such proficiency enables learners to engage in intercultural exchanges using their second language with flexibility and efficacy (Sharifian, 2009). This aspect becomes significant within English as Foreign Language

classrooms, where learners must be equipped with the awareness that their interlocutors may not necessarily share their cultural conceptualizations. Moreover, learners must recognize the presence of divergent cultural conceptualizations that could lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations in cross-cultural communication. Therefore, it becomes imperative to integrate modules that sensitise learners to these nuances, fostering their ability to understand and negotiate cultural differences effectively in their interactions outside the classroom.

2.1 Culture and textbooks

Textbooks in foreign language teaching (FLT) serve not only as repositories of linguistic features and rules but also as implicit representations of broader cultural paradigms (Gray, 2013). As stated above, language encapsulates and reflects a wide array of cultural information, constituting a relevant part of its speakers (Byram & Risager, 1999). It seems logical that language instruction should integrate cultural components not only within classroom dynamics but also within the content of textbooks themselves. In this vein, Schissler (1990) underscores that textbooks offer a global understanding of history, societal norms, and ways of living, thereby shaping students' perceptions of different societies and their respective values. On top of that, textbooks function as controlled instruments which mitigate potential cultural shock by introducing new cultures in a methodical manner.

However, representing culture in textbooks poses challenges, as there is not a universally accepted "correct" way to depict target, source, and international cultures (Ulrich, 2004). Despite the acknowledgment of the importance of integrating target culture into FLT so our students can learn new sets of conceptualizations, there is a tendency in textbooks to overrepresent the target culture, primarily due to economic considerations and the influence of English-native authors (Alptekin, 1993). Nevertheless, exposure to diverse cultural perspectives, including their own, is crucial in fostering students' empathy, reflexive knowledge about their own culture, and intercultural communication skills (Méndez García, 2005). Nevertheless, EFL textbooks often narrow their focus to American and British cultures, thereby presenting a limited view of the target culture (Matsuda, 2002). Yet, as English continues to evolve as a global language, exposure to diverse linguistic and cultural varieties becomes increasingly essential (Wandel, 2002).

With regards to reading passages in EFL textbooks, cultural differences are often discerned through the identification of key words, which carry significant cultural connotations and encapsulate the beliefs and values of diverse society (Porto & Byram, 2016). Regarding EFL materials, vocabulary selection plays a pivotal role in shaping the cultural focus of texts and fostering cultural awareness among learners (Byram, 1997; Porto & Byram, 2016). Consequently, exposure to a diverse array of cultural key words in EFL instruction enables learners to broaden their cultural conceptualizations, thereby enhancing their comprehension skills and mitigating potential communication misunderstandings (Sharifian, 2009).

Porto and Byram (2016) introduced a model of cultural comprehension in textual analysis, which emphasizes the significance of cultural schemata in interpreting texts in a foreign language. This model consists of six levels delineating the diverse approaches

EFL learners may adopt when engaging with cultural themes during reading. Their framework conceptualizes the process of reading in a foreign language as a dynamic continuum marked by the oscillation between familiarity and unfamiliarity with cultural content. At the initial level, learners focus on identifying visible elements of cultures, prompting an active process of recognizing and discerning cultural differences. This stage represents a pivotal point where readers may perceive elements of a given culture as distinct, stimulating, and appealing (Porto & Byram, 2016, p. 22). The identification of cultural disparities occurs through the mechanisms of comparison and contrast, facilitated by the recognition of key vocabulary terms or phrases. These scholars argue that understanding cultural nuances and connotations via vocabulary is not merely a straightforward cognitive process; rather, it necessitates learners to have a pre-existing framework or set of conceptualizations for categorizing these key terms. Furthermore, within this cognitive process, encountering elements in the text that are perceived as unpredictable or unfamiliar plays a crucial role. When readers encounter content that challenges their conceptualizations or disrupts their schematic expectations, they are inclined to engage in deeper levels of comprehension and understanding (Wade *et al.*, 1999; Porto & Byram, 2016).

Research into the presence and role of cultural words in EFL materials is still sparse, although existing studies indicate a tendency for cultural vocabulary to predominantly reflect the target culture (Cifone Ponte, 2019; Canga Alonso & Cifone Ponte, 2015). Regarding cultural conceptualizations in the vocabulary input of EFL textbooks, to the best of our knowledge, only one study has been conducted so far. Cifone Ponte (2023) analysed the vocabulary content of two graded readers of the same novel (a Christmas Carol) addressed to two different proficiency levels (A1 - B1); she found that graded readers contributed to the increase of learners' cultural understanding of some cultural conceptualizations and that these books include more information about these conceptualizations in terms of sub-schemas and instances as the level increases. Moreover, the inclusion of these sub-schemas and instances improves the understanding of certain cultural topics that, otherwise, would be difficult to process using the learners' L1 system of cultural conceptualizations. However, one question that remains to be explored is whether EFL textbooks designed for the same level and purpose are developing students' cultural conceptualizations through the inclusion of cultural words or keywords. On these grounds, the research questions that guide the study are the following:

RQ1. What type of cultural conceptualizations are activated by the vocabulary input contained in two EFL textbooks' reading activities? Are they further developed by the inclusion of sub-schemas and instances?

RQ2. What culture or cultures predominate in the content of reading passages?

2. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample

As outlined in the introduction, the study will examine the vocabulary input contained in the reading sections of two of the most used EFL textbooks in La Rioja, an Autonomous Community located in Northern of Spain. Despite being small, our sample is significant as the selection of textbooks have been done considering their use in several public schools within the region. The sample comprises two textbooks designed to meet the curricular requirements of the 4th year of compulsory secondary education: Think Ahead 4 (Marks & Scott, 2019) and Aspire Pre-Intermediate (Nauton & Crossley, 2012). In both materials, it is claimed that they cover a pre-intermediate level and align with the guidelines established by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001).

Think Ahead 4 is distributed by Burlington Books, a European publishing house specialised in EFL textbooks for Primary and Secondary Education in the Spanish context. On the other hand, Aspire Pre-Intermediate is published by the international publishing house Cengage Learning (National Geographic). For the sake of clarity, we will refer to these two textbooks during the results and discussion section as TB1 (Think Ahead 4) and TB2 (Aspire Pre-Intermediate), respectively.

3.2. Data analysis

The analysis focused on multiword units from all the reading passages of both materials and defined in accordance with Schmitt's concept of lexical units: "an item that functions as a single meaning unit, regardless of the number of words it contains" (2000: 11). The methodological approach adopted in this study was a content analysis, facilitating replicable and valid inferences from our sample (Krippendorff, 2004).

To examine cultural conceptualizations embedded in the lexicon of reading passages, the Cultural Linguistics framework of analysis was employed. This framework (i) enabled the identification of cultural conceptualizations through the examination of the vocabulary input, (ii) assessed the complexity of cultural concepts present in the sample and, (iii) determined the cultural focus of the texts. As discussed in the literature review (section 2.1.), cognitive processes such as cultural schemas and cultural categories constitute the primary analytical tools within this field, allowing the examination of various language features ranging from morpho-syntactic aspects to pragmatic and semantic meanings (Sharifian, 2017). Cultural conceptualizations (cultural schemas, cultural categories and, sub-schemas and instances) will be analysed in accordance with Sharifian's definitions (see section 2.1).

To address the first research question (What type of cultural conceptualizations are activated by the vocabulary input contained in two EFL textbooks' reading activities? Are they further developed by the inclusion of sub-schemas and instances?) cultural schemas and categories were identified in the text. Additionally, vocabulary associated with these cultural schemas and categories (sub-schemas and instances, respectively) was also extracted.

Regarding the second research question concerning the predominant culture in the reading passages, the classification of culture proposed by Risager (1991) and expanded by Cortazzi and Jin (1999) was adopted. The concept of culture in the field of FLT has traditionally been categorised into the target, pertaining to the cultural context surrounding the target language or L2, and source culture, reflecting students' own cultural background. In the late 1990s, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) introduced the concept of international culture, which differs from both the students' culture and the target culture, encompassing other cultures present in the classroom or represented in the textbook.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our first objective aimed to determine whether cultural conceptualizations were present in the vocabulary input of reading passages of the two 4th year of ESO EFL textbooks that comprised our sample. Moreover, we also wanted to determine what type of cultural conceptualization were more common and if they were somehow further described and explained by the presence of sub-schemas and instances respectively. To accomplish this objective, we extracted those cultural conceptualizations (schemas and categories) present in the reading comprehension activities in both textbooks (see terms in bold in table 1). Moreover, we also extracted those sub-schemas and instances referring to the main schema and category (table 1).

Focusing on the cultural conceptualizations, our data revealed that they were present in the reading passages of both textbooks. Generally, in terms of quantity, schemas were more common than categories in both materials (see table 1). These first results disagree with Cifone Ponte's (2023) findings in their analysis of graded readers where they reported a similar quantity of schemas and categories. Our results could be explained based on the different nature of reading passages in the textbooks. The graded readers they examined were focused on a very specific cultural topic (Christmas), so it seems logical to assume that event-schemas will be limited and all related to this holiday.

	TB1	TB2
Schemas and sub-schemas	<p>Mother's Day, national holiday, florists, greetings card shop, chocolate makers.</p> <p>Christmas, Iceland, books, Christmas present, Christmas Eve, reading, Jolabokaflokkur, customary Christmas gift.</p> <p>Pancake day, pancake races, England, run down, lent, eggs and fats not eaten, Easter.</p>	<p>The Bangladeshi festival of Baishakhi Mela, Brick Lane, crowds.</p> <p>The Edinburgh Festival, summer, performers, classical music, opera, dance.</p> <p>The Edinburgh Fringe Festival, art festival, anarchic event.</p> <p>The Edinburgh Military tattoo, Edinburgh Castle, military bands, regimental dress, sell out, popular,</p>

	<p>Holi, spring festival, India, prayers, fires, throw coloured powders, bright colours, visit friends and family, exchange gifts or sweets.</p>	<p>visitors, USA, Canada, New Zealand.</p> <p>International book festival, famous writers, poets.</p> <p>Highland games, ancient, Scotland, outdoor festival, tartans, tossing the caber, sword dancing.</p> <p>Chinese Spring Festival, spring rolls, holiday, Chinese New Year.</p> <p>Burns' night celebration, kilts, Scottish dances, haggis, playing the bagpipes, puddin' race, neeps, cranachan</p>
<p>Categories and instances</p>	<p>Traditional food, turkey in thanksgiving.</p> <p>Festivities Mother's Day, Christmas, Pancake Day, Saint Patrick's, Holi, thanksgiving</p>	<p>Sporting Britain, tennis, golf, rugby, London Marathon, cricket, Highland games</p> <p>Regional food, wines, camembert de Normandie, feta, Apetina, Cornish pasty, Turrón de Alicante, haggis, spring Rolls, cranachan</p>

Table 1. Vocabulary developing cultural conceptualizations.

Upon a closer examination of our findings, it became apparent that TB2 outnumbered TB1 in the inclusion of schemas whereas in both textbooks only two categories were found. In the case of sub-schemas and instances, distinct patterns were observed in each book. Our data reported a larger number of occurrences of sub-schemas and instances than schemas and categories overall. In this regard, TB1 offered more sub-schemas and instances than TB2 did. Since sub-schemas and instances serve to elucidate and further enrich their respective schemas or categories, it can be inferred that TB1's content delves deeper into cultural aspects, potentially facilitating learners' cultural comprehension and vocabulary depth (Read, 1993; Nation & Beglar, 2007).

In addition, although both textbooks claimed to be designed to adhere to the Spanish national curriculum requirements, the disparity in the number of cultural references in the reading passages suggests a lack of consensus regarding the integration of the cultural component. Table 1 illustrates disparities in all the schemas, categories, sub-schemas and instances across both texts. It is noteworthy that both coursebooks were designed for the same educational objectives and level. However, the divergence in cultural conceptualizations raises concerns and may have implications for learners' educational experiences. Learners using TB2 seem to be exposed to a broader array of cultural conceptualizations; yet they lack the accompanying sub-schemas and categories needed for a deeper understanding and the formation of new systems of cultural cognitions (Sharifian, 2009; 2017). Moreover, the exposure to wider range of

unfamiliar cultural conceptualizations without vocabulary to support understanding may potentially lead to learners' rejection of the new culture and misunderstandings and culture shocks in the classroom (Dimitrijevic, 1977; Sharifian, 2009).

We now proceed to address our second research question which aims to identify what cultures predominate in the reading passages of our two textbooks. Table 2 provides the schemas and categories along with the sub-schemas and instances that may be pointing to a specific culture and may be specifying the schema or category. Additionally, the second column classifies the type of culture (i.e., target, source and international).

Textbook	Classification of culture
TB1	
Mother's Day, national holiday, greetings card shop	Target culture, British
Christmas, Iceland, books, reading, Jolabokafloð	International culture, Icelandic
Pancake day, pancake races, England, run down, lent, eggs and fats not eaten, Easter	Target culture, British
Holi, spring festival, India, prayers, fires, throw coloured powders, bright colours, visit friends and family, exchange gifts or sweets	International culture, Indian
Traditional food, turkey in thanksgiving	Target culture, American
Festivities, Mother's Day, Christmas, Pancake Day, Saint Patrick's, Holi, thanksgiving	International culture, target culture
TB2	
The Bangladeshi festival of Baishakhi Mela, Brick Lane	International culture, Bangladeshi (celebrated in Britain)
The Edinburgh Festival	Target culture, Scottish
The Edinburgh Fringe Festival	Target culture, Scottish
The Edinburgh Military tattoo, Edinburgh Castle, military bands, regimental dress	Target culture, Scottish
International book festival	International cultures, several
Highland games, ancient, Scotland, tartans, tossing the caber, sword dancing	Target culture, Scottish

Chinese Spring Festival, spring rolls, Chinese New Year	International culture, Chinese
Burns' night celebration, kilts, Scottish dances, haggis, playing the bagpipes, puddin' race, neeps, cranachan	Target culture, Scottish
Sporting Britain, tennis, golf, rugby, London Marathon, cricket, Highland games	Target culture, British
Regional food, camembert de Normandie, feta, Apetina, Cornish pasty, Turrón de Alicante, haggis, spring Rolls, cranachan	International culture (Chinese, French, Greek), target culture (British, Scottish) and source culture (Turrón)

Table 2. Cultural conceptualizations classified by culture.

We proceed to address our second research question, which aims to ascertain the predominant culture or cultures embedded in the vocabulary input of the two EFL textbooks' reading passages. Table 2 presents the schemas and categories, including sub-schemas and instances, associated with these cultures. This time only words indicating a specific culture were kept. The second column provides a classification of the type of culture (i.e., target, source and international).

The analysis reveals a notable presence of elements from the target culture in the reading passages of both textbooks. This finding aligns with prior research indicating the pervasive representation of the target culture in EFL textbooks (Alptekin, 1993; Bahrami, 2015; Canga Alonso & Cifone Ponte, 2015; Ashrafi & Ajideh, 2018; Cifone Ponte & Mora Guarín, 2021). On top of this, similar trends were found in an analysis of 6th year of Primary Education textbooks in La Rioja, where there were only prototypical references to the target culture (Cifone Ponte & Mora Guarín, 2021). A plausible explanation of this predominance in our sample may be attributed to the specifications of the national curriculum. Recent changes in Spain's educational legislation (Alonso-Sainz, 2023), have led to modifications in the EFL curriculum, including the division of content into three main areas: communication, plurilingualism, and interculturality. Decree 42/2002, which outlines the contents, competences, and assessment criteria for EFL subject in the four courses of compulsory secondary education in La Rioja, mandates that learners at this educational stage should be acquainted with sociocultural and sociolinguistic aspects of English-speaking countries, with an emphasis on their celebrations, festivities, events, history, and characteristic behaviours. Scholars have recognized the importance of incorporating the target culture in the EFL classroom (Méndez García, 2005), however intercultural communication requires speakers to operate with distinct systems of cultural conceptualizations (i.e., source, target, and international cultures) (Sharifian, 2017). The contact with different cultures and perspectives in the classroom may help learners become aware of cultural nuances in cross-cultural interactions. Therefore, while learning a language, speakers should be able to expand and acquire new cultural conceptualizations.

When examining the cultural conceptualizations in terms of the type of culture they denote, it becomes evident that EFL textbooks incorporate different cultural elements.

TB1 encompasses more general elements, such as Mother's Day or Christmas, that may be close to the students' culture; while TB2 makes more specific references to Scottish culture, exemplified by mentions of events like The Edinburgh Festival and Highland Games. Nevertheless, TB1 provides a more detailed inclusion of sub-schemas and categories, enabling students to discern differences between their own cultural conceptualizations and those of the target culture. In contrast, TB2 not only introduces conceptualizations that starkly differ from those of the students but also lacks the provision of additional keywords to facilitate comprehension and usage of these new conceptualizations.

The inclusion of references through schemas and categories is notably absent in the sample. TB2 makes a reference to Spanish culture by including the multiword term *turrón de Alicante* as an instance of the category regional food. However, this instance stands as the sole reference observed in both materials. While research conducted in Eastern countries suggest that locally produced textbooks often incorporate more references to the local and source culture (Chao, 2011), our findings may indicate differing trends in the Spanish publishing market. It is imperative that students not only grasp new sets of conceptualizations but also possess the ability to articulate their own in the L2 (King Baxter & Magolda, 2005). Vocabulary pertaining to their own celebrations, costumes and traditions is as crucial as understanding ideas originating from the target culture.

Finally, the international culture is briefly included in both textbooks (Holi in TB1 and Chinese Spring Festival in TB2). Our data agrees with previous studies whose results revealed a small and unbalanced presence of international cultures in EFL textbooks (Song, 2019; Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2012). In our sample, TB2 included some instances referring to international cultures such as *Camembert de Normandie* (French), *Apetina* (Greek), and *spring rolls* (Chinese). Once more, the sub-schemas within the cultural conceptualizations included in TB1 seem to be consciously included so learners grasp a deeper idea of subtleties in the main event (see *Holi* in table 2).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The research conducted in this study aimed to investigate the cultural conceptualizations embedded in the vocabulary input of reading passages of two 4th year of ESO EFL textbooks commonly used in La Rioja, Spain. Employing the Cultural Linguistic framework of analysis (Sharifian, 2011), the study sought to elucidate how these textbooks addressed the inclusion of schemas, sub-schemas, categories and instances in their texts and what culture is prevalent in their content.

Findings indicate variations in the treatment of cultural conceptualizations between the two textbooks. While both exhibited a greater prevalence of schemas over categories, TB1 (Think Ahead 4) reported a lower number of cultural conceptualizations compared to TB2 (Aspire Pre-Intermediate), albeit placing greater emphasis on sub-schemas and instances within the text. Although a higher presence of cultural conceptualizations would be ideal to prepare students for interactions with speakers from diverse cultures, it is equally crucial for learners to grasp the nuances inherent in each conceptualization. TB1's comprehensive approach to culture within its reading

passages, where detailed vocabulary contributes to overall text comprehension, holds potential for shaping learners' cultural conceptualizations and aiding in their ability to navigate intercultural encounters while minimizing potential misunderstandings.

Furthermore, the analysis also revealed a tendency in both materials to prioritize cultural conceptualizations from the target culture, while overlooking the source culture. However, the comparison between the two materials revealed that the approach to address this culture differs totally in both materials. TB1 incorporated cultural conceptualizations potentially shared by the target students and integrated sub-schemas and instances depicting behaviours and traditions from the target culture. In contrast, TB2 opted for a more selective approach, featuring specific schemas from the target culture while limiting sub-schemas and instances, thereby impeding comparisons between the students' own culture and the target culture.

Our study yields various pedagogical implications. Firstly, it highlights deficiencies in the EFL curriculum in secondary education. Specifically, the current regulations emphasize a focus on the target culture, neglecting the inclusion of others. This oversight significantly impacts the design of EFL textbooks and subsequently deprives students of the necessary tools to comprehend new realities and cultures they may encounter outside the classroom. Secondly, despite both textbooks serving the same educational purpose and covering the same proficiency level, notable differences emerge in their approach to cultural conceptualizations. Depending on the textbook, learners may experience different level of exposure to cultural perspectives. This may suggest educational inequities regarding cultural understanding in the EFL classroom.

While this study offers valuable insights, it is not devoid of limitations. Despite having focused on two mainstream textbooks, a wider sample comprising other textbooks used within the Autonomous Community of La Rioja could offer a much more comprehensive understanding of how EFL textbooks designed for 4th of ESO students portray cultural conceptualizations. Furthermore, analysing other aspects of the textbooks, such as listening activities, could shed light on what type of cultural content is being included in oral comprehension activities. This examination could help determine whether the presence of cultural conceptualizations, such as sub-schemas and instances, facilitates comprehension of oral texts.

NOTAS / NOTES

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