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Research Paper

Evaluation of Visual Literacy of High School English Textbooks in Iran: An Intercultural Perspective

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to find the realization of visual literacy in Iranian high school English textbooks. To this purpose, the density and number of the tags in the three volumes of the senior high school English textbooks were qualitatively investigated. The results showed that Book 1 emphasizes the Affective/Perceptual aspect of the visuals, whereas Book 3 puts more emphasis on Critical/Ideological aspect of the visuals. Furthermore, it was found that as grades of the books advance, the density and number of the tags decrease. The results based on Callow's (2005) dichotomy also indicated that as the grade of the English textbooks advances, the visual literacy moves from the receptive aspect to more productive one. It can be inferred that in developing high school English textbooks, there seems to be no association between the visuals and the corresponding tags despite the variety of the visuals.

Keywords: *Intercultural competence, Intercultural teaching, Materials development*

ارزیابی بین فرهنگی سواد بصری کتب انگلیسی دبیرستان ها در ایران
امروزه تکامل بین فرهنگی و آموزش زبان جنبه های جدیدی در مطالعات آموزش زبان و تهیه و تدوین کتب درسی را تحت پوشش خود قرار داده است. اگر چه مطالعاتی در حوزه بین فرهنگی کتب درسی زبان انگلیسی صورت گرفته است، ولی سواد بصری از مقوله های فراموش شده در این حوزه می باشد. لازمه دیپلمات بین فرهنگی بودن، داشتن سواد بصری می باشد زیرا با داشتن آگاهی بین فرهنگی، فرد توانایی تجزیه و تحلیل، درک و خلق تصاویر را کسب می کند. مطالع حاضر در تلاش است تا نحوه ارائه سواد بصری را در تهیه و تدوین کتب زبان انگلیسی دبیرستان های ایران را نمایان سازد. تحقیق حاضر نشان داد تراکم و تعداد پی نوشت ها (tags) تصاویر در سه (3) دوره کتب زبان متفاوت می باشد. همچنین بر اساس نظریه کلو (2005) نتایج نشان می دهد که تصاویر بکار برده شده در کتاب سال اول بر مقوله احساسی/ دریافتی تاکید دارد در حالی که کتاب زبان سال سوم بر مقوله انتقادی/ عقیدتی تصاویر تاکید دارد. علاوه بر این، یافته ها نشان داد که با پیشرفت سطح کتب زبان تراکم و تعداد پی نوشت تصاویر کاهش پیدا می کند. همچنین یافته ها نشان داد که با پیشرفت سطوح کتب زبان سواد بصری از حوزه دریافتی به حوزه تولیدی در حرکت می باشد. در ادامه تحقیق به منظور تایید یافته های تحقیق پرسشنامه موثق و معتبری تهیه شده بر اساس نظریه کلو (2005) در بین 15 دبیر زبان از شهرهای متفاوت پخش شد. نتایج حاصله تاییده ای بر تجزیه و تحلیل و یافته های محقق بود. متاسفانه می توان نتیجه گرفت که در تهیه و تدوین کتب زبان مدارس، هماهنگی لازم بیت تصاویر و پی نوشت های تصاویر علارغم تنوع تصویری وجود ندارد.

واژگان کلیدی: تکامل بین فرهنگی، تدریس بین فرهنگی، تهیه و تدوین مطالب درسی

Introduction

Visuals have a major role in communications, textually or visually. Accordingly, it could be stated that hitch a ride is the tangible fact of visuals among many national and international material developments which leaves the learners in an alienated situation to struggle the meaning. Many texts are accompanied by visuals whether to make them more entertaining or franker in transmitting the intended meaning. The episodes are freely enriched with visuals: black and white or colored. Nonetheless, the dilemmas around the globe in general and local areas in particular have planned their separate distained design to achieve their ideological dreams, which is going to be covered under English Language Textbooks in Iran. Next, 'intercultural competence (IC)' puzzle is going to be dealt with to make the atmosphere clearer on the relationship between IC and visual literacy. Visual literacy as a branch of IC suggested and supported by Corbett (2003) will be explained to discover the roots and definitions.

A glance at the bumpy history of English language teaching in Iran shows that it has had its own ups and downs in adopting new trends of language methodology which was surveyed and described by Aghagolzadeh and Davari (2015). In Iran, English language is treated as a threat due to the ideological barrier and as a chance for business and academic flourishing. To state the role of ideological barriers, many authors such as Aliakbari (2004), Dahmarde (2009) and Riazi (2005), have emphasized the pessimistic view on English language teaching and learning in academic contexts. For example, an article by Davari and Aghagolzadeh (2015) questions the education system. They state that methodological and cultural alternations are observed in the English language curriculum. Moreover, 'inconsistencies' in policies on teaching or not teaching English have suspended the efforts of many professional teachers to provide appropriate content in curriculum. Besides, as for English language learning, the authors of the article have reiterated the role of English language as a fashionable trend.

Four decades ago, due to the bilateral ties in economics, culture and industry between Iran and English-speaking countries and the west, English language was treated as a tool of improvement and modernity. Almost all of the authorities were graduates of Western countries who could talk in English or French. Before 1969, the rulers had held their interviews in English with the authorities of all the countries in the world. Thus, due to a lot of interaction between the Iranian and the North American countries and the west, people viewed English language as a means toward modernity and communication. So many English language learning institutes emerged. As an instance, Iranian Language Institute (ILI) replaced Iran America Society (IAS). Nonetheless, the curriculum developers of that governmental Institute used so-called methods to teach English. However, English language lost its color due to ideological barriers in 1969 at schools and universities unlike the great developments it achieved in non-profit institutes. As far as the ideological barriers are concerned, Davari and Aghagolzadeh (2015) stated that the new government opposed the old agreements between Iran and the west. Thus, hostility against English language as an emblem of America and Britain, the enemy countries, created an atmosphere to reform English language teaching as a whole as well as English textbooks in state schools and universities in particular. As for ideological barriers, Aliakbari (2002) held that hostility towards English language was the major cause of the closure of many of the private language institutes as well as the reforms on English textbooks. policies led to the development of new materials with religious, national and local content. Nonetheless, globalization played its major role in forcing the policy makers to rethink about the goals of English language teaching. As a consequence, private language institutes flourished.

Newly established institutes run by English language graduates motivated a large number of applicants to improve their English language proficiency. At the same time, new methods were developed and applied by these graduates, which, in turn, had a tremendous effect in learning English language for communicative purposes.

In a study conducted by Davari and Aghagolzadeh (2015) on the National Curriculum Document, globalization was immensely emphasized. It was believed that the knowledge on both computer and English language is the triggering factor in success. Later, in 2010 the fundamental transformation of education was approved stating that The Ministry of Education is responsible for all decisions made. In the same vein, an analysis on the cultural content of English textbooks entitled '*Prospect*' and '*Vision*' done by Ajide (2016) using Ramirez and Hall's modified version shows that text developers in Iran following the dictated policies had provided Islamic and home culture with English language structure which means that intercultural issues are ignored completely. Another study conducted by Rezaeifard et al., (2017) on the teachers' and students' attitudes toward English culture reveals that although both have positive attitudes toward English language and culture, less target cultural issues can be found in the materials developed and taught in Iranian schools. Besides, a study by Mahbubi and Javani (2012) reveals that all students have negative attitudes toward the target cultural presentation system in English books taught at Iranian Public schools.

In summary, the studies conducted by Iranian and non-Iranian researchers reveal those inconsistencies in academic policies as well as ignoring the cultural and intercultural issues in developing materials as the influences of religious norms in fighting back against imperialism have all created a context where English language is the cursed language via which the enemies impose their own culture on the community that they refer to it as a cultural war in Iran.

Textbooks have been applied in classrooms since the beginning of formal education in the entire world. They, in turn, have always played a major role in language education. However, they have been dealt differently concerning different language education policies. The path has not always been clear enough. Some developed countries as the pioneers of language studies sought their aims in finding the best ways and methods in material development; nonetheless, as regards ideological barrier some developing countries such as Iran has seen English language as a threatening aspect for the cultural changes and considered English as the language of imperialism. Consequently, this country has utilized a myriad number of maneuvers to improve its own educational policies on material development.

Regarding the importance of the textbooks as the main sources of information, Risager and Chapelle (2013) believe that textbooks have always played a central role in the formal education of foreign and second languages emphasizing that they are mostly applied at the beginning levels. On the other hand, Garcia (2005) adds that textbooks provide a roadmap to a foreign language learning through contextualizing the settings. He also states that 21st century material development should be adapted to the new requirements. He proposes the following perceptions in 21st century:

The learners' world knowledge and foreign communities should be enhanced;

The most salient behavior patterns of the target societies must be familiarized;

Reflections upon one's own culture must be fostered; and

The relative role of one's cultural assumptions or developing real intercultural communication in an intercultural world must be emphasized (p. 57).

In the same vein, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) have introduced the preliminary roles of textbooks as a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority, a de-skinner and an ideology. Textbooks as roadmaps emphasize on how and what of the materials, in which how refers to methodology and



what refers to curriculum. Richards (1993) viewed textbooks as resource books through which useful information can be extracted. Textbooks as resources might have another implication as well. That is, unlike developed societies, developing communities have always put the materials as resources from which data can be pulled out. However, learners are usually detached from the international resources so that policy makers impose their own ideology not only to segregate students from the world but to confine their minds to the beliefs they contextualize in their textbooks.

Textbooks are also seen as trainers. That is, they are to achieve the intended goals as curriculum developers in various countries based on the ideologies they hold. De-skilling is the negative function of textbooks in which teachers are restricted to what the policy makers have provided, thus creativity in such textbooks is faded into oblivion. Finally, textbooks are introduced as the source of ideology trying to construct, control and direct learners' ideas toward the intended goals; the ideologies of the policy makers that manifest themselves in curriculum development. This aspect is quite evident in many of the developing countries such as Iran.

Byram (2008), a pioneer in the field of intercultural studies, believes that one of the most prominent issues in materials development is the fact that textbooks should not be a threat to the national identity. However, the idea is not congruent with local and national identities that are highlighted in English language teaching materials which can be traced in English language textbooks in Iran. Textbooks or materials have always been the realizations of the values and policies of the ruling governors unlike the values and customs of the nations which are equipped with the scientific findings in the world of language teaching. As far as the idea is concerned, the target language culture and international cultures, values and customs such as Valentine Day, etc., are removed from the textbooks and more emphasis are made on the local ideological, sociological customs instead.

Based on what was stated above, the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1. Are there any affective/ perceptual, compositional/structural, critical/ideological questions on the realization of the visuals?

RQ2. How are the visuals are culturally situated?

RQ3. How are relationships represented by the visuals?

Literature Review

In 1974, Hymes proposed communicative competence which questioned Chomsky's Universal language theory (Brown, 2007). Hymes claimed that understanding and using linguistic resources in a structurally well formed, socially and contextually appropriate, and more importantly, culturally possible in diverse communicative contexts cannot be legitimate only through universal grammar. Hymes in an attempt suggested four dichotomies; systematic potential, appropriateness, occurrence and feasibility. Systemic potentials deal with the basic abilities and the language use knowledge. Appropriateness refers to the authentic language use based on contextual relations. The third dichotomy, i.e., occurrence, refers to the relationship between language and action. The last dichotomy refers to the knowledge of extension and possibility of something (Sandorova, 2016). Also, the new findings led to a new terminology i.e., communicative competence which was defined (Canal and Swain, 1980) as consisting of grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociocultural competence and strategic competence (Murcia, 2001).

Sociocultural dimension of communicative competence was the corner stone to the intercultural competence which was expanded and developed by Byram in 1997. The context of communication ignored by Chomsky but emphasized by Hymes' communicative competence implied that contexts of communications are usually clear cut and easily achieved; however, the invention of new technologies and the Internet has created situations where two or more non-natives can communicate with each other Byram (1997.). In the same vein, Risager (2013) stated that the multiple situations show that we are living in a complex atmosphere requiring linguistic and cultural qualifications among language learners. "We have to be able to deal with this complexity, both productively and receptively, at local level or in micro-context-home, the work place or school – and also in global situations or macro-contexts – international meetings or the Internet" (Jager as cited in Aguilar, 2007., p. 59). The idea is supported by Kramsch (1993) who asserts that native speakers at this complex situation cannot be a resource to refer to. Kramsch holds that intercultural speaker is a mediator who has the ability to not only manages communications and interactions between different identities and languages, but they can also get out of their own identity while taking up a new personality to handle different interpretations of reality (Aguilar, 2007).

The aforementioned contributing factors have been discussed under savors by Byram (1997.). He states that an intercultural competent diplomat has to acquire the following savors for involving in real communications. They are as follows:

"Savoir etre refers to the attitude, openness, and curiosity to the target culture

Savoir comprendre refers to the ability of interpreting events or documents from the target culture

Savoir apprendre/ taire refers to the ability of acquiring new knowledge on the target culture

Savoir s'engager refers to the ability critical evaluation of self and target culture" (pp. 31-54).

Visuals and Visual Literacy

Nowadays, one can hardly detect any English teaching materials free from images or visuals. The merging of the visuals with the texts is evolving due to new technologies and new publishing systems around the globe. A short glance at the history of visuals and texts dates back to Aristotle stating that "without image, thinking is impossible" (as cited in Stokes, 2002, p. 11). Visual literacy was first defined by Debes in 1969. The definition goes on as follows:

visual literacy refers to a group of vision-competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences. The development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning. When developed, they enable a visual literate person to discriminate and interpret the visible actions, objects, symbols, natural or man-made, that he encounters in his environment. Through the creative use of these competencies, he is able to communicate with others. Though the appreciative use of these competencies, he is able to comprehend and enjoy the masterworks of visual communication" (p. 9).

Moreover, West in 1997 (as cited in Stokes. 2002) kept the idea on stating that alphabetical characters are meaningful images. By the invention of printing press, more burden of visualization was on texts or texting. However, recently, due to the new technologies, visually-oriented projects have risen up. New technologies have raised a need for visual literacy; the idea which has been elaborated by Stoke (2002) as "in education's continuing mission of meeting the needs of learners, an apparent shift from the long-standing process of the reading, writing,

counting and text memorization skills that may have been appropriate for the medieval clerks, are giving way to skills of analysis and innovation that are considered desirable in today's modern culture" (p.11). According to Kellner (1998 cited in Stoke, 2002) multiple literacies include: print literacy, visual literacy, aural literacy, media literacy, computer literacy, cultural literacy, social literacy, and Eco literacy.

In the same vein, it is believed that interpretation and creation abilities are the required skills in visual literacy which implies that visual literacy is a language of communication. Accordingly, it needs to be learned to encode and decode the visuals. Visuals as norms of communication, thus, need to be acquired to be competent in a social life. In line with the stated idea, Debes (1996, as cited in Duchak, 2015) proposes 5 steps of visual communication: seeing, learning, communication, interpretation, and finally comprehension.

Methodology

Framework of the Study

Visual Literacy a subcategory of intercultural competence is rarely investigated on ELT materials in general and in Iranian ELT context in particular. Corbett (2005) made a checklist according to the use of the images in the intercultural classroom, such as images of the people, the characters, feelings in the pictures, their social distance, fashion, style, etc. Majority of the themes mentioned in Corbet's checklist can be seen in Callow's 3-dimensional dichotomy. Hence, Callow's (2005) dichotomy was more comprehensive to be used in the current study. Callow (2005) developed a 3-dimensional evaluation system in which he tried to rate the visuals on the basis of three main factors: affective / perceptual, compositional / structural, and critical / ideological (p.13).

'The affective / perceptual dimension refers to the learners' quick responses; the compositional / structural dimension deals with the identification of semiotics of structural and contextual elements; and the critical / ideological refers to sociocultural considerations and highlights the visuals' messages which require a deep look beyond a literal meaning'. The headings are divided into standard questions the presentation of each question can lead to the creation of visual literacy. Thus, the following Table adopted from Callow (2005) is going to be applied on visual literacy analysis of 'Vision' series, that is, the Iranian English high school textbooks.

Table 1

Callow's Visual Literacy Dichotomy

AFFECTIVE/ PERCEPTUAL	COMPOSITIONAL/ STRUCTURAL	CRITICAL/ IDEOLOGICAL
How does the image make you feel?	What elements can you see in the foreground/ background, etc.?	What message does the image transmit?
Why does it make you feel this way?	What text accompanies the image, if any (a caption, a title, etc.)? What does it add to the image?	Who created it? For what purpose and in what extent?
What other images come to mind when you see it?	How is the image framed or composed?	In what forms of media will the image be seen?
What personal relevance	What do you think lies beyond	Who is the intended audience

does it have for you, if any?	the frame?	for the image?
What does the image remind you of?	From what angle or point of view has the image been taken?	In what context did you view the image? The original context or another one? What is the difference?
Do you identify with or relate to the image in any way? If so, how?	Which parts of the image are centrally focused?	In how many different ways could the image be interpreted?
Do you think the image is positive or negative? Or do you feel indifferent towards it? Why?	What has been altered, omitted from or included in the image?	Are any of the images stereotypical, idealized, non-representative or anachronistic?

Results and Discussion

In order to make the study more tangible, the page number of the visuals and visual tags, are illustrated in Table 2 below. It is to be noted that in this study only the visuals containing tags are investigated and thus, the visuals without tags in teaching listening, speaking, reading and writing are excluded.

Table 2

Visual Tags and page numbers in English Textbooks

Materials	
Vision 1	<p>A. Match the pictures with the phrases / sentences. (ps.16.45.73)</p> <p>B. Which is good for nature? Which is bad? Which one is more interesting for you? Order the words based on your interest. (ps.16. 45)</p> <p>A. Match the pictures with the words. (ps.17.46.75.99.101)</p> <p>B. Can you divide the above animals into two groups? How? (p.17)</p> <p>Are there many cheetahs alive? (p.19)</p> <p>A. Look, Read and Practice (ps.20.48.77.103).</p> <p>E. Look at the pictures and choose the best answer (p.55)</p> <p>B. Order the followings from 'oldest to newest' (p. 74)</p> <p>B. Which place do you want to visit? Do you know where they are located? (p. 100)</p> <p>A. Look at the map. Choose six countries and write their languages. (p.17)</p> <p>B. Match the signs with their meanings. (p.18)</p>
Vision 2	<p>A. Look, Read and Practice. (p.21.49.55.77.87)</p> <p>A. Write the words that mean the same under the picture where they belong. (p.27)</p> <p>A. Measure words with uncountable nouns. (p.30)</p> <p>A. Look at the people in the pictures. Check if what they doing is good for their health. Now match the pictures with the words and sentences. (p.51)</p> <p>B. In the pyramid below circle the food you eat each day. Do you think you have a healthy diet? How do you know that? (p.52)</p> <p>A. Look at the pictures. Mark two parts on the map of Iran where these artworks and crafts are made. Now match the pictures with the following words. (p.83)</p>



	A. Write a word in each blank that is the opposite of the words in the left column. (p.93) A. Match the pictures with the following sentences. (ps.17.45)
Vision 3	A. Match the pictures with energy sources. (p. 73) B. Draw a circle around renewable energy sources. (p.74) C. This picture shows six ways you can save energy. Place the letter next to the correct description. (p.74) F. Using the following pictures, write about 'Sport'. (p.96) G. Look at the following picture and then write a paragraph to describe it. (p.97)

Based on the above results, all the senior high school English textbooks include only 22 tags. Regarding visual literacy, it seems that the tags apparently do not have complete compatibility with Callow's dichotomy. However, the compatibility seems to be evident as far as the concepts of Callow's dichotomy correspond with the visuals of the textbooks. Hence, based on the conceptual similarities between the tags of the textbooks with the questions given in Callow's dichotomy, the following findings seem to rise. The following tables illustrate the frequencies and percentages of the tags in Books 1, 2 and 3.

Table 3

The number of tags in the senior high school English textbooks

Book1	N	Valid	10
		Missing	0
Book2	N	Valid	7
		Missing	0
BOOK 3	N	Valid	5
		Missing	0

Table 4

The frequency and percentage of visual literacy tags

BOOK			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Book1	Valid	A/P	4	40.0	40.0	40.0
		C/S	2	20.0	20.0	60.0
		C/I	1	10.0	10.0	70.0
		None	3	30.0	30.0	100.0
		Total	10	100.0	100.0	
Book2	Valid	A/P	1	14.3	14.3	14.3
		C/S	1	14.3	14.3	28.6
		C/I	2	28.6	28.6	57.1
		None	3	42.9	42.9	100.0
		Total	7	100.0	100.0	
BOOK 3	Valid	C/I	2	40.0	40.0	40.0

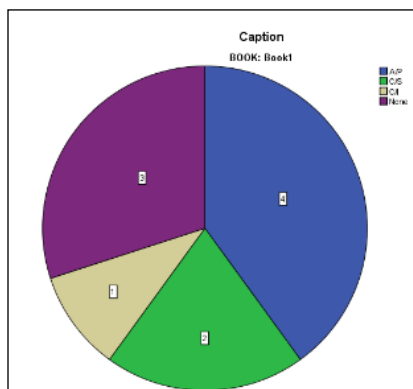


None	3	60.0	60.0	100.0
Total	5	100.0	100.0	

A close look at the above tables indicates that Book 1 includes only 10 tags out of which 40% goes under the category of effective/perceptual (A/P). Further, 20% of the tags belong to the compositional/ structural (C/S) of Callow’s taxonomy. It also shows that 10% of the tags are related to the critical/ ideological (C/I) heading. It needs to be mentioned that 30% of the tags were not compatible at all with all the headings of Callow’s dichotomy. The following pie chart illustrates the percentage of the use of tags in Book1.

Chart 1

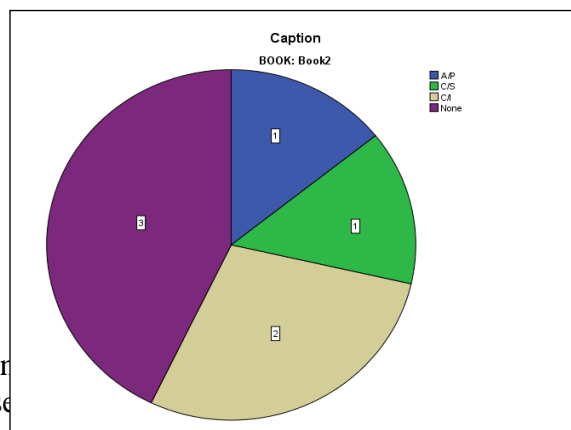
The percentage of tags in Book 1



Another look at the above tables shows that Book 2 involves 7 tags out of which 14.3 % belongs to both A/P and C/S. A close look at the table indicates that 28.6% is compatible with C/I. However, it is noteworthy that 42.9% is not under the category mentioned in Callow’s dichotomy as shown in the following pie chart.

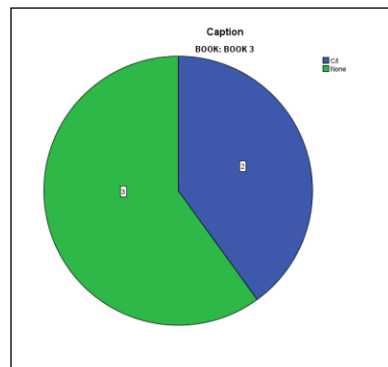
Chart 2

The percentage of tags in Book 2



Book 3 totally cor
Nevertheless, C/I compose

A/P and C/S are found.
ow.

Chart 3*The percentage of tags in Book 3*

It can be concluded that the density and number of the tags in Book 1 compared with Book 2 and the density and number of tags in Book 2 as compared with Book 3 is more frequent respectively. A close scrutiny at the results would indicate that Book 1 emphasizes on the A/P of the visuals, whereas Book 3 puts more emphasis on C/I of the visuals. Furthermore, the results show that as the books advances, the density and number of tags decreases. The findings also show that as the grade of the book advances the move from A/P and C/S increases toward C/I. In other words, it moves from the receptive aspect to more productive one which, in turn, can be regarded as a positive vantage point of the tags.

Unfortunately, it can be inferred that in developing high school English textbooks, there seems to be no association between the visuals and the corresponding tags despite the variety of the visuals. Thus, it is recommended that a survey have better be conducted via questionnaires or interviews to ameliorate the visual literacy of the learners through improving the characteristics of the visuals.

Conclusion

Visuals and visual literacy play an important role in the world of communication. The inventions and innovations of new technologies and applications have created various methods where visuals talk louder than speech. Different nations use various patterns and styles in their visuals, and time to time some common norms are born. However, some countries due to their sociopolitical situations and the language policy dictated by their educational systems might not meet the demanding needs of the learners for communication. The present study expounded the fact that the new versions of *Vision 1, 2 and 3* used in Iran are rich in colors and decorations. They are attractive enough to simply make the textbooks beautiful. However, these English textbooks lack a deep theoretical knowledge on visualizing the content of teaching. In fact, the visuals in these textbooks are blank fillers, i.e. they fill the pages without provoking the learners into manipulating the visuals interculturally. Visual questions or tags that warm up or introduce the content could hardly be found.

The findings of this study suggest that by adding visual questions and tags, English materials could be rich enough to involve the learners in communication. Moreover, the questions could raise their consciousness about the fact that different nations might follow different patterns in visualizing, and that the learners should be literate enough to guess the meaning out of the visuals and be able to transfer the intended meaning. This refers to the idea that the intercultural competence of the learners in language acquisition demand them to be the

diplomats of their own nations. Moreover, their acquisition of the visual literacy is expected to ease the communication in the world of anarchy.

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