

Examining Identity Options in Native and Nonnative Produced Textbooks Taught in Iran: A Critical Textbook Evaluation

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Abstract

Considering the crucial role textbook evaluation plays in any educational system, this study evaluated 2 textbook series with respect to the identity options they offer to Iranian learners of English. Data were gathered based on reading passages, dialogues, and pictures of *Right Path to English (RPE)* and *Cambridge English for Schools (CES)*. Although this study is mainly qualitative in nature, quantitative results were also presented to provide the readers with a valid and replicable analysis of the data. Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework constituted the theoretical framework of the study. Using this framework, the researcher examined different aspects of identity, namely, gender, social class, professional occupation, marital status, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. Findings indicated that *RPE* provides its readers with an ethnically homogenous imaginary world of English use. *CES*, on the other hand, depicts a more varied and ethnically heterogeneous picture of English use. Implications of these findings for Iranian textbook writers are also discussed.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); Identity Options; Textbook Evaluation.

1. Introduction

Education, which is an important system dealing with language, is constructed by society, that is, the prejudices, values, and traditions of the society which are also reflected in textbooks can influence the educational system of a country. Textbooks and teaching materials, as a part of school and the educational system, are of great significance in this regard, and they may pave the way for such prejudices in the educational environment and in the society at large (Söylemez, 2010). Considering the crucial role textbooks play in any educational system, practitioners need to be knowledgeable enough to examine the content of these books closely in order to choose the best textbook available for use in instructional settings.

To this aim, some researchers have enumerated different characteristics for effective and good textbooks. For example, Crawford (2002) believes that good textbooks provide structure and a syllabus for the program, help standardize

instruction, maintain quality, provide a variety of learning resources, are efficient, can provide effective language models and input, can train teachers, and are visually appealing.

Some other researchers have adopted a different perspective which is based on poststructuralist theory and critical discourse analysis (CDA). On the basis of such views, a good textbook must be able to offer a range of identity options to learners, especially L2 learners who have no or limited opportunities to communicate with native speakers of the L2 (Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004). Identity is a significant aspect of every individual and people can be identified as belonging to specific ethnic, social, and cultural groups on the basis of their identities. Fought (2006) reports some of the crucially important aspects of an individual's identity, namely, culture, race, age, gender, social class, and ethnicity.

Recently, SLA studies demonstrated that L2 learners and users experience identity conflicts while trying to participate in L2 use contexts (Shradakova & Pavlenko, 2004). They might also experience denial or misunderstanding of their identities (Norton, 2000). Sometimes L2 learners might feel that they lack the necessary linguistic resources needed for communication in situations involving gender, ethnicity, race or social class (Ehrlich, 2001; Polanyi, 1995; Talburt & Stewart, 1999). In such situations, textbooks can serve as a useful tool that can provide learners with the linguistic skills necessary to overcome such problems. They can introduce a variety of identity options to learners in order for them to become more familiar with the social, ethnic and cultural norms of the L2 community. If learners are unaware of these norms, they may feel vulnerable and powerless in real-life encounters with native speakers of the L2 and this feeling might decrease their investment in the L2 (Norton Peirce, 1995) and might even lead to their resistance to a particular language (Ehrlich, 2001; Ohara, 2001).

Because textbooks play a vital role in making learners familiar with native speakers' identities, it is crucial for textbook writers to pay more attention to the range of identity options offered to the learners by their books. In this study, I examined identity options offered to the Iranian EFL students by two different textbook series which are taught in Iran, that is, a textbook produced by native English speakers and another one produced by Iranian writers. To this aim, two types of identity options were investigated: imagined learners who are implicitly targeted by the texts, and imagined interlocutors who are explicitly targeted by the texts. In addition, identity options missing from the texts were taken into account, thus highlighting those learners who are marginalized and those interlocutors who are devalued in the two textbook series.

2. Literature Review

The study of identity construction in L2 textbooks is a relatively new area of investigation in applied linguistics. It has mainly been informed by feminism and recent developments in critical and feminist pedagogy (Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004). Gender studies are the most prevalent ones regarding the representation of identity in the textbooks and early studies examined the treatment of gender in L2/FL textbooks in the 1970s and the 1980s (e.g., Hartmand & Judd, 1978) and came to the conclusion that textbooks reproduce gender biases. Evaluating Greek textbooks, Poulou (1997) found that these textbooks reproduce traditional gender relations through discursive roles assigned to males and females. For instance, in situations where there was no expert on a particular issue, men gave rather than asked for information and women did the reverse.

Although more recent studies indicate that the situation has significantly improved, textbooks seem to continue to reproduce gender biases by assigning the stereotypical role of women as mothers and homemakers. Evan and Davis (as cited in Sahragard & Davatgarzadeh, 2010) lamenting this situation maintain that although there is a consensus among researchers and publishers on using positive characteristics of different genders in their textbooks, the results have not been that much promising. Pointing to the same fact, Otlowski (2003) criticizes EFL/ESL textbooks for contributing to the misinterpretation of women and minority groups. The common belief rejects perpetuating the image of women as homemakers when they play a vital role in the workforce in many developed countries.

In a more recent study, the linguistic representation of male and female social actors and the construction of gender identities in the Interchange Third Edition were investigated (Sahragard & Davatgarzadeh, 2010). Results revealed a differential representation of social actors in that females were portrayed as more prominent, successful, active, independent, expressive and assertive in comparison with males. The authors concluded that apparently attempts have been made to bring women from margin to the foreground because females were associated with high status activities in this series. They added that this kind of representation of female social actors challenges traditional values that exclude and demean the value of women in society implying that women are as crucial as men to the functions of the communities.

In another study, the construction of social gender identity in the reading passages in two sets of textbooks (i.e., *Face 2 Face* and *English File*, elementary, preintermediate, intermediate and upper-intermediate) was examined (Söylemez, 2010). To collect the data, the reading texts in these textbooks were scanned and the adjectives used to describe both genders were identified and categorized to determine what kind of characteristics have been attributed to male and female and

how their social identities have been constructed. Results indicated that although the adjectives seem to have been chosen randomly, writers of the books reflected the general outlook on females and males; that is, deliberately or not, textbook writers have a tendency to use some adjectives with one gender rather than with the other.

In some other studies, the focus of inquiry was expanded by considering a range of social identities and the students' perceptions of identity options offered to them. For instance, in Iran, the representation of social actors in terms of social class, gender, and so on in EFL textbooks was studied (Amalsaleh, 2004). The results indicated that all the books, irrespective of their goals and audience, mostly seemed to follow an almost similar trend. For example, all of them showed males and females differently portraying the female social actors as belonging to home context or having limited job opportunities in the society.

Although many textbook evaluation studies have been conducted in Iran (e.g., Bahrami, 2011; Gordani, 2010; Kazempourfard, 2011; Riazi & Mosallanejad, 2010; Sahragard & Davatgarzadeh, 2010; Souzandehfar, 2011), none of them has provided a comprehensive examination of identity options offered to Iranian EFL learners by native and nonnative produced textbooks. Hence, none of the abovementioned studies has taken all aspects of identity into consideration. Even if in some studies, identity construction has been the focus of inquiry, the construction of gender identity has mostly been taken into account. Therefore, in order to fill this lacuna, the present study intends to examine and compare the identity options offered to Iranian EFL students by the two series: *Cambridge English for Schools* (hereafter *CES*) and *Right Path to English* (hereafter *RPE*).

3. Theoretical Framework

The CDA of the two series is predicated on the general framework proposed by Fairclough (1995) and Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999). This is an interpretive approach which considers mediated connections between properties of texts and social and cultural structures and processes. The goal is to examine the role of language in the construction of identities and power relations, and the role of identity in language learning and use. The view adopted here is that human beings exist and live in the real world where their lives are shaped by their ethnicity, race, age, gender, social class, and religious affiliations. Therefore, this view does not consider multiple discourses as equally valid versions of "truth" but attempts to identify ways in which hegemonic discourses construct and impose particular versions of reality (Fairclough, 1995), and in this particular study, the reality of community of the learners and that of the L2 community.

Attempt was made to explore the vital role textbooks play in the potential empowerment or disempowerment of language learners. In EFL contexts where

learners have few opportunities to encounter native speakers, textbooks can create “imaginary worlds” for the learners and sometimes misrepresentation, oversimplification or stereotyping of these worlds might lead to cross-cultural miscommunication, demotivation, frustration, conflict or even resistance on the part of language learners when they feel that their own identities and values conflict with those values and identities imposed on them by the texts (Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004).

The role of imagination in the language learning process will be clarified based on Anderson (1991). Anderson (1991) viewed nation-states as imagined communities “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 6). From this perspective, imagination is a social and discursive process in the sense that those in power often do the imagining for the rest of their fellow citizens by offering them certain identity options while leaving other options *unimaginable* (Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004). Similarly, textbook writers can do the imagining for the language learners by presenting them with certain identities while leaving the rest of identities hidden.

4. Objectives and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine whether native English and nonnative Iranian authors attempt to (over)simplify the language contact situations encountered by beginning level students leading to oversimplification of the social world in which the language is used. To this aim, characters in the texts were viewed as representative of two sets of identity options: learners and L2 speakers. Therefore, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. Which learners are reflected and which are not reflected by the texts, that is, which identities remain “hidden” in each of the two textbooks?
2. Which speakers of the L2 community are learners assumed to encounter (according to the texts) and which speakers are missing from the textbooks?

5. Method

5.1 Materials

This study analyzed two series of textbooks taught in Iran, namely, *CES* and *RPE*. In fact, the focus of this study was on the books taught to junior high schools talented students. In Iran, after finishing their elementary school, students take an entrance examination for special junior high schools which are allocated only to highly talented students. Those who are accepted in this entrance examination will attend these special schools where they have to study more materials which are more complex and varied than ordinary public schools’

materials. For instance, in public schools, the only English textbook taught is *RPE*. If these students feel a need for more instruction in English, they attend private institutes. But talented students will receive instruction on *CES* in addition to *RPE*.

In such contexts, *RPE* serves as the main textbook, whereas *CES* is considered as supplementary. The former book consists of three volumes (*Grades 1, 2, and 3* of junior high schools) and the latter one has five volumes (a *Starter, Books 1, 2, 3, and 4*). Regarding the latter series, the focus is just on the *Starter* book and volumes 1 and 2 which are taught as supplementary to the first, second and third volumes of *RPE*. In addition, the focus is mainly on the *Student Books* of both series rather than the workbooks.

RPE is produced by a group of Iranian teachers under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, whereas *CES* is written by native speakers, namely, Andrew Littlejohn and Diana Hicks and is published by Cambridge University Press. *RPE* is obligatory in all Iranian schools but, as stated above, *CES* is only taught to highly talented students in schools controlled by the National Organization for Development of Exceptional Talents (NODET). Both series are considered as beginning levels because, in Iran, teaching English begins from the first year of junior high school.

5.2 Data Analysis

Adopting Fairclough's (1995) CDA framework as the theoretical framework, we investigated imaginary worlds created for Iranian EFL learners by the two textbook series and analyzed the assumptions underlying particular identity options and omissions. Therefore, to answer the first research question, learners' identity options portrayed in the texts, that is, those learners who are implicitly targeted by the texts, were investigated. Additionally, the way they are portrayed was also examined. In order to answer the second question, the researcher took into account which English native speakers are represented in the texts and are, thus, assumed to be potential interlocutors and which ones are missing.

To this end, reading passages, dialogues, and pictures of the two series were analyzed. Moreover, in order to provide the readers with a valid and replicable analysis of the data, quantitative results are presented that may lead us to particular interpretations. Hence, the readers are provided with frequency counts and percentages of the two series, and the results are compared and contrasted. During data analysis, an attempt was made to examine a wider range of identity questions than simply ones pertaining to gender; hence, representations of race, class, religion, ethnicity, career and other identities were examined simultaneously. A critical perspective also allowed the researcher to take into consideration not only learners' identities but also the identities of their imaginary interlocutors. It further allowed

her to examine those identities reflected in the texts in addition to the ones which remain hidden throughout them.

To confirm the validity of the coding procedure, inter and intracoder reliabilities were checked. To this aim, the researcher asked one of her colleagues to independently categorize identity options in the two textbook series once more. They agreed on labels for 81% of the cases. Differences for the remaining cases were resolved through discussion. Intracoder reliability was also checked. The researcher herself rated the identity options of the two textbook series once and then after a few days, she coded them for the second time. The overlap between the two ratings was 89.8%.

6. Results and Discussion

6.1 *Right Path to English (RPE)*

6.1.1 *Representation of English learners in the RPE series*

The first issue examined in this study is English learners targeted by the two series. To begin with *RPE*, English learners portrayed—and implicitly targeted—by *RPE* are able-bodied White middle-class educated young people. In this series, we do not see a number of primary characters who are introduced at the beginning of the book and are present throughout the whole textbook; rather, there are different individuals participating in different contexts for different purposes. In fact, the series does not introduce a group of primary characters whom the readers permanently encounter. Hence, all of the characters are temporarily introduced for specific purposes in specific parts of the texts. Therefore, all of them are considered as secondary ones.

All of the characters present in this series are Iranian people interacting with each other in the context of Iran except the two characters introduced for the first and the last time in the review part of the *Third Grade Textbook* (p. 2), namely, John and Akiko. John seems to be a native English speaker and Akiko a Japanese learner of English (their identities were decided on the basis of their names and their pictures). There are no real pictures of individuals to contextualize the texts and help the reader understand the texts better; rather, all of the pictures are artificial drawings. In fact, an attempt has been made to use drawings which are in harmony with the learners' age. Iranian names are used for all the characters which seem to be quite justified and reasonable in this specific textbook series because this series is intended for national use within the context of Iran and there is no provision of its international use beyond the boundaries of this country.

6.1.1.1 Social class, professional occupation, and age

As mentioned above, on the basis of the texts and the pictures, it was revealed that all of the characters in the *RPE* series are white middle-class educated young people. The only character whom can be considered as a working-class one is a “farmer” in the second *Grader’s* book of this series (p. 58). A close examination of this series’ characters also revealed that the majority of characters are students ($N = 30$) who are interacting with each other in artificial Iranian contexts using highly artificial inauthentic language. Teachers constitute the second group of occupation mentioned in this series ($N = 6$). The majority of women characters introduced in *RPE* are depicted as homemakers who are busily engaged in home chores ($N = 4$). The only working-class character introduced in this series is a farmer (p. 58), whereas the rest of characters remain undefined in a way that there are no clues neither in the texts nor in the pictures to help the readers infer the occupational status of them ($N = 18$). All of the conversations between these characters are oversimplified in terms of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic properties to the extent that the readers would not be able to detect the effect of the contextual factors on their performance in different situations. As an example, the dialogue on page 53 of *Book 3* is presented here:

- Ali: *Excuse me, Sir.*
- Teacher: *Yes, what is it?*
- Ali: *Reza doesn't feel well.*
- Teacher: *What's the matter, Reza?*
- Reza: *I have a headache.*
- Teacher: *Can't you stay in the classroom?*
- Reza: *No, I can't. May I leave now?*
- Teacher: *Sure. But you should come back after the break.*

With respect to the age of *RPE* characters, results indicated that most of the characters portrayed in this series are teenagers ($N = 38$), some of them being young adults ($N = 14$) and the rest of them remaining undefined ($N = 7$). There are no traces of babies or old people in the series and no information is given about their lives. One possible justification for this limited range of characters’ age as one aspect of their identity can be the assumed audience of this series. In fact, the *RPE* series is intended for teenagers who enter junior high schools when they are around eleven years old. For this reason, the writers might have decided to include mostly teenagers in the books in order for the intended audience to be easily able to empathize with them.

6.1.1.2 Gender and marital status

The majority of characters present in the *RPE* series are male individuals ($N = 42$), whereas the number of female characters is low ($N = 17$). In addition, in line with previous research on textbook evaluation, most of adult female characters depicted are homemakers ($N = 4$); only one of them is a teacher and the rest of them remain undefined. This way of identification of characters reveals a tendency to stereotype gender roles and to portray women “as less socially engaged, situated predominantly in the family domain” (Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004, p. 36). This is a traditional view towards women held in Iran. Nowadays, Iranian women are busily involved in key social and occupational roles, and they hold high-ranking positions in the society. In line with these developments, Iranian materials writers need to introduce new identity options of Iranian women and portray a true picture of them in the textbooks they produce. Regarding the marital status of these characters, it was revealed that all of the adult characters depicted in *RPE* are married individuals.

6.1.1.3 Ethnicity and religious affiliation

A close examination of *RPE* revealed that all of English learners depicted in this series are Iranian people (except Akiko who seems to be Japanese) who are talking to each other in the schools, streets and different contexts of Iran. This is, in fact, an unrealistic picture of the use of English in Iran because Iran is an EFL context where there are no native English speakers present (except a few tourists) and its national/official language is Persian. Sticking only to these texts, students would not be able to challenge the highly varied and difficult situations of real life encounters with native speakers in which they need to draw on a range of linguistic skills. Regarding the final identity aspect examined in this study, that is, religious affiliation, on the basis of the texts and the pictures accompanying them, it can be concluded that all of the characters (probably except John and Akiko) are Muslims. There are no traces of other religious affiliations, for example, Christians or Jews. There is not even a hint to the existence of other religions in the world. Hence, the range of identity options regarding ethnic identity and religious affiliation offered in this series is too limited and it is only restricted to those options Iranian students are familiar with. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of representation of English learners' identity options in *RPE*.

6.1.2 Representation of English native speaker interlocutors

The second issue examined in this study was the range of identity options of native English speakers depicted in *RPE*. As stated before, the only native English speaker present in this series is a teenager named John whose social class, ethnicity, occupation, and religion remain hidden. The only information given of this character, based on the short conversation and the accompanying picture, is that he

is a young boy assumed to be a native speaker of English. Therefore, native speakers are predominantly missing from this series and Iranian EFL learners studying these textbooks are not provided with any information regarding the identities of native speakers. Absence of native speakers contributes to the marginalizing and devaluing them in *RPE*. As stated by Yarmohammadi (2005), Iranian textbooks are produced with no specific purpose in mind. That is, if the purpose of learning English is to communicate with other English speakers, how can learners be equipped to engage in such interactions without being offered any such encounters in their textbooks?

6.2 Cambridge English for Schools (CES)

In contrast to *RPE*, *CES* does have a fixed set of characters that are introduced at the beginning of each textbook and are followed throughout the whole textbook in different situations while engaging in various types of activities. They are considered as primary characters and are differentiated from secondary ones who make only one appearance throughout the whole textbook. Additionally, because *CES* is intended for an international market, specific learners of English cannot be assumed; therefore, nonnative speakers introduced in this series will be regarded as English learners and their identity options will be investigated.

Table 1. *Frequency and Percentage of Representation of English Learners' Identity Options in RPE*

		Frequency	%
Social Class	Middle class	58	98.3
	Working class	1	1.6
Professional	Students	30	54.8
Occupation	Farmer	1	1.6
	Teacher	6	10.1
	Homemaker	4	6.7
	Undefined	18	30.5
	Age	Teenager	38
Gender	Young adult	14	26.9
	Undefined	7	11.8
	Male	42	71.1
Ethnicity	Female	17	28.8
	Iranian	58	98.3
Religious	Japanese	1	1.6
	Islam	58	98.3
Affiliation	Undefined	1	1.6

6.2.1 Representation of English learners in CES

The data for this part of the study comes from *Starter, Book 1* and *Book 2* of *CES* because these three textbooks are used as supplementary materials for the main course book (i.e., *RPE*) in special junior high schools for talented students in

Iran. The other two books, that is, *Books 3* and *4*, were not taken into consideration because we were supposed to make a comparison between the main textbooks written by Iranian authors and the supplementary ones produced by native English speakers for the same proficiency levels of the students. *Books 3* and *4* are taught in high schools for talented students along with their main course book passed on to teachers from the Ministry of Education.

Considering the primary characters of this series, the presence of nonnative speakers as the primary characters is clearly observable. For instance, Ali, Mona, Pat and Helen are nonnative primary characters in the textbooks studied. A close examination of the pictures and the texts reveals that Ali and Mona, who are brother and sister, seem to be from Arabic countries; Pat is a Black girl, whereas Helen appears to be Korean. Therefore, *CES* gives a more varied picture of English learners around the world. The pictures used in the textbooks are a mixture of real pictures of people and artificial drawings of them. In particular, in all dialogue parts, real pictures of the people involved are depicted.

6.2.1.1 Social class, professional occupation, and age

Most of the characters introduced in this series are native English speakers, and there are only a few nonnative speakers whom we assume to be English learners and examine their identity options. Among the primary characters, we can see some learners of English, for example, Ali, Mona, Pat, and Helen who are depicted as able-bodied middle-class educated young people. The point worth mentioning is that all of these learners are not White people; Pat, for example, is a Black girl.

Regarding their age and professional occupation, all of them are teenagers. The choice of these people as the primary characters of this series reveals that *CES* creates similar immediate surroundings for the main protagonists. The assumption underlying this type of depiction is that young English native speakers are most likely to make friends with nonnative speakers of similar age and socioeducational background.

A close examination of other characters present in this series, that is, secondary characters, reveals a similar trend in depicting them. The Sharma family (*Book 1*, p. 80) is an Indian family who is also depicted as able-bodied, middle-class, educated and young. They live in a modern house in London and Rahul, who is the father of this family, is a doctor in a hospital.

6.2.1.2 Gender and marital status

As far as the primary characters are concerned, there are one male and three female individuals. The number of females as the secondary characters is also three,

whereas there are two male secondary ones. In addition, all of the adult characters are married.

6.2.1.3 Ethnicity and religious affiliation

As stated above, a wide range of English learners' ethnic identities can be observed in the *CES* series. For instance, Ali and Mona who are Arab, Helen who is Korean and Pat who seems to be African play the role of the protagonists of the textbooks. Among the secondary characters, Rahul and Moneera Sharma who have three children, namely, Ali, Hameeda, and Fatma, are from India. The religious affiliation of these characters, however, remains hidden throughout the textbooks and we cannot decide on the basis of either the texts or the pictures in which religion they believe. Table 2 summarizes the frequency and percentage of representation of English learners' identity options in *CES*.

6.2.2 Representation of English interlocutors

The majority of characters introduced in *CES* are native English speakers. For instance, as primary characters, we can identify Tony, Kate, Susan, Barbara, Sophie, Anne, Alison, Will, and Nick as native English speakers.

6.2.2.1 Social class, professional occupation, and age

As commonly viewed in EFL/ESL textbooks, the majority of the primary characters of this series are able-bodied white middle-class educated young people, whereas in the secondary characters, one working-class individual can be observed, that is, a lorry driver. With respect to the age and occupation of the protagonists, all of them are teenagers. Regarding the secondary characters, a wide range of age and professional occupations are portrayed. For instance, Alec and Barbara Green are adult individuals; Alec is a school teacher and Barbara is a bank employee. Susan Spencer who is a young British girl is a swimmer; Patt Watts is a dentist; Ken is a lorry driver and some archaeologists are also depicted.

Table 2. *Frequency and Percentage of Representation of English Learners' Identity Options in CES*

		Frequency	%
Social Class	Middle class	9	100
	Working class	0	0
Professional Occupation	Students	5	55.5
	Doctor	1	11.1
Age	Homemaker	1	11.1
	Undefined	2	22.2
	Teenager	6	66.6
Gender	Adult	3	33.3
	Male	3	33.3
Ethnicity	Female	6	66.6
	Iranian	5	55.5
Religious Affiliation	Korean	1	11.1
	Arab	2	22.2
	African	1	11.1
	Undefined	9	100

6.2.2.2 *Gender and marital status*

In *CES*, native female characters hold prestigious professions of a dentist, a swimmer and a bank employee. In terms of their marital status, adult characters are commonly depicted as married. For instance, as the secondary characters, Alec and Barbara as well as Helmut and Erica are depicted as couples. The rest of characters are either shown as young single individuals or their marital status cannot be inferred from the texts and, in fact, remain hidden.

6.2.2.3 *Ethnicity and religious affiliation*

As it is evident from the previous discussion, the *CES* series employs a wide range of native speakers' ethnic identities. In this series, English interlocutors from different Western countries such as United States, United Kingdom and Wales are portrayed. Therefore, it is obvious that *CES* provides its readers with a wide and heterogeneous range of ethnicities. With regard to religious affiliation of the characters, the texts do not reveal any of the characters' religion although there is one reference to Muslims and their religious celebration, that is, Eid Al Fitr (*Book 1*, p. 141), this religious belief is not attributed to any of the characters of the texts, however. Therefore, religion as an aspect of identity is missing from the texts in this series. Table 3 shows the frequency and percentage of representation of English native speakers' identity options in *CES*.

7. Conclusion

This study was an attempt to critically examine identity options in native and nonnative produced textbooks taught in Iran. In fact, it sought to answer two research questions. With respect to the first research question, results indicated that *RPE* focused mainly on learners of English who are portrayed only as Iranian people (except Akiko) with homogeneous social class, ethnic and religious identities. There are no primary characters in this series and all characters appear only once in a particular Iranian context for a particular purpose. Hence, all of them are regarded as secondary characters.

Table 3. *Frequency and Percentage of Representation of English Native Speakers' Identity Options in CES*

		Frequency	%
Social Class	Middle class	22	95.6
	Working class	1	4.3
Professional Occupation	Doctor	1	4.3
	Dentist	1	4.3
	Swimmer	1	4.3
	Bank employee	1	4.3
	Teacher	1	4.3
	Lobby driver	1	4.3
	Archeologist	3	13
	Student	11	47.8
Age	Undefined	3	13
	Teenager	12	52.1
Gender	Adult	11	47.8
	Male	11	47.8
Marital Status	Female	12	52.1
	Married	4	17.3
Ethnicity	Single	11	47.8
	Undefined	8	34.7
	British	21	91.3
Religious Affiliation	American	1	4.3
	Welsh	1	4.3
	Undefined	23	100

In contrast to *RPE*, *CES* gives us a more varied and heterogeneous range of identity options. There are a fixed number of primary characters in addition to some secondary ones. Overall, we can conclude that *RPE* provides its readers with lots of ethnically homogeneous English learners, from the point of view of their identities, whereas *CES* does the reverse, that is, it introduces to its readers a limited number of ethnically heterogeneous English learners. Regarding social class, all of English learners depicted in *CES* are middle-class, whereas *RPE* introduces both middle- and working-class learners. The prevalent professional occupation is students in both series. In *RPE*, the number of male English learners is approximately three times that of female ones, whereas in *CES*, female learners constitute two times the number of male ones. In line with what Sahragard and Davatgarzadeh (2010) found in the case of Interchange series, *CES*, too, seems to attempt to bring women from margin to the foreground. Table 4 makes a comparison of English learners' identity options offered by *RPE* and *CES*.

Regarding the second research question, it was found that *RPE* does not include native English speakers (except John), whereas *CES* provides learners with lots of native speakers of heterogeneous identities. Gender bias which has been reported by different researchers to be present in most EF/SL textbooks (e.g., Amalsaleh, 2004; Otlowski, 2003) is not observed as such in the *CES* series regarding native English characters, and female native characters are depicted as busily involved in different and even prestigious occupational positions. This finding is in line with Sahragard and Davatgarzadeh (2010) who found that female characters in *Interchange* series were associated with high status activities. They concluded that “this challenges traditional values that exclude and demean the value of women in society implying that women are as crucial as men to the community’s function” (p. 67). However, the one female nonnative adult character is depicted as a homemaker in *CES*. Therefore, *CES* is biased when depicting native and nonnative characters but it is unbiased while depicting native ones.

Table 4. *Comparison of English Learners’ Identity Options Offered by RPE and CES*

	<i>English Learners in RPE</i>		<i>English Learners in CES</i>	
Social Class	Middle class	98.3	Middle class	100
	Working class	3.6	Working class	0
Professional Occupation	Students	54.8	Students	55.5
	Farmers	1.6	Doctors	11.1
	Teachers	10.1	Homemakers	11.1
	Homemakers	6.7	Undefined	22.2
	Undefined	30.5		
Age	Teenager	73	Teenager	66.6
	Young Adult	26.9	Adult	33.3
	Undefined	11.8		
Gender	Male	71.1	Male	33.3
	Female	28.8	Female	66.6
Ethnicity	Iranian	98.3	Indian	55.5
	Japanese	1.6	Korean	11.1
			Arab	22.2
			African	11.1
Religious Affiliation	Islam	98.3	Undefined	100
	Undefined	1.6		

Furthermore, it was found that *RPE* gives its learners an oversimplified picture of the L2 community by depicting Iranian learners’ interactions with each other in the context of their own L1 and culture. *RPE*, it can be argued, portrays “imaginary worlds” which offer oversimplified and stereotyped identity options to Iranian EFL learners. Such limited options might influence and even sometimes shape “the students’ motivation, degree of engagement with the L2 and culture, and

development of their intercultural competence” (Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004, p. 27). In contrast to *RPE*, *CES* provides its learners with a more varied and heterogeneous picture of English learners and native speakers.

In sum, *CES* provides the students with a wider range of identity options in comparison to *RPE* which introduces only a limited range of identities. Therefore, in *RPE*, a number of identity options are hidden, and this fact needs to be taken into consideration by Iranian textbook writers who are responsible for raising students’ critical language awareness. They need to take steps to represent the diversity of native English speakers and English learners who are not necessarily all able-bodied White middle-class educated young people. By depicting a limited range of identity options in their books, Iranian writers present English language use situations as simple, highly successful, and unproblematic encounters. This is, in fact, an ideal view of the contexts of L2 use, whereas in reality, social interaction is constructed by gender, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, age, and many other factors.

The findings of this study are indicative of the fact that those Iranian students who participate in public schools are at an unfair disadvantage in comparison to those who attend special schools for talented students, that is, ordinary students are deprived of becoming familiar with a wide range of native speakers’ identity options unless they are able to attend private institutes. Talented students, on the other hand, are offered a multiple and diverse range of native speakers’ identity options by studying an additional textbook, namely, *CES*. This seems to be materials developers’ mission to provide all of the students with equal opportunities; therefore, they should do their best to enrich and promote existing in-house textbooks in terms of presenting identity options. Materials developers in general and Iranian textbook writers in particular need to be aware that they are responsible for providing learners with adequate and sufficient linguistic skills needed for overcoming difficult and problematic exchanges involving racial, ethnic, or religion discrimination.

The results of this study are not definite and they are subject to a number of limitations and drawbacks. The number of books examined was limited because an attempt was made to conduct an in-depth examination of the two series. Future studies need to examine more textbooks written for different proficiency levels and produced by different writers to vitiate writer involvement. We do not suggest future studies with more complex and sophisticated statistical computations. However, we do suggest researchers study how various texts are used in the classroom and examine the effect of textual diversity—or lack of it—on the students’ language learning and use.

Finally, based on the tenets of critical pedagogy, the goal of L2 is to help learners raise their critical language awareness and construct their identities by

making use of different discursive strategies in order to be able to engage in meaningful interactions with real and heterogeneous native speaker groups in real situations. Further research in this area is needed in order for textbook writers to develop a more comprehensive view of materials development. Teachers and materials users also need to be aware of the results of such research to be able to evaluate materials they intend to use and to make informed decisions regarding which textbook is the most appropriate and useful one for their specific group of learners in their specific context.

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