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Reframing the Language/Culture Debate in the Teaching of English

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ABSTRACT

In the last ten years, the local/global debate about the role and value of English as a foreign language has become more acute. The models proposed by applied linguistic research (e.g., Byram 1997, Kramsch 2010) and mentioned by Kramsch (2013) in this journal for the development of intercultural or transcultural competence have served to improve the communicative ability of learners of English but have they improved their ability to understand Self and Other across cultural boundaries? Because "culture" has become more nebulous than ever in this increasingly global world, this paper explores the benefits of using an interdiscourse approach rather than an intercultural approach to teaching communicative competence in English. It discusses the possibility of teaching learners of English how to enter into dialogue with several discourse systems (Scollon et al. 2012) while remaining faithful to one's own cultural heritage.

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Introduction

Since WWII, the teaching of English (ELT) around the world has been caught between multiple scales of time and space. On a lower scale, English is the local language of the citizens of English-speaking countries, situated in identifiable geographical spaces on the map, spoken in its local varieties at a certain point in time. On a somewhat higher scale, English is associated with specific national cultures; it is taught in its standardized form in educational institutions, and used by individual speakers according to the norms and rules of specific native speech communities. On a yet higher scale, it has become a timeless, global lingua franca, spread around the world by global digital technologies, learned and used by a majority of non-native speakers, and associated with the global lifestyle of multilingual multicultural individuals whose frame of reference extends beyond national borders and national values.

The debate going on among teachers of English in Iran as to which "culture" to teach together with such a global language as English – a global culture of "western" origin, or a local Iranian/Islamic culture (e.g., Aliakbari 2004, Tajeddin & Teimournezhad 2014, Dahmardeh et al. 2017, Ajideh & Panahi 2016, Gholami & Ghasemi 2018, Dahmardeh & Kim 2020)- is echoed in various countries. For example, China, that aggressively teaches English as early as first grade, strives to make its citizens able to explain China to others in English and to compete with them around the world through this lingua franca, but the teaching of culture there remains a "perplexing problem" (Shen Chen & Thi Thuy Le 2019 Ch.6). In the UAE, English is seen as necessary for global trade and international relations, but the culture associated with the language may threaten the traditional local culture (Hopkyns 2020). In Iran, where English is seen as a "Western" language, textbooks are polarized between embracing ELF and its cosmopolitan lifestyles, or teaching English in order to promote Iranian/Islamic values around the world through the medium of English as a lingua franca (Dahrmardeh et al. 2017, Usò-Juan & Martinez-Flor 2006, 2008, Tajeddin & Teimournezhad 2014).

In all these cases, English as a mode of communication is wanted but the culture that goes with it might not be welcome, to use Hopkyn's striking phrase. Scholars who write about intercultural communicative competence (Byram 1997, 2021) seem to take culture to mean a stable set of social behaviors, attitudes and products shared by the members of a national community like Iran or an imagined community like "the West" – social behaviors (e.g. bows and handshakes), attitudes (e.g., beliefs and worldviews), material products (e.g., food or clothes), traditions (e.g., Christmas or Nowruz), or themes (e.g. kinship relations or the role of women in society).

But where is language? Communicative competence was defined, after all, as the "expression, interpretation and

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negotiation of meaning" (Breen & Candlin 1980:92) within a communicative curriculum in *language* learning and teaching.

"A communicative curriculum defines language learning as learning how to communicate as a member of a particular socio-cultural group. [Participants] typically exploit a tension between the conventions that are established and the opportunity to modify these conventions for their particular communicative purposes. *Communicating is not merely a matter of following conventions but also of negotiating through and about the conventions themselves." (*p.89 our emphasis)

These conventions constitute what we call culture and negotiating through and about cultural conventions, behaviors and worldviews is negotiating *language as discourse*. To the extent that one always communicates in some sociocultural context or the other with members of various sociocultural groups, "culture" always plays a role in learning a foreign language. It is true that, as Tajeddin & Teimournezhad (2014) note, culture is not fully encoded in the language system itself, but it is unavoidably encoded in social language use. Language as discourse mediates any meaning that we give to cultural traditions, behaviors and attitudes.

In the remainder of this paper, we seek to answer the following three research questions:

a) How have researchers conceptualized communicative competence across cultures?

b) How can a discourse approach to intercultural communication help link language and culture in ways that are more meaningful?

c) How can an interdiscourse dialogue be fostered between local and global discourse systems in English language teaching?

1. How has communicative competence across cultures been conceptualized?

The concept of communicative competence across cultures emerged in the late 80's from the confluence of Canadian-American second language acquisition/applied linguistic research on the one hand, and American research in social psychology and management studies on the other hand. What brought these two strands of research together was British educational research, specifically the work of Michael Byram.

1.1. From linguistic competence to communicative competence

The Canadian model (Canale & Swain 1980).

The early 80's saw a radical shift in our conception of language learning and teaching, from grammar-translation to communicative language teaching, from the study of language as a linguistic system (on the model of classical languages Latin and Greek) to the

learning of language as a usable skill. Global trade demanded that English learners learn not how to understand their neighbors' history, literature, mentality, but how to get things done together. It was based on an instrumental view of human relations – as long as people talked and interacted with one another, where they came from was less important. The progress made in communication technologies at the time fueled the language lab and the development of oral communication skills. At the same time, Canada was developing a way of improving communication between its French-speaking and its English-speaking citizens through French immersion programs in English-speaking Canada. Thus Canadian applied linguists were the first to provide a theory of communicative competence whose components famously included: grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence (Canale & Swain 1980), to which was added discourse competence (Canale 1983).

- grammatical (ability to create grammatically correct utterances)

- sociolinguistic (ability to produce sociolinguistically appropriate utterances)

- strategic (ability to solve communication problems). Strategic competence refers to the ability to repair the inevitable miscommunications that frequently arise during interaction.

- discourse(ability to produce coherent and cohesive utterances in spoken and written texts)

Communicative competence became a term in linguistics which referred to a language user's grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology and the like, as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately in social and cultural contexts outside of class. Over the years, strategic competence took on a greater importance than originally conceived; and discourse competence was seen as applying mainly to semantic coherence in spoken conversation and textual cohesion in written texts.

The Canale & Swain (1980) model was reshuffled by the two Spanish applied linguists Usò-Juan and Martinez-Flor (2006) who placed discourse competence at the core of the model, replaced linguistic by grammatical and sociolinguistic by pragmatic competence, and added a new component, *intercultural competence*, referring to the knowledge of how to interpret and produce a spoken or written piece of discourse within a particular sociocultural context.

1.2. From communicative competence to intercultural communicative competence

At the end of the 80's, as multinational corporations started to span the globe, they also realized that cultural differences were likely to create misunderstandings in the workplace and that those misunderstandings led to

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reduced productivity. It was not enough to learn foreign languages and become communicatively competent in the four skills, companies needed for their workers to be also sensitive to cultural differences. Management theories sought to reduce anxiety/uncertainty and foster intercultural competence in the workplace. Communication specialists, e.g., Milton Bennett (Bennett et al. 2003) and William Gudykunst (Kim & Gudykunst 1988) drew on research in group and cross-cultural psychology to devise developmental models of intercultural competence. Social psychologists such as Henri Tajfel (1982) studied intergroup relations. Such research, however, did not affect the teaching and learning of foreign languages that was firmly anchored in linguistics and applied linguistics (e.g., Breen & Candlin 1980).

All this changed in the 90's when British education specialist Michael Byram and French anthropologist Geneviève Zarate developed their model of intercultural competence that combined the insights from linguistics and social anthropology. Between the strictly communicative model of applied linguists and the strictly intercultural communication model of social psychologists, Byram and Zarate offered an educationally viable model of "intercultural competence" (Byram & Zarate 1997) which Byram quickly changed to "intercultural communicative competence" (Byram 1997). This model responded to the urgent need of European corporate managers and educators to assess the linguistic and the cultural competences of foreign language learners in the emerging European Union. Such an evaluation instrument was being developed by the European Council to serve the needs of companies hiring foreign workers across Europe, and of schools desirous to prepare foreign language learners to enter the European workforce. Backed by such powerful institutions, Byram's model found resonance across Europe and many other countries around the world.

A generic definition commonly accepted by intercultural scholars defines Byram's 1997 model as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardorff 2004:194). It has remained operative to this day (see Byram 2021:44). In this model, the acquisition of language is seen as the acquisition of five *savoirs* or knowledges. The first two are labeled "SKILLS": *savoir-comprendre* (interpret and relate) and *savoir-apprendre/faire* (discover and/or interact). The other three are labeled "KNOWLEDGE" or *savoirs* (knowledge of self and other; interaction, individual and societal), "EDUCATION" *savoir s'engager* (political education, critical cultural awareness), and "ATTITUDES": *savoir être* (relativizing self, valuing other.) In Byram 2021, the model remains the same and *savoir s'engager* remains at the center, referring to political

education or intercultural citizenship (p.72).

"[To say that] learners are or become politically engaged means that they develop their own ideas, beliefs and commitments, become involved in public life and practice politics, and may therefore challenge authority (at any level – family, school, sports club, national and international government). This is the definition on which intercultural citizenship is based" (Byram 2021:123).

Thanks to the double meaning of the verb *savoir (Fr.*to know *that* and to know *how to),* the cultural cognitive and the social psychological – knowledge and skill - are made to mesh into one intercultural communicative competence. Indeed, the metaphor, borrowed from the French variations on the verb *savoir*, allows the model to have a coherence it might not otherwise have. For, it is still not clear how learners get from the acquisition of language "skills" and "knowledge" to having the right "attitudes" and the right "political engagement". Byram's model, however useful it remains for pedagogic and assessment purposes, cannot provide the bridge we are looking for between language and culture.

"The notion of intercultural competence has to do with the recognition and acceptance of other people's cultural beliefs and values, and the willingness to relativize one's own. However, these are moral and psychological goals. Language teachers teach language, not ethics or psychology. Our morals, our beliefs and cultural values are constituted by and in turn constitute the symbolic systems we use to express them, the most important one being discourse" (Kramsch 2009:107).

The communicative competence as defined by Breen and Candlin (1980) cannot lead to intercultural dialogue if it remains based on a view of language acquisition as the acquisition of skills and knowledges. The notion of language skill, defined as "the ability to do something by using language" is deceptive. It implies that language is a neutral tool that can be "used" to get things done, where in fact, language mediates our very thoughts and intentions, and the way we express, interpret and negotiate meanings. Through our choice of words, the illocutionary force of our speech acts, our strategies for saving face (Goffman 1967) and all the other sociolinguistic and sociocognitive processes of the communicative situation we negotiate the power to make and impose meaning (see, e.g., Johnstone 2018). Talking about four basic "skills" (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) does not prepare learners to develop communicative competence. For this, they need to view language not as skill but as discourse.

2. How can a discourse approach to intercultural communication help link language and culture in ways that are more meaningful?

2.1. From culture to discourse

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In the 80's and 90's, while Byram (1989) was drawing attention to the important role of culture in foreign language education, Widdowson (1984), Kramsch (1984) and Scollon & Scollon (1995) were keen on moving from text to context, and from language to discourse. While the field of intercultural communication came from British cultural studies, cross-cultural psychology and social anthropology, the field of discourse analysis came from linguistics, applied linguistics and sociolinguistics. In the eighties, many language teachers who were at that time switching from a grammar/translation approach to a communicative approach found in the work of such applied linguists as Breen & Candlin (1980), Larsen-Freeman (1980), Widdowson (1984), Hatch (1992), Kramsch (1993) and others a way of integrating "culture" into language teaching by viewing language as discourse, i.e., as social practice. As discourse, English vehiculates through its speakers and writers local and global discourse systems made of knowledges, skills, beliefs, attitudes and values. These attitudes and beliefs are historically contingent and constructed over time by the way speakers position themselves subjectively vis a vis others, even in the most mundane conversations.

Let us take an example. If on a street in Beijing a young Chinese woman responds to an older Chinese woman, who has just made her a compliment in Chinese, with an English "Thank you!", she is doing much more than just doing "being polite". She is aligning herself with an Anglo-American politeness discourse but in a way that may be showing off or ironic. By positioning herself in that moment as an English speaker or as a Chinese parodying an American, she is playing with forms of discourse and face systems that are part of larger discourse systems called "utilitarian discourse" or "professional discourse" systems (Scollon et al. 2012:192). In so doing, she is playing at adopting an interactional style that is appropriate in American business circles but not in Chinese relations between people of different generations (p. 236). So, when she was asked: "Why did you respond in English?", she answered: "In Chinese, not only don't we make as many compliments as you in the U.S., but it is not appropriate to answer 'thank you' to a compliment. It sounds arrogant or presumptuous. But I know that nowadays it has become fashionable to say 'thank you'. So I said it, but I said it in English, so that I was not really saying it."

Let us unpack this example from a discourse perspective. What meaning did the younger woman convey by answering *Thank you* in English to a friend with whom she had just been chatting in Chinese? She had to first assume that she and her friend shared the same language *ideology* regarding the high value of English as a marker of modernity and cosmopolitanism. Remembering that for English speakers (unlike Chinese speakers) a compliment is perceived as a gift, she understood that a gift must be reciprocated and thus that she was under the *discursive*

obligation to say something in return. She knew that her friend must have learned English in school, thus understood English, and that native English speakers are *socialized into* giving an appropriate social response to a personal compliment. She was probably slightly embarrassed by the compliment and wished to *save face*[1]; the use of English could serve as face-saving strategy. Given that face-saving is an important part of living in a Chinese discourse system, saying "thank you" in a foreign language enabled the speaker to maintain the respect and the distance owed to an older woman in the Chinese generational discourse system while participating "for fun" in the American utilitarian discourse system. This entire subject positioning happened in a split second, but it illustrates well the complexities of the local and the global in today's discourse worlds.

2.2. From intercultural to interdiscourse communication

This is why sociolinguists Ron and Suzanne Scollon called intercultural communication "interdiscourse communication" (Scollon et al. 2012: 237) to underscore the fact that culture is nothing but the meaning we give to things, persons and events through discourse. When talking about communication between people, they prefer the term discourse to culture, which in their view is too large a category to really understand individual speakers when they use language to convey meaning.

What is meant by discourse?

The answers to that question reflect the different ways of conceptualizing "language in use". We list a few below. The first four definitions see language as a way of producing, sending and receiving meaningful spoken or written texts in a sociocultural context. These texts can be as short as a "*thank you*", and as long as a Russian novel.

1. Discourse is "a general term for examples of language use, i.e., language which has been produced as the result of an act of communication" (Richards et al. 1985:83).

2. Discourse refers to "larger [meaningful] units of language such as paragraphs, conversations, and interviews" (Richards et al. 1985:84).

3. Discourse competence is the "mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres" (Canale 1983:9).

4. Discourse analysis is "concerned with the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used." (McCarthy 1991:5).

By shifting the focus from language to language-in-use, we are moving from a focus on grammatical sentences to a focus on speakers and their utterances,

[1] Goffman (1967) defines the term face as "…the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 5). Therefore, to save face is to save one's social image in the eyes of other interlocutors.

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from texts as products to texts as messages exchanged between speakers and hearers, writers and readers for particular purposes, to express particular meanings from a particular perspective at a particular time in a particular place. Speakers/writers implicitly or explicitly choose what to say to whom in order to have particular effects on listener/readers. These recipients then interpret intended meanings and infer meanings that might be only implied or may be recoverable from the larger discourse context.

The next four definitions agree that discourse is language in use, but not just as a tool for the exchange of information. It is a symbolic system with the power to create and shape symbolic realities such as values, perceptions, and identities. As such, it is a social and ideological practice synonymous with culture.

"5. Discourse is language as social practice" (Fairclough 1989:17).

"6. Discourse does not refer to language or uses of language, but to ways of organizing meaning that are often, though not exclusively, realized through language" (Pennycook 1994:128).

"7. Discourses are systems of meaning embedded in certain institutions, which in turn are determined by ideologies in response to larger social structures. On the microlevel is the text, determined by discourse and genre, in turn determined by ideology; on the macrolevel is the larger social structure" (Kress 1985: 31).

"8. A Discourse is composed of ways of talking listening, reading, writing, acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and using tools and objects, in particular settings and at specific times, so as to display or to recognize a particular social identity. Law school teachers and students enact specific social identities or 'social positions' in the Discourse of law school. The Discourse creates social positions (or perspectives) from which people are 'invited' ('summoned') to speak, listen, act, read and write, think, feel, believe and value in certain characteristic, historically recognizable ways, in combination with their own individual style and creativity" (Gee et al. 1996:10).

This last definition by James Gee can help us reframe the teaching of language and the teaching of culture within a sociolinguistic view of Discourse. Indeed, the sociolinguists Ron and Suzanne Scollon conceptualized big D Discourse as "discourse system" that encompasses different ways of making meaning, both verbal and non-verbal, in a sociocultural context.

"From an interactional sociolinguistic perspective, discourse is communication between or among individuals. . . Cultures do not talk to each other; individuals do. …Those aspects of culture which research has shown to be of direct significance in discourse and which impinge directly upon how people talk to one another

across cultures are the four elements of a discourse system – ideology, forms of discourse, socialization, and face systems." (Scollon & Scollon 1995:139ff).

According to the Scollons, a social group shares a discourse system made of four aspects that we saw enacted in the encounter between the two Chinese women above, and that are major factors in communication across cultures:

> *1 Ideology*: history and worldview, which includes beliefs, values, and religion.
> *2 Socialization*: how we learn to be members of our cultures and how we learn our systems of discourse through education, enculturation, acculturation; primary and secondary socialization; theories of the person and of learning.
> *3 Forms of discourse:* broad range of everything that can be said or talked about or symbolized within a particular, recognizable domain. Functions of language (information, negotiation of meaning). Non-verbal communication.
> *4 Face systems*: negotiated public image, mutually granted each other by participants in a communicative event; social organization, which includes family relations; concept of the self; ingroup/outgroup relations; community and society. (Scollon & Scollon 1995:140-141)

If, as Gee and the Scollons suggest, a discourse system refers to the culturally inflected way language is used to talk and write about things, persons and events within a particular, recognizable domain like the law school, then we can talk for example about the discourse of Canale & Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence as belonging to a larger Utilitarian discourse system. This discourse system is based on the *ideology* that language is primarily a tool for transmitting information through grammatical accuracy and sociolinguistic appropriateness. It sees the process of learning a language as a *socialization* process into a community of native speakers. This process is facilitated by using the conventional *forms of discourse* used by native speakers, and by using their expected *face-saving politeness* strategies. Similarly, we can talk of classroom discourse or the discourse of textbooks when referring to values, ideologies, attitudes, knowledge and communicative styles of teachers and characters represented in English textbooks. These forms of discourse may belong to larger discourse systems such as Utilitarian or generational discourse systems, that teacher and textbooks participate into various degrees and in different ways.

2.3. "The West" as a global imagined discourse system

When we talk about intercultural communication in the learning of English, the term "Western" is often used to characterize people who have a common "western culture" and live in "the West". But what is "the West"? According to Stein & Andreotti (2016, 2017), the West is not a unified culture, but a globally imagined discourse system.

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"“The West” does not describe an ontologically fixed location; rather, it captures a historically constituted, epistemological distinction, generally made in contrast to various iterations of the “non-West”. Nonetheless, over time, “the West” has taken on particular geographic meaning. In this article, we generally include within the category of “Western countries”: Western European countries; the USA; Canada; New Zealand; and Australia.” (Stein & Andreotti 2016:239)

It is of course risky to attribute one discourse system to one geographical entity – the West. For example, the Utilitarian discourse system in which Anglo-American businessmen participate is quite different from the Confucian discourse system that Americans of Chinese descent might participate in. And a French businessman might participate in the Utilitarian discourse system quite differently from an American businessman. It would be more accurate to see in the term “Western” a global imaginary similar to Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community” (1983) that is no less real for being imagined. Viewing these divides as between discourse systems rather than between cultures will enable us to make a stronger link between culture and language, and between discourse and historicity.

How is the West, then, imagined by those who teach and write textbooks for young learners of English as a global language? We recognize in many instances the codewords of the Utilitarian discourse described by Scollon & Scollon (1995: 110) – a discourse characterized as “neoliberal” by Holborow (2006) or “sloganized” by Schmenk et al. (2018): “efficiency”, “language skills”, “communication skills”, “educational resources”, “human potential”. We recognize that discourse’s adjectives: “an interesting” strategy, “an efficient” technique, “effective” teaching, “useful” information, a “smart and helpful” teacher, an “attractive” textbook design or “fun” cartoon figures.

These are, of course, stereotypes that may be countered by any number of counter examples. Real life is filled with inefficient bureaucracies, useless skills because of unemployment, racist and sexist discrimination etc. But the ideological codewords surface in private conversations, and infiltrate statements of purpose, student course evaluations, job and grant application letters, websites, social media postings. These codewords slowly build a global imaginary or “western” narrative that English speakers around the world promulgate again and again on television, social media and through the Hollywood film industry. It is the story they dream of when they learn English “in order to have a better life” for themselves and their children. It has elements of the five large discourse systems described by the Scollons (1995:185ff): the corporate, professional, utilitarian, generational, and gender discourses. It is imagined as valuing teamwork and rationality

(corporate), good communication skills (professional), efficiency and plain talk (utilitarian), youthful energy and entrepreneurship (generational), and heterosexuality (gender). But imagining it as one coherent "western" discourse system is misguided. These are discourse systems that people participate in all over the world, not just in the West. And not all "Westerners" participate in this global imagined discourse system. For example, this is not the professional, generational or gender discourse system of Black Americans, African or Latino immigrants to the United States, nor that of Americans with particular genders and sexualities.

In sum: By seeing behaviors as part of larger historically contingent discourse systems rather than stable, fixed "cultures", we can take into account the diverse, changing, and sometimes conflictual ways in which local and global verbal behaviors intermingle nowadays, and how language constructs identities, attitudes, and ideologies. Let us examine concretely how the discourse of textbooks constructs for learners of English around the world a "Western" global imaginary that is meant to strengthen their motivation to learn English, but that can be analyzed and interpreted from different perspectives.

2.4. The construction of "the West" in a "western" English textbook

How does an English textbook published by Cambridge University Press construct a discourse system that will be recognized and accepted by learners as typically "western" and that will prepare them to integrate a lifestyle associated with native speakers of English? Let's take as an example a page from *Touchstone 1* designed to teach English as a foreign language to teenagers/young adults at the intermediate level at private language institutions. (McCarthy et al. 2014).

The lesson, titled *Building Vocabulary* shows four cartoon-like scenes featuring from left to right a girl playing the electric guitar "in a band", two boys at the home of a blond teenager who is seen vacuum cleaning the carpet while his "lazy" friend is slouched in the armchair eating popcorn and watching TV; an "outgoing" and "friendly" man at the door with a big smile introducing his little neighbor as "quiet and shy"; and a young female math teacher who is described as "smart, and really nice too" ─ and "fun in class". The vocabulary to be learned is highlighted in bold. Students are asked to listen to the tape and repeat the utterances heard on tape, thus internalizing the characteristics of these figures and lending them their own voice.

The English learner cannot but notice that there is an equal number of males and females, and of white and brown faces in this picture, even though all faces have Anglo-European features. One notices that the visiting friend has a Jewish name, Ethan.

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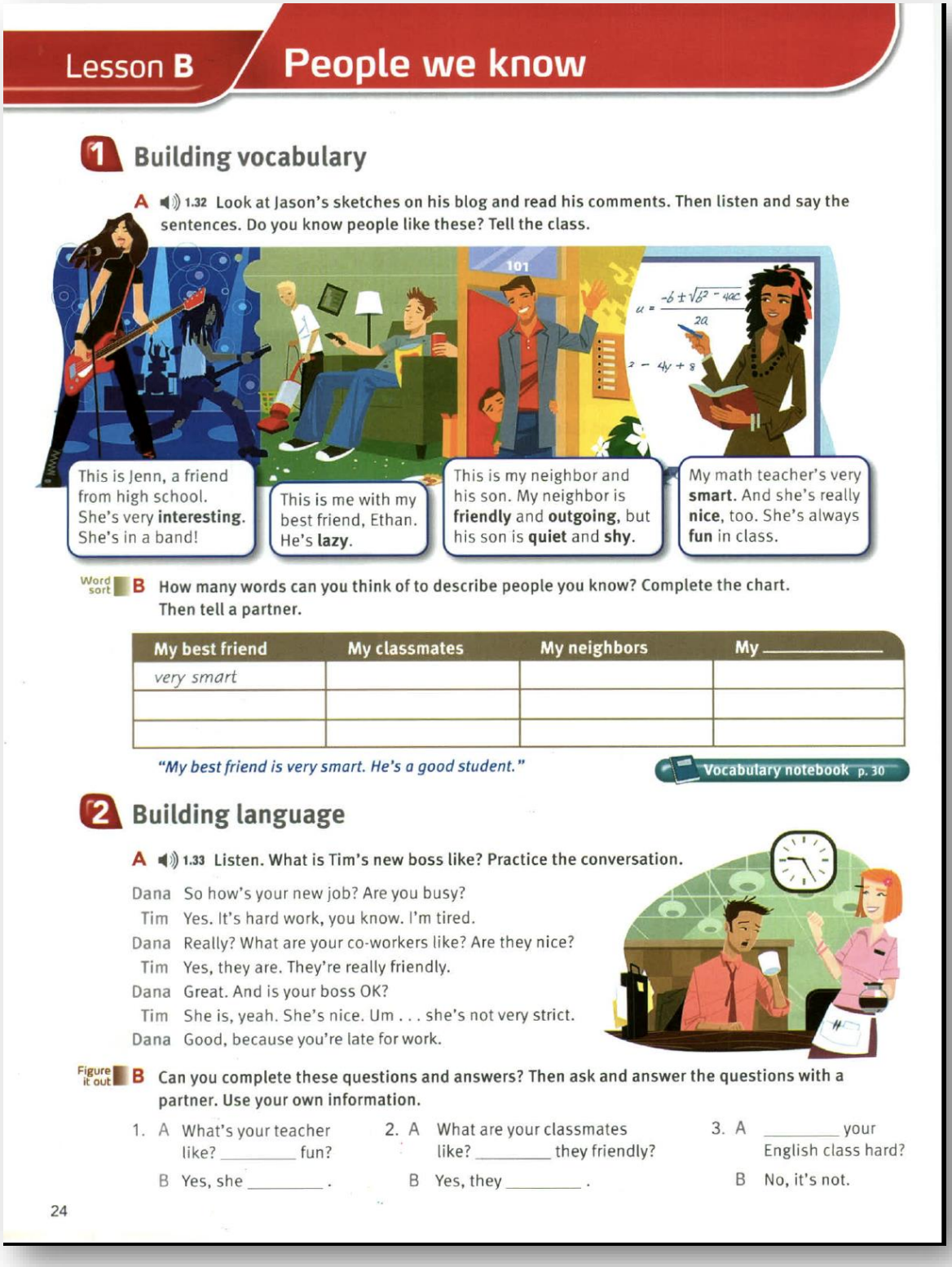

Lesson B People we know

1 Building vocabulary

A 1.32 Look at Jason's sketches on his blog and read his comments. Then listen and say the sentences. Do you know people like these? Tell the class.

Word sort B How many words can you think of to describe people you know? Complete the chart. Then tell a partner.

My best friend	My classmates	My neighbors	My _____
very smart			

"My best friend is very smart. He's a good student."

Vocabulary notebook p. 30

2 Building language

A 1.33 Listen. What is Tim's new boss like? Practice the conversation.

Dana So how's your new job? Are you busy?
Tim Yes. It's hard work, you know. I'm tired.
Dana Really? What are your co-workers like? Are they nice?
Tim Yes, they are. They're really friendly.
Dana Great. And is your boss OK?
Tim She is, yeah. She's nice. Um . . . she's not very strict.
Dana Good, because you're late for work.

Figure it out B Can you complete these questions and answers? Then ask and answer the questions with a partner. Use your own information.

1. A What's your teacher like? _____ fun?
   B Yes, she _____ .
2. A What are your classmates like? _____ they friendly?
   B Yes, they _____ .
3. A _____ your English class hard?
   B No, it's not.

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Figure 1 Touchstone Book 1, Unit 3, lesson B. People we know (Personalities).

Relating adjectives to one another, one notices that if the teacher is "smart" and "nice too", it seems to imply that "smart" is not expected to go with "nice" and "fun". Would a math teacher be expected to be "rigorous and fair", or "interesting and helpful"? The choice of vocabulary seems to suggest what is valued in western teenagers' imaginary: being friendly and outgoing is more valued than being quiet and shy, and a young, nice and fun teacher is more valued than, say, an old and interesting one.

It could be objected that such an analysis is reading too much into such a small text and is overinterpreting what is after all only a vocabulary exercise. But whoever has written a textbook knows how careful publishing houses are about what could affect their bottom line, i.e., their sales. Economics shape educational discourse systems as much as they are shaped by them. One can notice the absence of Muslim youngsters and Black Americans, and the lack of parents or older people on this page. These absences as well as the racial and ethnic diversity expressed through white and brown faces, the youthfulness and hip appearance of the math teacher, and the religious inclusion indexed by a Jewish name are not random decisions. They can be seen as examples of political correctness or of the desire to satisfy the largest number of customers as possible. They can also be seen as participating in the generational discourse system of children of the Millenial generation (born between 1981 and 1995) that values individualism and creativity, independence ─ a generation that "gives more importance to relationships with their peers rather than their parents and other family members" (Scollon et al. 2012: 223). This generational discourse system is recognizable as that of the white American middle-class around the turn of the century, not that of African-American or Latino-American families around that time.

This way of looking at a textbook requires looking at it not just as a skills-learning tool, but as a discourse artifact, written by someone keen not only on teaching linguistic structures but on showing how English speakers/writers communicate with one another. For sure, a communicative approach advocates using "authentic" texts, not pre-fabricated dialogues whose unique purpose is to "practice" the language, not exchange real information. But treating them as authentic pedagogic discourse makes it possible to bring to the fore its constructed nature and reflect upon it – which is what we show in the final section of this paper.

3. How can an interdiscourse dialogue be fostered between local and global discourse systems?

After having done the textbook's vocabulary exercise and reflected on the very discourse of the exercise, students when they reach high school can be asked to compare the discourse of two English textbooks, for example: one for students preparing to work or study abroad where they will have to integrate foreign discourse systems , the other for students preparing to work at home in

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the tourism industry where they will have to explain to foreigners the discourse systems they themselves participate in.

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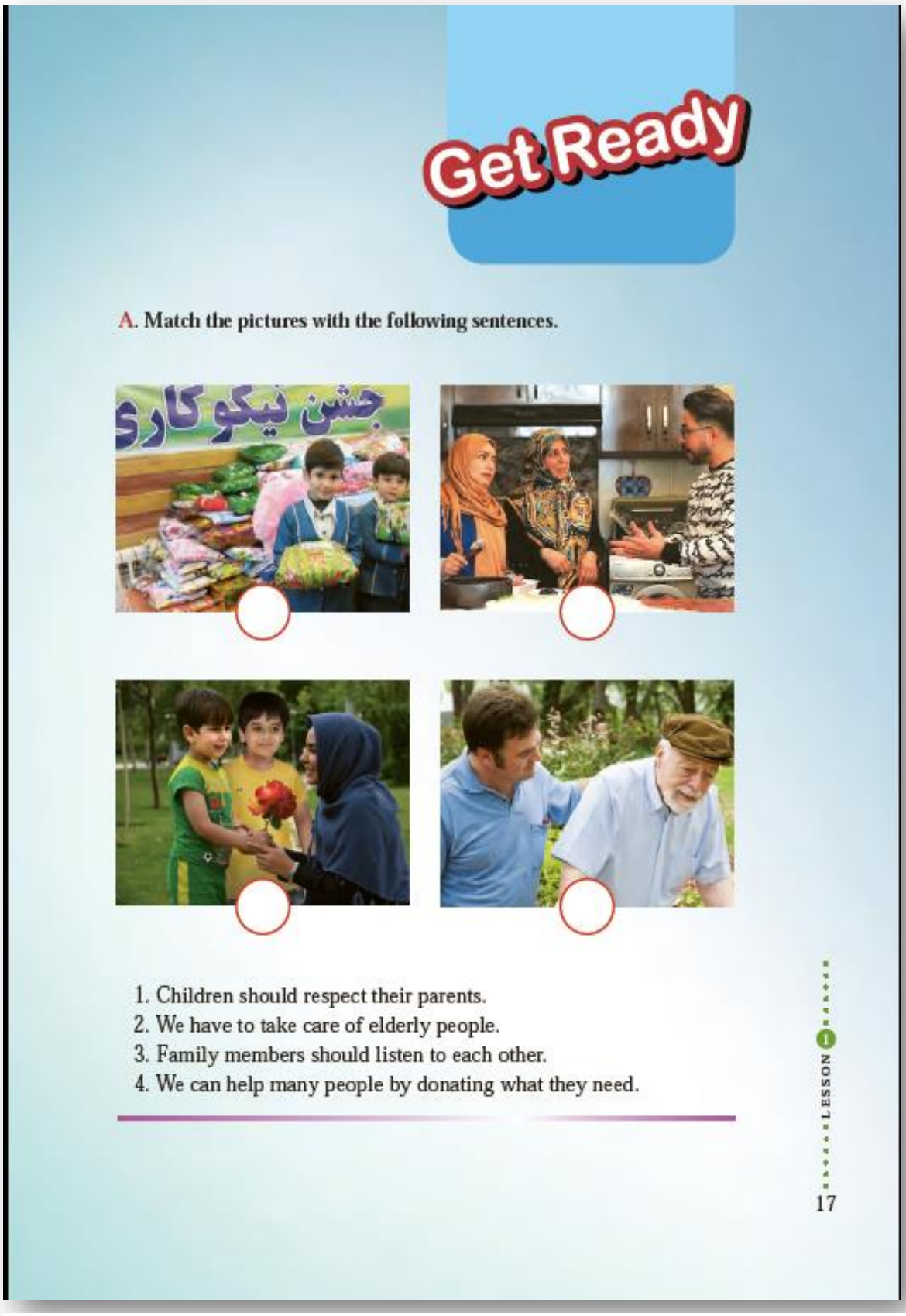

Figure 2 Vision 3, Lesson 1: Sense of Appreciation

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As an example, we compare the discourse of Two textbook excerpts: one from *Touchstone* 1 discussed earlier, published by a UK publisher and used at private English language institutes in Iran, the other from *Vision 3 published* by the Iranian Department of Education for 12 graders in Iranian public schools (Alavi Moghaddam et al. 2020).

Such a comparison would take place in four steps.

-understand each discourse system (that of the Self, that of the Other) on its own terms

-understand each discourse system from the perspective of the Other

-explain each discourse system to a member of the other discourse system and respond to his/her (mis)understandings

-perform an interdiscourse dialogue

1) Analyze your English textbook as a cultural artifact participating in various discourse systems, e.g., pedagogical, generational, and gender discourses. Identify the components of each discourse system: ideologies, socialization, forms of discourse, face systems. Draw the relations between the various components as a network of behaviors, attitudes, beliefs / values, social norms and conventions/ ritual forms of discourse/ strategies used to save self and others' face, i.e., need for both involvement and independence, help and respect.

For instance, if your textbook is *Touchstone 1*, show how the behaviors of the youngsters in the *Touchstone 1* picture and the color of their faces express an ideology of diversity and a socialization of self-reliance characteristic of an American generational discourse around 2010. If your textbook is *Vision 3*, analyze the picture in the lower left quadrant. How would you choose to subtitle it? If you choose: "Children should respect their parents", how does your choice reflect the generational discourse system of the textbook? Now look at the picture in the upper right quadrant subtitled: "Family members should listen to each other". How does this picture participate in a particular generational and gender discourse system? How would you describe the ideology and the socialization aspect of this discourse? (see Dahmardeh & Kim 2020)

2) *Read and analyze the discourse of the Self from the perspective of the other.* Interrogate its assumptions and presuppositions, its historical and subjective aspects. If your textbook is *Vision 3*, imagine that you are a member of the family depicted in the *Vision 3* book. What would you *as a member of that family* want to know about the characters in the *Touchstone 1* book — the blond boy and his two friends, Jenny and Ethan? How would you characterize the discourse system that these three youngsters participate in?

If your textbook is *Touchstone 1*, imagine that you are Jenny from the Touchstone *1* book. What would you *as*

a woman, a musician and a high school student want to know about the families depicted in the *Vision 3* book? For example, who is the man with the glasses talking to the two women in the kitchen? What is his relationship to the women? Why are all six children in these pictures males? How would you characterize the discourse system that these families participate in?

3) *Write up a dialogue* between the authors or publishers of the two textbooks, explaining why they made the choices they did when designing these two pages.

4) *Role play an interdiscourse dialogue* between the characters in one textbook and those in the other. Imagine each one of them deciding what to do on Mother's Day. Or imagine Jenny being invited to the home of the *Vision 3* family for a Nowruz celebration or Farzaneh being invited to the home of *Touchstone 1's* Jenny to celebrate Christmas. Imagine the dialogue between Jenny and Farzaneh after the event, reporting and explaining to each other from their own perspective what they saw and did.[2]

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined various approaches to teaching English as communication across cultures. We have suggested that intercultural communication cannot really take place as long as language is viewed as a skill, albeit linked to intercultural attitudes and beliefs. We have proposed that a focus on language as discourse would enable us to better link language and culture in the form of discourse systems that can refer to a symbolic context that is both real and imagined. English teachers who have lived both inside and outside English-speaking environments should play a major role in explaining one discourse system to members of other discourse systems and in sharing their experience dealing with the contradictions that such communication entails (Kramsch & Zhang 2018). Ultimately, what matters is what those bilingual teachers tell about their experience that can serve as a model of interdiscourse communicative competence. That experience is worth pondering and passing on.

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[2] The purpose of these activities is not to "practice one's English", but to learn how to adopt someone else's perspective, and to infer meanings that are not necessarily expressed explicitly. Therefore, teachers should be encouraged to read Scollon et al. (2012), and students should be encouraged to use their own experience to interpret how someone from one discourse system might understand behaviors and rituals as experienced by someone from another discourse system – and to what extent do the various discourse systems overlap.

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