Exploring the Types and Categories of Culture in Algerian Official Exam:

The Case of Literary and Foreign Languages Stream Texts in English Baccalaureate Exams from 2005 to 2021

Berkia Bouhlal [1], Sabrina Baghzou [2]

1- university of khenchela, faculty of letters and foreign lnguages, department of English**,** Laboratory of anthropological studies and social issues
berkia.bouhlal@univ-khenchela.dz

2- University of khenchela, faculty of letters and foreign lnguages, department of English **,** Laboratory of anthropological studies and social issues
baghzou.sabrina@univ-khenchela.dz

Abstract:

This descriptive study intends to investigate the types and categories of culture by conducting a content analysis on the texts of 31 foreign languages stream BAC exams from 2005 to 2021. The findings reveal that all analysed texts are designed within a cultural dimension. However, the majority of the texts tend to discuss themes from Big C culture and neglect the small C aspect of culture. Furthermore, the source culture was largely marginalized. Recommendations were provided to make an equilibrated cultural dimension of BAC exam texts.

Keywords: Content Analysis, BAC Exam, Culture Types, Culture Categories, Culture and Language

Corresponding Author: Berkia Bouhlal: berkia.bouhlal@univ-khenchela.dz

1. Introduction:

In EFL settings, Culture started to impose itself to have a vital role in the learning/teaching of foreign languages (Kramsch, 2013). Therefore, the learner of foreign languages is supposed to be culturally competent in the same way he is required to be linguistically. EFL materials, in this regard, started to have their texts and activities more and more culture based; communicative tasks target cultural phenomena and the productive skills are performed in a cultural dimension (Cortazzi, 1999). In terms of classroom management, foreign language classrooms tend to have students from different cultural backgrounds to encourage cultural exchange (Crozier & Reay, 2008).

This tendency in centralizing culture as a hub in foreign language learning leads the researchers to think of the place of culture in language testing. Indeed, testing comes as an ultimate outcome of any teaching program where the teacher can identify and measure his teaching in a systematic way (Bachman, 1996). It is then very logic that the foreign language testing texts and instructions in foreign language learning environment would be evolving around cultural axes considering the paramount role of culture in language teaching.

In Algeria, the case of foreign language teaching is not an exception of what has been stated above. Thus, this study will deal with the place of culture in foreign language teaching in Algeria, as far as testing is concerned.

The researchers made this study on Baccalaureate exam texts as an official testing program. The choice of BAC comes from the fact that it is an official examination of a whole language learning program at the secondary level. It is supposed to test the exit profile of learners who spent 7 years in learning English. As such, BAC exams could be a reliable and valid sample of secondary school examinations (GFrine, 2014). Moreover, the researchers chose to start studying BACs texts from 2005 onward, as it is the year when the official authorities has adopted the Competency-Based-Approach which is still adopted up to this day (BENADLA, 2013).

This study was conceptualized as to answer the following research question:

➢ Do the selected BAC exam texts incorporate cultural topics from both the source and target cultures, and in what manner does it address both 'Big C' and 'small c' aspects of culture?

We hypothesize that the selected texts are designed within a cultural dimension that is equilibrated between the Big C and small C and the source and the target culture.

2.   Background of the Study
2.1.   Testing in the learning/teaching process

Testing can be regarded as one of the multiple existing tools to assess the outcome of the learning/teaching process; this definition of testing is faithfully perceived in the writing of Taylor (2009) about assessment in the fact that tests are assessment tools which are intended to measure the language outputs that reflect the learners' productive language skills. This measurement of the teaching outcome would help, inevitably, the teacher to identify the weaknesses in his teaching and provide an eventual remediation to assure the progress of the teaching/learning process.

Tests can be categorized in different ways according to their ultimate goals. For example, tests that are supposed to be in relation to the teaching programs to meet the goals of the curriculum are called achievement tests, whilst performance tests measure the learners' readiness to perform a communicative role (Desheng & Varghese, 2013).

Other academics classify tests according to their items' nature into direct or indirect tests. A direct test is supposed to test learners' communicative competence. Learners are felt to be directly targeted by the instruction of the test as this kind of tests puts the learner in a real-life like situation (Harmer, 2007). On the other hand, indirect tests tend to test the linguistic competence of the learner in a form of grammar or lexis based tasks as to measure the productive and receptive skills of Fthe learner (Harmer, 2007).

However, though their diverse classification, it is widely agreed that tests should have two outstanding characteristics: validity and reliability (Madsen, 1983).

First, tests should be valid in the sense that they should test what they are supposed to test. For example, a writing test should focus on mechanics of writing and spelling mistakes.

The second feature of testing in language teaching is reliability. By the term reliability, tests are supposed to generate the same results under the same circumstances.

In other words, the same learner who scores differently each time he takes the same test could not be said that he received a reliable test. Similarly, in a reliable test, the learner who has a higher level is

more likely to score better than a student with a lower level (Madsen, 1983).

2.1.1. BAC as an official language Exam in Algeria

The BAC is a French accronyme for (bacalauréat), that is. The BAC is an official examination which "certifies knowledge and skills accumulated over a course of four years of learning carried out in secondary school education; it allows an assessment that allows access to the university. This induces that the learner has been subjected to various types of assessment: diagnostic, informative, and summative" (Grine, 2014, p. 62).

In the case of English language, BAC exams are devised within two main parts. Part one contains a document (generally a text) dealing with themes that were taught during the course of high school level. The document of part one is followed by reading comprehension activities and mastery of language activities. This part deals with different skills and sub skills of the language such as the reading skill (comprehension questions related to scanning and skimming), the speaking skill (testing pronunciation through activities dealing with the pronunciation of final "ed", final "s", silent letters, diphthongs…etc), and other sub skills such as mechanics of writing, lexis, syntax and the rest. This part of BAC exam is felt to have indirect items of assessment as it was discussed earlier in this paper (Harmer, 2007).

Then, part two represents a direct assessment of the learners' linguistic/communicative outcome i.e. the teaching/learning final product. It is generally a situation of integration where the learner is requested to write a piece of writing (letter, article, email…etc) in which he uses his communicative competence to deal with a situation in direct relation to the document of the exam.

The finality of this exam is to enable learners to understand cross curricular topics in English by interacting with written documents, interpreting activities and producing new pieces of writing (Bounab, 2020).

Finally we can say that the BAC exam falls in Desheng & Varghese's (2013) classification of tests as an achievement test on the one hand; the BAC tests what has been taught in the high school level, on the other hand, it is also a performance test since it tests the readiness of learners to access to the university.

2.2.   Culture in the learning/teaching of foreign languages

Many academics in the field of language teaching accounted for the importance of integrating culture in the foreign language classrooms (Kramsch, 2013) and (Byram & Esarte-Sarries, 1991).It is, thus, imperative to organize the EFL classroom settings within this dimension, since many EFL teachers and learners are expected to have some personal, academic, and professional experience of dealing with more than one cultural topic (Abdel-Waha, 2014).However, many Algerian teachers have claimed facing problems in transmitting cultural themes in their lessons, either because they have never been to an English speaking country or because they fear to tackle the existing divergence between the target and the source culture (Madani, 2020). As such many of them rely on textbooks but never give importance to the exam itself (Abdul Rahim,2020)

2.2.1. Types of culture

Topics of culture fall, according to their levels and importance, into two classifications. In this sense, we can identify two outstanding terms for culture: the big C culture and the small c culture. We refer to Big "C" culture to the representation of "facts and statistics relating to the arts, history, geography, business, education, festivals and customs of the target speech community" (Laohawiriyanon, 2013, p. 85). Thus, any culture which focuses on the products and contributions to a society and its outstanding individuals, is often referred to as Large/Big/Capital/Macro "C" culture.

Small "c" culture is another aspect of cultural themes. It refers to the daily aspects of life that embody everything as a total way of life (Laohawiriyanon, 2013, p. 85). These aspects of daily life could be visible such as gestures, clothing style, food, music, or invisible such as popular issues, opinions, preferences and tastes (Peterson, 2011).

2.2.2. Categories of culture

Learners' knowledge about a particular culture defines the notion of culture into two basic terms, in this sense; we can distinguish the source culture which is the culture of the learner and the target culture which is generally the culture of the target language. In our case, the source culture is represented by the Algerian National culture; Islamic and Arabic whereas the target culture is represented in this study by the cultures of the U S A and U K and other countries

where English is used in way or another, since English has become a lingua franca of the world (Alpetkin, 2002; Matsuo, 2014).

3. Methodology

This descriptive study is based on a document analysis which is a form of qualitative research design where documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around a topic of assessment (Bowen, 2009).

The Analysis of documents involves the coding of the content into themes. It is similar to how interview transcripts are analyzed (Bowen, 2009). The document or content analysis of this research intends to examine the target sample of BAC exams as to see whether it incorporates cultural topics, types and categories in a workable way or not. Content analysis is based on checklists for they are argued to be as the most practical tool in evaluating textbooks and other written documents (Sándorová, 2016).

3.1. The sample of the study

The sample of this study is a collection of thirty one (31) texts of literary stream and foreign languages BAC exams, from 2005 to 2021. The choice of 2005 as a starting point is due to the reforms that were brought about to integrate the competency-based-approach into EFL settings in Algeria (Thaâlibi, 2006).

3.2. Research tools

3.2.1. Cortazzi's (1999) checklist

Cortazzi's (1999) checklist addresses the culture related issues in terms of the categories of culture. It investigates all the cultural information concerning the source culture (learners' native culture) and the target culture which can be American British, or any other culture which is referred to as international cultures.

3.2.2. Chen's (2009) checklist

The second is Chen's (2009) checklist about types of culture which is designed to collect data about the topics of culture. The researcher adopts the following principles to conduct the data collection in relation to the types and themes of culture presented in the selected BAC texts as table.1 below shows.

Table.1 Chen's (2009) classification of cultural themes into small and big

Number	Big "C" culture	Small "c" culture
1	Government/politics	Food
2	Economy	Holidays
3	History	Living style
4	Geography	Customs
5	Literature/art	Beliefs/values
6	Society's norms	Hobbies
7	Education	Gestures/Body
8	Architecture	Language
9	Music	
Total	9 Themes	7 Themes

4. Results and discussion

The findings of this study are represented in the table below under frequencies and the percentages concerning culture types and categories which were found in the texts of BAC exams from 2005 to 2021.The results have shown that the texts of the concerned exams are designed within a cultural dimension.

The types and categories of culture were, however, disproportionally covered; the target culture dominated the source culture whilst some texts seemed to be culturally neutral as far as the source and the target cultures are concerned.

Table 2. Culture types and categories in the texts of BAC exams from 2005 to 2021

Year	Theme of the BAC texts	Source C.	Target C.	Neutral/ universal	Big c	Small c
2005	Racism in South Africa	0	1	0	1	0
2006	The reaction of British authorities towards smoking	0	1	0	1	0
2007	Women role in Britain	0	1	0	0	1
2008	Education in UK	0	1	0	1	0
	Civilization in Mesopotamia	0	0	1	1	0
2009	Counterfeiting in medicines	0	0	1	0	1
	Education in USA	0	1	0	1	0
2010	Ancient civilizations	0	0	1	1	0
	Education in Australia	0	1	0	1	0
2011	Ancient civilizations	0	0	1	1	0
	Schooling in USA	0	1	0	1	0
2012	Drugs in Sports	0	0	1	0	1
	Education in USA	0	1	0	1	0
2013	Ethics in journalism	0	0	1	1	0
	Education in Britain	0	1	0	1	0
2014	Smoking in schools	0	0	1	0	1
	Ancient civilizations	0	0	1	1	0
2015	Education and success in life	0	0	1	1	0
	Islam and Muslims between the past and the present	1	0	0	1	0
2016	Corruption	0	0	1	1	0
	Angles and Saxons immigration	0	1	0	1	0
2017	Ancient civilizations	0	0	1	1	0
	Child abduction	0	1	0	0	1
2018	Islamic civilization	1	0	0	1	0
	Brain drain	0	0	1	0	1
2019	How to contain corruption	0	0	1	1	0
	Violence against children	0	0	1	0	1
2020	Ancient civilizations	0	0	1	1	0
	Whistle blowing	0	0	1	0	1
2021	The ancient Tipaza	1	0	0	1	0
	Corruption in Education	0	0	1	1	0
Total	31 texts	3	11	17	23	8

Percentages		Culture categories			Culture types	
		Source C.	Target C.	Universal C.	Big C.	Small C.
%	100%	9,6%	35,5%	54,9%	74,2%	25,8%

CULTURE TYPES OF BAC TEXTS FROM 2005 TO 2021
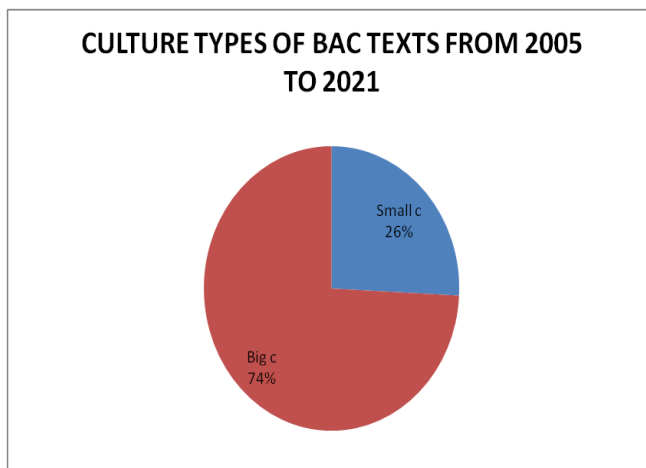
Small c 26%

Big c 74%

Fig.1 Distribution of cultural types in BAC texts

4.1.   Culture Categories

Concerning the source, it was clearly perceived that only 3 texts dealt with cultural themes from the source culture; within the thirty one exams that represented the sample of this study, no text dealt directly with the source culture except BAC 2018 which was felt to be, possibly, of the source culture due to the presence of a historical text about the Algerian city of Tipaza. The two remaining texts dealt with Islamic culture which we considered here as a representation of the source culture.

The target culture was perceived under three distinct categories: the American culture, the British culture and international cultures. This proves again that the target culture of English language is no longer exclusively confined to the British or American cultures; it goes beyond to embody other cultures due to the status of English as a lingua franca in this globalized world (Alpetkin, 2002).

A big proportion (55%), however, presented some neutrality as to present a universal cultural values and facts that can by no means belong to a particular culture.
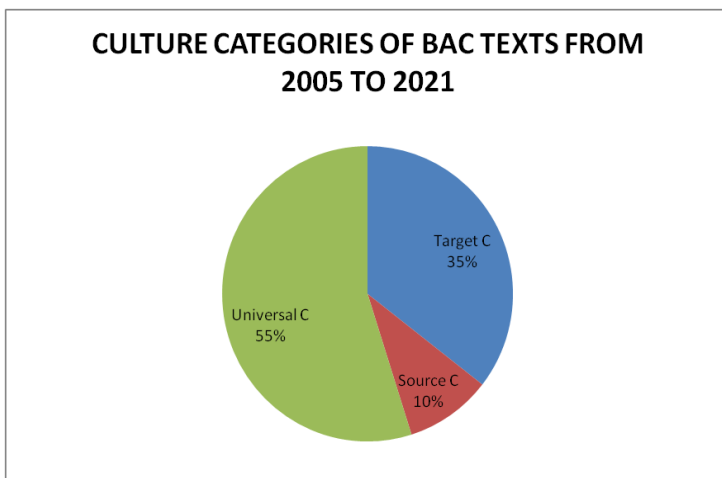
CULTURE CATEGORIES OF BAC TEXTS FROM 2005 TO 2021

- Target C 35%
- Source C 10%
- Universal C 55%

figure 2 : The distribution of culture categories in BAC texts

5. Conclusion

In the teaching/learning of foreign languages, culture is argued to be playing a paramount role as far as communicative competence is concerned. As such, the researchers have inquired the presence of culture in one of the most important stations in the teaching/learning process, testing.

The choice of the literary and foreign language stream BAC exams was mainly due to the fact that they are a reliable sample of secondary school examinations; BAC exams are official and supposed to cover the whole curriculum of the secondary school level.

In this regard, this descriptive study was conducted by the researcher who opted for a document analysis as to investigate the distribution of cultural types and categories in the texts of BAC exams from 2005 to 2021.

The study came to conclude that all texts under scrutiny have, by and large, a cultural theme whether from the big C or the small c aspects of culture. The dominance of the Big c culture over small c culture was clearly perceived. Concerning the distribution the cultural content in culture categories, however, the source culture was greatly marginalized. target cultures were also prioritized over the source culture. Nonetheless, the majority of texts were felt to present neutrality in as much to culture categories.

The researchers call for further investigation concerning the place of culture in BAC exams; especially as far as the instructions and the writing expression activities are concerned.

Furthermore, within the intercultural context that is being established within modern technology and globalization, the researchers also suggest that BAC designers give more importance to the source culture which is as important as the target /international cultures for it raises learners' self awareness and strengthens one's identity as to achieve an efficient intercultural competence which is another key-element in the teaching of foreign languages (Byram, M. 1997).

6.   References

Abdel-Wahab, M. M. (2015). Culture and English Language Teaching in the Arab World. *ADULT LEARNING , 26* (2), 66-72.

Abdul Rahim, H. &. (2020). Locally-developed vs. Global Textbooks: An Evaluation of Cultural Content in Textbooks Used in ELT in Malaysia. *Asian Englishes , 22* (3), 317-331.

Alpetkin, C. (2002). Towards intercultural communicative competence. *ELT Journal , 56* (1), 57-64.

Bachman, L. F. (1996). *Language testing in practice: Designing and developing useful language tests* (Vol. 1). Oxford University Press.

BENADLA, L. (2013). The Competency Based Language Teaching in the Algerian Middle School: From EFL Acquisition Planning to its Practical Teaching/Learning. *Arab World English Journal , 4* (1).

Bounab, S. (Ed.). (2020, 04 21). *Bem guide november 2018*. (Ministry of National Education) Retrieved from Slide share: https://www.slideshare.net/daffodil66/bem-guide-november-2018

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method . *Qualitative Research Journal , 9* (2), 27-40.

Byram, M., & Esarte-Sarries, V. (1991). *Investigating Cultural Studies in Foreign Language Teaching: a Book for Teacher.* Clevedon: Multiligual Matters.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence.* Multilingual Matters.

Chen, S.-H. (2009). Intercultural team teaching: A study of local and foreign EFL teachers in Taiwan. *Ph.D. dessertation .* Durham University.

Cortazzi, M. a. (1999). Cultural Mirrors Materials and Methods in the EFL Classroom. *Culture in Second Language Teaching , Cambridge University Press*, 196-219. (E. Hinkel, Ed.) Cambridge.

Crozier, G., & Reay, D. (2008). *The socio cultural and learning experiences of working class students in higher education.* (T. a. Programme, Ed.)

Desheng, C., & Varghese, A. (2013). Testing and Evaluation of Language Skills. *IOSR-JRME Journal of Research & Method in Education , 1* (2), 31-33.

Grine, S. (2014). L' Evaluation de la production écrite de l'examen final d'enseignement moyen BEM 2010-2011 approche socio didactique. *Revue des lettres et des langues* (21), 61-75.

Harmer, J. (2007). *The practice of English language teaching.* Harlow: Pearson Longman.

Kramsch, C. (2013). Culture in foreign language teaching. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research , 1* (1), 57-78.

Laohawiriyanon, C. (2013). Cultural Content in EFL Listening and Speaking Textbooks for Chinese University Students. *International Journal of English Language Education , 1* (1).

Madani, H. (2020). Integrating the Target Language Culture in the Algerian EFL Classrooms. *Loughat-kalaam , 6* (3), 447-454.

Madsen, H. S. (1983). *Techniques in Testing.* (ERIC, Ed.) New York: Oxford University Press.

Matsuo, C. (2012). A critique of Michael Byram's Intercultural

Communicative Competence Model from the perspective of model type

and conceptualization of culture. *Fukuoka University Review of*

Literature & Humanities (福岡大学人文論叢) , 44 (2), 347--380

McGrath, I. (2002). *Materials evaluation and design for language teaching.* Edinburgh University Press.

Peterson, B. (2011). *Cultural intelligence: A guide to working with people from other cultures.* (N. Brealey, Ed.)

Taylor, L. &. (2009). Are two heads better than one? Pairwork in L2 assessment contexts. *Language Testing , 26* (3), 325-340.

Thaâlibi, N. (2006). *Réforme de l'éducation et innovation pédagogique en Algérie.* Alger: UNESCO-ONPS.

Sándorová, Z. (2016). The intercultural componentin an EFL course-book package. *Journal of Language and Cultural Education , 4* (3), 178-203.