On Cultural Diversity in the BBC Learning English Podcast Series: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

The significant role of culture is undeniable in both discourse and the acquisition of a second or foreign language. With the rise of digital technology, it is increasingly crucial to explore digital educational resources such as podcasts. Grounded in a CDA perspective, this study explores how culture and cultural diversity are constructed and represented in the podcast series "6 Minute English" by BBC Learning English. Drawing on Yuen (2011) cultural representation framework and the multimodal analytical toolkit by Ledin and Machin (2020), the study investigates how the podcast's discourses and accompanying images negotiate cultural elements and diversity in this digital education context. Quantitative content analysis and qualitative multimodal analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings indicated that the podcast episodes analyzed predominantly featured the Product and Person dimensions of culture. Thus, it can be concluded that while tangible cultural aspects are foregrounded in the "6 Minute English" podcast, abstract cultural Practices and Perspectives receive comparatively less attention, a pattern that prompts reflection on inclusivity in language learning materials. Additionally, the analysis of the podcast images demonstrated that the accompanying visuals were used in conjunction with the podcast content to further highlight the message and potentially enhance its effectiveness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture has long played a pivotal role in second and foreign language acquisition, especially over the past fifty years, and its integration into language instruction has sparked ongoing debate among scholars and practitioners in the field (Weninger & Kiss, 2013). Since language learning is not only about grasping grammatical structures but also involves understanding how various cultures are represented and interrelated, learners who engage with authentic language materials are simultaneously exposed to the cultural dimensions that accompany them (Yuen, 2011). Traditionally, English language teaching has relied heavily on textbooks and other print materials to facilitate the instruction of both language and culture. Some researchers (Alshenqeeti, 2019; Baleghizadeh & Amiri Shayesteh, 2020; Hilliard, 2014; Keles & Yazan, 2020; Yuen, 2011) have

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also extensively examined the frequency of culture-related items in these resources, but not the manner in which such elements are represented and interpreted. This is vital, as frequency alone cannot reveal deeper cultural constructions or implicit potential biases that might underlie language teaching materials; hence, the importance of critically investigating explicit and implicit representations of both objective and subjective cultural elements embedded in language teaching/learning content (Ger, 2021).

Building on this, in recent years, the rapid advancement of digital technologies has diversified instructional resources and their application in language classrooms worldwide (Motteram & Motteram, 2013). The integration of digital resources, therefore, implies a reduced reliance on textbooks as the sole language learning resource (Lee et al., 2020), with podcasts emerging as one of the most popular and accessible tools for authentic language and culture learning. Also, particularly evident in the Iranian context, both interested instructors and EFL learners actively utilize English podcasts, such as "6 Minute English," as supplementary and sometimes even primary sources for language input and cultural insight (NamazianDost et al., 2017).

Recognizing this paradigm shift and the widespread appeal and potential of podcasts as educational tools (Hasan & Hoon, 2013), the present study critically analyzes how cultural elements are constructed within the "6 Minute English" podcast series, addressing the current research gap and advancing the discussion beyond conventional textbook analyses.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical frameworks

Culture in language education is inherently ideological, shaping learners' perceptions of self, others, and the world through representations that can reinforce or challenge power structures (Liddicoat, 2024). From a critical perspective, cultural diversity in ELT materials must move beyond the superficial inclusion of objective cultural elements to question how dominant ideologies, defined by Paltridge (2012) as "a body of ideas that reflects the beliefs and interests of an individual, a group, or a social institution which finds expression in language," marginalize non-Western perspectives, promoting equity in globalized discourse. Cultural elements, such as Products, Practices, Perspectives, and Persons, serve as sites of ideological clash, where their presence or absence probably reflects broader sociocultural agendas. According to Paltridge (2012), it is the primary goal of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to help uncover some of these hidden and covertly stated values, positions, and perspectives.

The cultural representation framework

Yuen (2011) proposes that references to foreign cultures can be categorized into four distinct aspects and offers a widely adopted theoretical framework identifying these four categories of cultural elements prevalent in ELT materials, including Products, Practices, Perspectives, and Persons. He categorizes the first two types of cultural elements as 'objective culture' due to their tangible properties. Cultural Products encompass various items such as entertainment, food, clothing, housing, and travel, while cultural Practices, as enacted behaviors, involve daily routines, rituals, customs, societal norms, and other behaviors deemed appropriate by a specific society. The third category, Perspectives, refers to the collective worldview held by members of a group or society, including their values and beliefs. This is known as 'subjective culture,' which is more abstract compared to the tangible 'objective culture.' Finally, the last category, Persons, includes well-known and lesser-known everyday individuals from different societies. As per Yuen (2011),

to examine the representation of foreign cultures in ELT materials, these four aspects—Products, Practices, Perspectives, and Persons—can be used as the framework for the data analysis.

Multimodal concepts

With the rise of digital ELT resources like podcasts, visuals (in this case, the accompanying images) play a key role in constructing meaning alongside audio content. Multimodal discourse analysis, therefore, examines how visual elements, such as the representation of participants or color selection, position viewers and convey cultural nuances. To this end, drawing on Ledin and Machin (2020), the following concepts provide the theoretical foundation for analyzing the "6 Minute English" podcast images.

Pictures and images

People in images can be depicted as individuals or in groups. This distinction can impact how the individuals and the events they participate in are portrayed. Visually, individualization is achieved through shots that focus on a single person. In such instances, this can be significant in personalizing the connection between the portrayed individual and the viewer, prompting us to resonate with their emotions and interests (Ledin & Machin, 2020).

According to Ledin and Machin (2020), just as in real life, interaction with the viewer in images can take different forms depending on the subject's gaze and perspective. When the individuals depicted gaze at the viewer, this creates a symbolic bond or interaction between the audience and the portrayed subjects. This interaction serves two main purposes. Firstly, it establishes a visual mode of address, acknowledging the viewer. Secondly, it creates an image act. The image is utilized to engage the viewer in a specific way. This can be referred to as a 'demand image' that requests something from you in a figurative relationship. When we view a person in a frontal perspective, we feel engaged with them. Conversely, in a non-frontal perspective, we assume the role of observers of the scene. However, our involvement can also shift based on our viewpoint, particularly with the angle of interaction along the horizontal plane. If a photograph depicts individuals at the same level, it suggests equality. However, altering our viewing position, either by elevating or lowering it, alters our perceived status relationship (Ledin & Machin, 2020).

Additionally , as noted by Ledin and Machin (2020), distance in images reflects social dynamics just as it does in real life. We often maintain distance from those we dislike and move closer to our friends or those within our social circle. In visual representations, distance is represented by the size of the frame (such as close shots, medium shots, long shots, etc.), indicating how near a person appears to the viewer. Although this can differ across cultures, people generally feel uneasy when strangers encroach too closely.

Concerning modality markers and scales, the aspect of detail articulation considers whether we can observe the details of elements within a photograph, examining how faithfully the representation reflects reality. It operates on a spectrum from maximum detail to complete abstraction. The distinction between these two extremes could be likened to a family member's wedding photograph versus a simplistic matchstick drawing of that same person. In this instance, the contrast lies in the representation of the specific, with all its intricate details, versus the generic (Ledin & Machin, 2020). Similarly, background articulation refers to the clarity with which we can distinguish the details of a background in an image. Backgrounds can range from a completely blank space to lightly sketched-in or out-of-focus backgrounds, and finally to backgrounds that are extremely sharp and detailed (Ledin & Machin, 2020).

As per Ledin and Machin (2020), degrees of articulation of depth also range from deep perspective to having no perspective at all. In naturalistic modality, depth would be represented as we perceive it in reality. Low modality would signify a reduction of this detail. Finally, the articulation of light and shadow pertains to how closely the lighting in the image resembles what it would appear like if we were physically present. A lack of shadow combined with bright light can generally generate an effect of optimism that may be conveyed to the products and promotions. Conversely, darkness and areas of shadow can create moodiness and suggest a sense of concealment (Ledin & Machin, 2020).

Significance of color in visual design

Color reinforces the aforementioned visual meanings through brightness and hue. The potential meaning of brightness is rooted in our fundamental experiences with light and darkness. No culture likely lacks a variety of symbolic meanings and values related to this distinction. A substantial portion of this potential meaning comes from the correlation between clarity and obscurity. Brightness may be linked to feelings such as happiness, while darkness can be associated with depression and sadness (Ledin & Machin, 2020).

Ledin and Machin (2020) also describe another color element as 'Hue' as the spectrum from blue to red. The blue end evokes coldness, calmness, distance, and backgrounding, while the red end is associated with warmth, energy, and prominence.

Empirical studies

In his empirical case study of English language textbooks utilized in Hong Kong secondary schools, Yuen (2011) proposes that references to foreign cultures can be categorized into four distinct aspects: Products, Practices, Perspectives, and Persons, thereby encompassing both objective and subjective dimensions of culture. The investigation of the ELT textbooks revealed that references to (cultural) Products appeared most frequently, with entertainment, travel, and food representing the primary categories. On the other hand, the other three aspects were featured less prominently, with Perspectives being particularly underrepresented. Moreover, the depiction of cultures predominantly favored those of English-speaking communities, while African cultures were notably marginalized. Therefore, this framework has subsequently shaped several studies, supporting systematic investigations into the nuances of cultural representation in both print and digital ELT resources. In light of this, an interest has been developed in the specific aspects of culture that are either emphasized or minimized within different ELT materials. Building on Yuen (2011) approach and utilizing his framework for cultural representation, recent scholarship and a number of latest studies have sought to examine the portrayal of culture in ELT materials, including textbooks(Baleghizadeh & Amiri Shayesteh, 2020; Keles & Yazan, 2020; Setyawaningsih et al., 2021; Soy et al., 2023) and ELT Instagram pages (Shahami & Tahriri, 2024). These studies consistently indicate that the aspects of Products, Practices, and Persons are the most frequently represented cultural elements, and concerning the scope of foreign cultures manifested in the examined ELT materials, they revealed a notable emphasis on the cultures of English-speaking countries compared to other cultures.

Building upon the previously mentioned concepts, there is an extensive body of research investigating the portrayal of culture in English language textbooks, most of which have adopted a critical approach, analyzing cultural representations as reflected in both the textual and visual components of textbooks. The content may focus on the target language culture, or the learners' source culture, or provide an international cultural perspective that encompasses a diverse range of contexts and resources (McKay, 2000). Several studies (Alonso & Ponte, 2015; Hosseinzadeh

et al., 2021; Setyawaningsih et al., 2021; Shahami & Tahriri, 2024; Soy et al., 2023) have, therefore, examined the representation of culture in ELT materials, contributing significantly to this discourse.

Several studies have concluded that many ELT textbooks around the world predominantly emphasize the target culture, often exhibiting a strong bias towards it (Alonso & Ponte, 2015; Alshenqeeti, 2019; Hosseinzadeh et al., 2021; Lestariyana & Nurkamto, 2022; Mahmood et al., 2012; Messekher et al., 2014; Purba, 2023; Shin et al., 2011; Smith, 2021; Tajeddin & Pakzadian, 2020; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2014). These studies have explored how cultural representations manifest in ELT materials, as well as the prevalence of cultural elements, including literature as a significant reflection of a nation's culture (Andarab, 2019), alongside details pertaining to daily life, cuisine, norms, values, and customs from Western or English-speaking countries- commonly referred to as inner-circle nations- compared to those from outer and expanding circle countries (Sadeghi & Sepahi, 2017).

Additionally, some studies have concentrated on the representation of dominant ideologies propagated within ELT textbooks, highlighting that the language utilized in these resources frequently mirrors specific values, predominantly those associated with Western ideologies (Chalak & Ghasemi, 2017; Hashemian & Farhang-Ju, 2022; Zarei & Khalessi, 2011) Related findings indicate that representations of ideology and multicultural values are conveyed through various cultural dimensions, including culinary themes, tourist attractions, youth lifestyles, flora and fauna, modern achievements, and interpersonal interactions (Sinaga, 2024), revealing a superficial form of multiculturalism intended to project an idealized view of the West (Babaii & Sheikhi, 2017).

A recent scoping review by Zhang et al. (2024) has also revealed that certain cultures are often either overlooked or misrepresented in instructional textbooks, typically depicted implicitly rather than explicitly. Additionally, foreign cultures are usually presented as static and oversimplified, leading to superficial comparisons that ignore their complex histories. Textbooks frequently lack diversity and political nuances, therefore, treating culture merely as a set of facts for language learners (Canale, 2016). Across such studies, there is consistent evidence to suggest five primary themes regarding cultural representation in foreign language textbooks, particularly in EFL settings, including: 1. predominance of the target culture, 2. absence of local culture, 3. lack of cross-cultural comparisons, 4. emphasis on surface-level culture, and finally 5. an imbalance in cultural representation (Karakus, 2021).

Despite the proliferation of empirical research on ELT textbook content, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, a notable gap remains regarding the representation of culture in emergent digital educational tools, such as podcasts, an area increasingly relevant for both language educators and learners. In light of this gap, the current study intends to investigate the representation of culture and cultural diversity in one of the most widely popular podcast series, titled "6 Minute English," produced by BBC Learning English.

To this end, the following research questions were posed:

1. How frequent are Yuen (2011) categories of cultural representation (Products, Practices, Perspectives, and Persons) in the BBC Learning English podcast series under investigation?

2. Is there any significant difference among the four categories of Yuen's framework (Products, Practices, Perspectives, and Persons) within the analyzed podcasts?

3. In what ways are culture and cultural diversity visually represented in the accompanying images of the BBC Learning English podcasts under investigation?

3. METHODS

Design of the study

The present study employed a mixed-methods design, consisting of two types of analyses to address the research questions. Firstly, a quantitative content analysis was conducted to investigate the cultural elements embedded within the selected podcast episodes. Secondly, a qualitative analysis was carried out to focus on the images accompanying each episode, which serve as multimodal resources that, in conjunction with the text, convey the intended meanings.

Materials

6 Minute English podcast

The current study aims to analyze the widely recognized podcast series offered by BBC Learning English, namely the "6 Minute English" podcast. This longstanding series features topical discussions and introduces new vocabulary, delivered by presenters from BBC Learning English. Targeted at intermediate learners, a new 6-minute audio episode is released weekly, which is discussion-oriented and designed to enhance vocabulary acquisition. Each episode, which is presented in the format of an audio file paired with an image, centers on a unique topic, facilitating the teaching of related vocabulary through dialogue between two presenters. The topics covered in the episodes are also notably diverse, encompassing a wide array of issues, ranging from pursuing personal dreams to more serious matters, such as climate change and plastic consumption.

Sample of the study

The aforementioned English Language Teaching (ELT) podcast series has been broadcasting weekly episodes since 2008, resulting in a significant number of episodes. To effectively manage the scope of the study, the analysis has been limited to episodes published over the last three years, from 2022 to the end of October 2024. This timeframe enables the establishment of a defined population with a specific number of episodes. Utilizing an online random number generator, a random sample of 30 episodes, along with their accompanying images, was selected from the approximately 150 episodes available within this timeframe. A simple random sampling method was employed to ensure that each podcast had an equal and independent chance of being selected, thereby facilitating a representative analysis of the population.

Procedure

As the initial phase, the "6 Minute English" podcast series was selected through purposive sampling due to its global popularity and influence among English language learners. Following this, a simple random sample of 30 episodes was selected from the broader pool of approximately 150 episodes, utilizing an online random number generator.

The unit of analysis was each cultural reference (i.e., mentions of Products, Practices, Perspectives, or Persons) identified in the podcast transcripts. To achieve this, quantitative content analysis was implemented, utilizing Yuen (2011) categories of cultural representation. The cultural references identified were then verified against the Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture, drawing on its cultural notes and topic pages, which offer valuable insights into different facets of English culture, including information about festivals, holidays, music, and British and American life, among others. Following categorization, the frequency and percentage of items

within each cultural category were computed, allowing for a comparative analysis of the four categories (i.e., Products, Practices, Perspectives, Persons) to identify any potential differences.

In the second phase of the study, an examination and interpretation of the images accompanying each episode was conducted, guided by the multimodal analysis framework posited by (Ledin & Machin, 2020).

Data analysis

In the present study, quantitative data analysis was performed subsequent to the classification of cultural elements within the selected sample according to Yuen (2011) model. Descriptive statistics were then employed to determine the frequency of cultural elements based on their occurrences.

Thereafter, the frequency for each category in the podcast episodes under investigation was calculated. Chi-square tests, a type of inferential statistic, were conducted using SPSS software version 26 to assess the significance of differences among the four categories.

Multimodal discourse analysis toolkit

For the qualitative phase of the study, the multimodal analysis guidelines proposed by Ledin and Machin (2020) were used. They adopt a social semiotic perspective on communication, which enables analysts to deconstruct visual designs into their basic elements and comprehend how these components interact. The complete toolkit suggested by Ledin and Machin (2020) for multimodal discourse analysis encompasses an assessment of various elements of visual design, including pictures and images, modality, color significance in visual design, typography meaning, textures and materiality, composition and page layout, as well as diagrams and flowcharts. Nonetheless, since some of the previously mentioned guidelines, including typography, textures and materiality, composition and page layout, as well as diagrams and flowcharts, did not apply to the focus of this study, i.e., podcasts, the final qualitative analysis framework relevant to our sample concentrated on two primary aspects of our data: pictures and images, along with the significance of color in visual design (see Appendix). Selected visual data was then meticulously analyzed and organized, with results interpreted following the established guidelines.

Additionally, to guarantee the trustworthiness of the study, the evaluative criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were taken into account throughout the research process. According to them, the credibility of a study is crucial for evaluating its significance.

In alignment with this principle, the present study sought to implement the most relevant and applicable related techniques to the extent possible to establish credibility in the research process. These techniques included, but were not limited to, triangulation, thick description, inquiry audit, and audit trail. Specifically, in the current study, triangulation was employed to help ensure credibility, thick description to achieve a degree of transferability, inquiry audit to enhance dependability, and lastly, an audit trail was maintained to help ensure confirmability.

In addition, concerning the quantitative content analysis stage of the research, the two researchers engaged in discussions during the data extraction and collection processes to ensure the accurate identification and categorization of the cultural elements to address any points of disagreement that arose and to arrive at a clear consensus.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the quantitative content analysis that was conducted on the selected episodes of the "6 Minute English" podcast. The results include descriptive statistics and

inferential analyses to determine the distribution and significance of the cultural elements within the dataset.

Responding to the first research question

Descriptive statistics

To address the first research question regarding the frequency of cultural representation categories (Products, Practices, Perspectives, and Persons) in the "6 Minute English" podcast, descriptive statistics were calculated. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Frequencies and percentages of cultural representation categories in the 6 Minute English podcast

	Frequency	Percent
Products	181	42.5
Practices	69	16.2
Perspectives	30	7.0
Persons	146	34.3
Total	426	100.0

As shown in Table 1, Products were the most frequently occurring cultural category (f = 181, 42.5%), followed by Persons (f = 146, 34.3%), Practices (f = 69, 16.2%), and Perspectives (f = 30, 7.00%). These cultural categories mainly reflect the elements appreciated and represented specifically within the context of English-speaking societies featured in the "6 Minute English" podcast.

Table 2 provides samples of the four categories of cultural representation from the podcast episodes examined.

Table 2: Samples of the four cultural categories

	Products	Practices	Perspectives	Persons
6 Minute English from BBC Learning English	Romeo & Juliet Fried Chicken & Chips with Gravy Forbes Magazine Harry Potter Books	Tea has traditionally been a very popular drink in the UK. Qatar has no tradition of playing football.	Challenging injustice Following your dreams can be tough, but not following them can leave you regretting.	Queen Victoria Mary Queen of Scots William Shakespeare Caroline Martins

Responding to the second research question

Inferential statistics

To examine whether there was a statistically significant difference among the four categories of cultural representation, a Chi-square goodness of fit test was performed. The test was conducted to determine whether the observed frequencies of the categories significantly deviated from an expected uniform distribution. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit test results

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Product	181	106.5	74.5
Practices	69	106.5	-37.5
Perspectives	30	106.5	-76.5
Persons	146	106.5	39.5
Total	426		

As indicated in Table 3, Products (f = 181) and Persons (f = 146) were overrepresented relative to the expected frequency (106.5), with positive residuals of 74.5 and 39.5, respectively. Conversely, Practices (f = 69) and Perspectives (f = 30) were underrepresented, as reflected in their negative residuals of -37.5 and -76.5. These findings suggest that the "6 Minute English" podcast places greater emphasis on tangible cultural artifacts and well-known as well as unknown individuals but it provides less focus on cultural practices and perspectives which are more abstract in nature.

Table 4: Test statistics

	Categories
Chi-Square	134.920a
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Note. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 106.5.

The Chi-square goodness of fit test results revealed that there is a significant difference in the distribution of the cultural representation categories, $\chi^2 (3) = 134.92$, $p < .001$. The p-value of .000, which was below the conventional threshold of .05, confirmed that the observed differences were statistically significant. These results suggest that cultural representation within the "6 Minute English" podcast is not evenly distributed and certain categories appear significantly more or less frequent than expected by chance.

Results of the qualitative data analysis

Representation of Participants in Images

Considering the total of thirty images analyzed, among the twenty-two images that include people, the vast majority, approximately 82% or eighteen images, display just one person, while only 18% depict group representations. Consequently, as previously noted, this choice of individualization can serve a specific purpose by fostering a personalized bond between the viewer and the represented individual, thereby encouraging the audience to engage with their emotions and interests. Below are a few images to illustrate this:

Figure 1: Addicted to sugar
Figure 2: How the language of menus matter

Figure 3: Bitter food, better health?
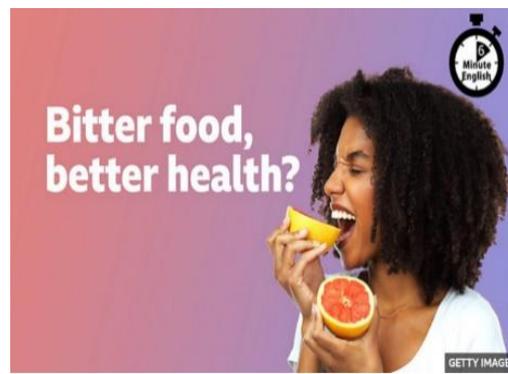
Interaction

The nature of interaction in images, or the specific tone of address, is influenced by various other elements. There could be a smile that welcomes us in or allows us to partake in a joyful moment. Alternatively, there may be an angry expression, where we perceive the subject as a threat or someone superior to us. The person's body language might convey warmth through open arms or hostility through clenched fists on their hips. All these factors enable the image to establish its relationship with the viewer (Ledin & Machin, 2020). For example, in the subsequent image, the use of direct address creates a figurative connection between the viewer and the girl portrayed, where she implores the audience to 'save the planet', illustrating the interactive principles outlined above:

Figure 4: Kids and climate change

As per Ledin and Machin (2020), conversely, we might encounter a potential address in images where we see someone face-to-face, but the subject does not gaze directly at the viewer; thus, this form of 'contact' or 'direct address' is lacking. Nevertheless, when we, as viewers, face an individual, particularly in a close-up of their face, there exists a potential for address. We are essentially encouraged to engage with this person. Frequently, in many photographs, we see the subject looking off-frame. In such cases, captions often accompany these images, inviting us into the thoughts of the depicted individual, making their gaze off-frame feel like a direct address in language, typically in the form of a question, as in the following instances:

Figure 5: Can we live without plastic?
Figure 6: How names can tell painful stories

In contrast, when we observe individuals not face-to-face, but instead from the side, from behind, or at a distance, there is no direct address. Non-frontal perspectives, therefore, indicate that we are observers, as if we are given a glimpse into a reality we are not a part of, sometimes resembling bystanders or eavesdroppers (Ledin & Machin, 2020). Here, there is no opportunity for engagement or interaction with the depicted individuals. Instead, the images present information available for our examination. Consider the upcoming examples:

Figure 7: Controlling the weather
Figure 8: Qatar's World Cup workers

Angles

Notably, among the twenty-two images of people analyzed in the multimodal phase of the study, a horizontal angle was consistently employed in all cases.

Distance

When discussing the element of 'Distance', as explained earlier, a closer shot conveys a sense of intimacy and helps viewers connect with individuals, as seen in Figures 9 and 10, while longer shots tend to feel more impersonal, as illustrated by Figures 7, 8, and 11.

Figure 9: Do our pets care about us?
Figure 10: Why laughter is the best medicine

Figure 11: Are you following your dreams?

Actions in images

As noted by Ledin and Machin (2020), actions in images can be understood through different processes that convey meaning to the viewer. To this end, emotional processes refer to instances where an individual's facial expression reflects their emotional state (mood) (Ledin & Machin, 2020). Examine the images below:

Figure 12: Do you get jealous easily?
Figure 13: Did Taylor Swift fans cause an earthquake?

Closely related to emotional processes are mental processes. In this case, however, images use gestures and body language to convey internal thoughts. Typically, one will find images depicting individuals gazing off-camera into the distance. Providing insight into the participants' mental processes can create a closer connection for the viewer, helping them relate to their concerns and interests (Ledin & Machin, 2020). By analyzing the images below, we observe how specific gestures and postures, along with titles presented as questions, invite viewers to engage with the internal thoughts of the individuals shown and to somehow align with their issues:

Figure 14: Do you have eco-anxiety?
Figure 15: Are you unhappy at work?

Modality markers and scales

Degrees of the articulation of detail

Fully detailed photographs, such as Figures 16 or 17, showcase an individual, while matchstick figures, like those in Figures 14 or 18 below, could easily represent anyone. According to Ledin and Machin (2020) , one possible reason for reducing modality might involve portraying an idea or concept rather than capturing a specific moment in time.

Figure 16: Sleepy in South Korea
Figure 17: How learning to read changes lives

Figure 18: The benefits of doing nothing

Degrees of articulation of the background

In the image below, for instance, the background is clearly visible. We can identify the type of location depicted, which is crucial for conveying the message of the image that aims to position the ecotourism project within a natural, safe, and familiar setting. According to Ledin and Machin (2020), photographs that capture exact location details situate the events at a specific moment in time or imply that the scene is happening there.

Figure 19: Ecotourism: good or bad?

This contrasts with the background articulation in Figures 9, 15, 16, or in the figure that follows. In these cases, the setting is somewhat discernible, but not entirely clear. In contrast, the individuals are portrayed in sharp detail, allowing us to see all the lines of their faces. In such cases, high levels of detail can suggest higher levels of truth (Ledin & Machin, 2020).

Figure 20: Saving dead languages

However, in the majority of the images, the depicted individuals are shown against a blank background. In one regard, this is entirely decontextualized. These individuals are completely detached from the various contexts in which they live and work, as seen in Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 17, or in the subsequent example:

Figure 21: What is the future of work?

Degrees of articulation of depth

Interestingly, among the images examined, only two instances (Figures 14 and 18) showcased low modality with reduced depth articulation, while the majority presented a deep perspective (naturalistic modality) as we would see in everyday vision.

Degrees of articulation of light and shadow

Figures 11, 19, and 20 exemplify instances where the presence of bright light and minimal shadow can invoke feelings of positivity and optimism regarding the subjects discussed. In contrast, Figure 8 effectively illustrates the opposite situation, as the darkness and shadows in this image are meant to create a sense of concealment about the conditions faced by workers in Qatar and the realities they endure.

The meaning of color in visual design

Colors serve as a tool as well for organizing compositions. Thus, color is yet another crucial semiotic resource that can be examined in a systematic way. Colors can trigger emotions and set moods that amplify meaning (Ledin & Machin, 2020).

Brightness

In the sample "6 Minute English" episodes, both symbolic meanings of brightness and darkness are represented. For instance, Figures 8 and 12 illustrate darker moods, evoking themes such as sadness or obscurity, while the image below illustrates brightness through vivid colors, conveying positivity and happiness. This dual presence reflects the range of symbolic and emotional meanings related to light and darkness in our discourse.

Figure 22: Island life: Is it paradise?

Hue

On the blue end of the hue spectrum, there are connections to coldness, calmness, distance, and backgrounding (e.g., Figures 4, 5, 16, 22, or 23). Conversely, the red end is associated with warmth, energy, and prominence (e.g., Figures 2, 13, or 14). Yellow and orange can convey optimism and vitality (e.g., Figure 7). Additionally, neutral colors like greys and beige can be found (e.g., Figure 15), as well as colors that evoke nature, such as greens and browns, shown in the following image.

To bring it all together, the podcast images analyzed commonly draw on a broad palette of hues, with each color shade employed to communicate specific meanings or moods, as discussed above. The sample material, therefore, includes representations across the spectrum, and the use of both cool and warm, neutral and vibrant hues contributes to the nuanced portrayal of different themes in the series.

Figure 23: Saving water in the driest place on Earth

Figure 24: How green is your money?

Responding to the third research question

Visual imagery in the examined English podcast series can provide a vivid illustration of culture and cultural diversity to a certain degree. For example, these images might depict people from various ethnicities, races, and backgrounds, highlighting the multiculturalism that is deeply rooted in many English-speaking nations. A qualitative analysis of the visuals demonstrates how individuals with differing skin colors or, as seen in Figure 10, varying religious affiliations are visually represented alongside the audio content of the podcasts, signaling the presence of diverse cultures (Figures 1-6, 15, 16, 19, or 20). Moreover, the visuals in these podcast episodes might also reference elements of popular culture relevant to the target language. For instance, Figure 25 features coffee beans and a coffee cup to illustrate the tremendous popularity of coffee consumption in Britain, engaging the audience both through visual and verbal means. This approach may provide a more effective way to introduce instances of popular culture to the audience.

Figure 25: Britain's love affair with coffee

To address the third research question, an examination of the images revealed that the visual representations used alongside the audio files generally aligned with or supported the content of the episodes and the messages being conveyed. For example, when the podcast discussed owning pets and "loving animals," which is commonly considered a crucial cultural aspect in many countries, the accompanying visual representation also depicted a person showing a clear affection for animals, like a woman embracing a dog, as illustrated in Figure 9 or even 19. The significance of the color blue, associated with calmness in the US and the UK, is also noteworthy. In Figure

16, for instance, the appropriate use of this color can be seen as a visual feature that assists in conveying the podcast's message. Furthermore, as noted in the Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture, both British and American cultures perceive green as the color that best symbolizes nature, as evidenced in Figure 24, which pertains to some environmentally conscious methods of managing finances.

Overall, to answer the question of how the visual representations accompanying the podcast episodes under study reflect culture and cultural diversity, it can be concluded that these images purposefully mirror cultural elements (Products, Practices, Persons) and reinforce the audio content. To elaborate, the visual components, whether they involve images of people or specific colors, as illustrated in the examples above, align with and intensify the cultural themes presented in the episodes to further emphasize the message and potentially increase its representational impact.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In line with Yuen (2011) fourfold classification (i.e., Products, Practices, Perspectives, and Persons), the present study sheds light on how culture is portrayed in one of the most popular ELT podcast series, namely "6 Minute English." While the results showed that diverse cultural elements largely characterized the analyzed podcast episodes, a notable imbalance persists. The findings revealed that the predominant cultural dimensions within the sample studied were Products and Persons, accounting for 42.5% and 34.3% of the total sample, respectively. The Practices dimension ranked as the third most common or moderately present, appearing in 16.2% of the cases. Finally, the dimension with the least occurrence was Perspectives, representing only 7.0% of the total.

The significance of presenting these frequencies and percentages lies in the fact that, according to Yuen (2011), it enables us to determine the breadth of cultural dimensions in educational materials. Additionally, this data aids in understanding which cultural dimensions the developers of the materials are emphasizing and aiming to communicate to the learners.

Critically examining these results, the increased emphasis on Products and Persons probably suggests editorial choices that echo the broader trend in ELT materials of prioritizing the more tangible, visible, and personal aspects of culture. In the first place, these results are to a large extent consistent with those of Yuen (2011), who found that the most frequently presented content in the analyzed textbooks pertained to Products like entertainment, travel, and food. However, the category ranking found in this study slightly differs from Yuen (2011). Unlike Yuen (2011), who found that the other three categories, especially the Perspectives category, were less prevalent, the current study observed Persons as the second most frequent dimension. This may reflect a greater emphasis in the "6 Minute English" podcast series on highlighting well-known as well as unknown individuals as influential figures, their stories, or personal experiences, suggesting a shift toward humanizing content, personalization, and representation of community members and their individual voices and stories in contemporary ELT materials, which may foster a sense of connection and relatability within a global audience. To put it in a nutshell, the aforementioned results indicate not only a focus on more tangible or objective cultural elements (Products) but also a noteworthy inclusion of personal narratives (Persons), which can potentially foster relatability and engagement for learners. Conversely, the limited presence of Perspectives suggests that deeper exploration of cultural worldviews, beliefs, and values remains less common, potentially restricting deeper cultural understanding and critical reflection. This pattern also seems to parallel Yuen's observation that material developers tend to prioritize content with broad appeal, like entertainment and other popular Products, thereby promoting a 'tourist's perspective' that may be

more engaging for younger learners or general audiences, as he clarified in his 2011 study that the selection process favored the potential interest of the material, resulting in popular Products being more attractive than abstract Perspectives like equality. Consequently, the textbooks depicted a "tourist's perspective," which may have been more appealing to younger audiences (Yuen, 2011, p. 459).

The statistically significant Chi-square test results, therefore, suggest more than a mere imbalance in category frequencies, since it can be a reflection of systemic priorities within the podcast's editorial process, intentionally or inadvertently. This could probably raise critical discourse concerns. To elaborate, by foregrounding Products and Persons while marginalizing Practices and especially Perspectives, the podcast content may unintentionally reinforce more objective surface-level manifestations of culture at the expense of deeper, more critical reflection. This is to be considered with substantial care, as it can shape learners' understanding, either supporting or constraining their development as critical intercultural communicators.

The results of this study, derived from the quantitative content analysis, also align with findings from previous research that focuses on specific cultural aspects highlighted or downplayed in different ELT materials. Utilizing Yuen (2011) framework for cultural representation, studies by Baleghizadeh and Amiri Shayesteh (2020), Keles and Yazan (2020), Setyawaningsih et al. (2021), and Soy et al. (2023) examining the cultural representations in ELT textbooks, as well as an analysis of ELT Instagram pages by Shahami and Tahriri (2024), consistently found that the cultural elements of Products, Practices, and Persons were the most frequently depicted. Furthermore, concerning the representation of foreign cultures in the analyzed ELT materials, they demonstrated a significant focus on the cultures of English-speaking countries compared to other cultures.

Shifting to the discussion of the results from the second phase of this study, the first point is related to the use of some of the key multimodal techniques in the examined podcast images. Next, how the visual representations (the images that accompany the audio) might portray culture and cultural diversity was examined. The results of the study, first and foremost, support the prevalent belief that teaching is a multimodal experience occurring through the combination of (spoken) language and various other forms of communication, including, but not limited to, gesture, gaze, and facial expression (Jewitt, 2008; Kress et al., 2005; Lim, 2020; Peng, 2019).

Kress et al. (2005) also indicate that modes are never isolated; they always interact with others in ensembles, or what Ledin and Machin (2020) refer to as a 'composition' that has an overarching unity, with the constituent components connected in various ways. Consequently, in any given lesson, multiple modes are typically utilized simultaneously, and it is presumed that the subject of English is not confined to language alone but exists across different modes and tasks beyond simply listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Kress et al., 2005).

A multimodal analysis of the sample podcast images revealed that multimedia content creators and materials developers often take advantage of the possibilities provided by different semiotic resources, such as visuals, colors, and audio, alongside text to deliver their materials. This observation extends to the active use of multimodal resources within the examined podcast series. Additionally, visual elements, especially images, were regularly and deliberately employed as a powerful tool to convey related cultural aspects. Thus, generally speaking, as noted by Lim (2020), the teaching and learning process transcends language alone.

Concluding implications and suggestions for further studies

As the prominent role and reflection of culture are undeniable in discourses as well as in the process of learning a second or foreign language, with the advent of digital technology, it is

immensely important and relevant to examine educational resources that are shared through different digital platforms, including but not limited to podcasts. By analyzing the representation of culture and cultural diversity in one of the most popular ELT podcast series, namely "6 Minute English", using Yuen (2011) framework of cultural representation, this study established that the "6 Minute English" podcast places greater emphasis on tangible cultural elements and well-known as well as unknown individuals, but it provides less focus on cultural Practices and Perspectives which are more abstract in nature. The importance placed on the tangible and objective dimensions of culture in educational materials, such as podcasts, may inform learners' understanding of the target culture; however, this may potentially come at the expense of deeper, more nuanced insights into cultural practices and perspectives. This focus can therefore be useful for familiarizing learners with the more visible aspects of a culture but may not sufficiently address the subtleties of how the people think, believe, interact, and interpret the world within that community or culture.

Furthermore, regarding the question of how the visuals accompanying the podcast episodes under study reflect culture and cultural diversity, it could be concluded that these images purposefully mirror cultural elements and serve as a clear reinforcement mechanism. To elaborate, the visual components, whether they involve images of people or specific colors, are utilized alongside the podcast content to highlight or support the audio content and potentially increase its impact.

The findings of this study underscore the critical importance of paying attention to the cultural aspect of language learning resources, particularly in more modern educational tools such as podcasts. The dominance of the objective and more tangible dimensions of culture helps educators and researchers become more cognizant of what kinds of elements the material developers tend to prioritize, a pattern that raises critical discourse concerns and prompts reflection on inclusivity in language learning materials. The research, therefore, underscores the importance of critically evaluating and designing educational resources that not only introduce learners to tangible cultural elements but also engage them with the underlying practices and perspectives that shape a culture. This more balanced representation of cultural categories is essential for developing more comprehensive and less biased language and cultural learning.

To build upon these findings, future studies could explore several issues. For instance, expanding the scope of the potential study to a wider range of ELT podcasts would help ascertain whether the patterns of cultural representation identified here are consistent across different series or unique to "6 Minute English". In addition, qualitative studies exploring learners' perceptions could provide deeper insights into how culture is represented and interpreted in textbooks as well as in digital resources, revealing the complexities and personal experiences that quantitative data alone cannot capture. Another fruitful line of research could be investigating how the nature of cultural representation in learning materials might affect key learner affective factors, such as motivation, engagement, and overall cultural awareness. By addressing these issues, future research can offer valuable guidance for materials development that fosters richer intercultural competence and more inclusive learning environments.

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Appendices

The theoretical framework adopted in the current study is based on the social semiotic approach, as proposed in the book Introduction to Multimodal Analysis by Ledin and Machin (2020):

> Pictures and Images - Representing Participants - Individuals and Groups - Frontal Perspective - Non-frontal Perspective - Angles - Distance - Actions in Images - Emotional Processes - Mental Processes - Modality Scales - Degrees of the Articulation of Detail - Degrees of the Articulation of the Background - Degrees of the Articulation of Depth - Degrees of Illumination- Articulation of Light and Shadow - The Meaning of Color in Visual Design - The Dimensions of Color - Brightness - Hue