Examensarbete I
What Culture?

Cultural representations in English as a foreign language textbooks

Författare: Mika Wilhelmson
Handledare: Marcia Markus
Examinator: Mats Tegmark
Termin: VT2015
Program: Ämneslärarprogrammet inriktning gymnasieskolan
Kurskod: EN2041
Poäng: 15

Vid Högskolan Dalarna har du möjlighet att publicera ditt examensarbete i fulltext i DiVA. Publiceringen sker Open Access, vilket innebär att arbetet blir fritt tillgängligt att läsa och ladda ned på nätet. Du ökar därmed spridningen och synligheten av ditt examensarbete.

Open Access är på väg att bli norm för att sprida vetenskaplig information på nätet. Högskolan Dalarna rekommenderar såväl forskare som studenter att publicera sina arbeten Open Access.

Jag/vi medger publicering i fulltext (fritt tillgänglig på nätet, Open Access):

Ja ☒
Nej ☐
# Table of Contents

Abstract.................................................................................................................................

1. Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 1
   1.1 Aim............................................................................................................................... 2

2. Background ......................................................................................................................... 2
   2.1 The Swedish curriculum and syllabus ........................................................................... 3
   2.2 Culture in foreign language education ......................................................................... 3
   2.3 English as an international language and the cultural content of language pedagogy ... 4
   2.4 Intercultural competence ............................................................................................ 5
   2.5 Textbooks ..................................................................................................................... 6

3. Methodology ....................................................................................................................... 7
   3.1 Design and selection criteria/strategies ....................................................................... 7
   3.2 Analytical method ......................................................................................................... 10

4. Results .................................................................................................................................. 12
   4.1 Geographical representation in the cultural content of EFL textbooks ....................... 12
   4.2 Varieties of cultural material in EFL textbooks ......................................................... 13
   4.3 Stereotyping and overgeneralizing of culture in EFL textbooks ................................. 14

5. Concluding discussion ....................................................................................................... 16

References .............................................................................................................................. 19
Abstract
Teaching the cultural aspect of foreign language education is a complex and sometimes difficult task, especially since English has become an international language used in different settings and contexts throughout the world. Building on the idea that the spread of the English language and its international status in the world has made English an important school subject to develop students’ cross-cultural and intercultural awareness, this paper has studied what research reveals about the influence this has had on cultural representations in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks. Findings from a systematic literature review that analyzed four different international studies on the topic are presented. The study showed that EFL textbooks often present stereotypical and overgeneralized representations of culture and that the cultural aspect of EFL education is not adequately addressed since focus tends to lean towards language proficiency. Results also indicated that though steps are made to include cultural representations from different international contexts, the target culture of countries where English is the first language remains dominant in EFL textbooks. The findings are discussed in correlation with the Swedish national curriculum and syllabus.

Keywords: EFL education, culture, cultural representations, textbooks, intercultural awareness
1. Introduction

Culture has been part of foreign language education for a long time; however, the increasing globalization of the world is affecting all aspects of society, including education and language teaching. In this paper, the term culture is used in a broad anthropological sense and culture is viewed as something that creates and is created in education (Giroux 1997 p.6-7). In the article “Invited colloquium: Foreign languages in an age of globalization”, Kramsch argues that the increasing globalization and multicultural nature of many societies is changing the nature of foreign language teaching. Kramsch argues that because of the increasing heterogeneity of nations, traditional concepts such as “native speakers” and “target culture” are becoming problematic (Kramsch 2013 p.2). Because of the English language’s status as an international language it has become increasingly more important in English as a Foreign Language teaching (EFL) to consider English as a global language which is spoken by people with diverse backgrounds all over the world.

Additionally, this internationalization of the language and globalization of the world is reflected in Swedish EFL teaching as well as the national curriculum where it is expressed that education should prepare students for “a society that will have closer cross-cultural and cross-border contacts” (Skolverket 2011a p.6). The syllabus for the English subject in Swedish upper secondary schools states that students should be “given the opportunity to develop knowledge of living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” as well as gain knowledge of “the spread of English and its position in the world” (Skolverket 2011b p.3). The content of the curriculum as well as the syllabus underline the importance of culture in language teaching as well as the importance of the English subject as a way to teach the fundamental values of the school and reach the overall goals of education in Sweden. However, there are issues that make teaching culture in a classroom environment problematic.

According to Tornberg, teaching culture in EFL classrooms is always problematic because teachers and textbook authors always risk adding to the notion of “the foreign culture” as well as presenting an over-generalised and stereotype representation of culture (Tornberg 2009 p.71). Byram has also noted that teachers often lack the preparation
needed to adequately teach the cultural aspects of language education themselves (Byram 2014 217-221). This would mean that teachers have to rely on textbooks and other teaching materials in order to teach the cultural aspect.

Moreover, studies from the Swedish National Agency of Education show that teaching materials indeed play a central role in teaching. What further adds to the issue of the cultural dimension of language teaching is that it is the teachers themselves that have the responsibility to ensure the quality of the teaching materials (Skolverket 2015-01-27). Because of the English language status as an international language, the importance of culture in language education and the central role textbooks have in the learning process, it is important to study what the research says about cultural representations in EFL-textbooks.

1.1 Aim

The aim of this thesis is to investigate and analyse what research says about cultural representations in EFL-textbooks in intercultural and cross-cultural terms. The thesis has a particular focus on upper secondary education in Sweden; however, since many textbooks have international authors it is also complemented by an international perspective. To achieve this aim, the study will centre on the following research questions:

- In terms of the international status of the English language, what geographical regions do the cultural representations in EFL-textbooks represent?
- What has research revealed about cultural representation in EFL-textbooks in terms of stereotyping and over-generalization?

2. Background

This section presents a background of the Swedish curriculum and syllabus as well as a background of the teaching of culture in foreign language education and the role of textbooks in EFL education. Additionally, central concepts such as English as an international language and intercultural competence are given a longer description.
2.1 The Swedish curriculum and syllabus
One of the aims of English as a foreign language education (EFL) in Swedish upper secondary school is that students should be “given the opportunity to develop knowledge of living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Skolverket 2011b p.1). The education should also encourage the students’ curiosity of culture. Moreover, the view on culture and what culture is actually being taught was changed in the curriculum from 2011 from “English-speaking countries” to “parts of the world where English is used” (Skolverket 2011b p.1). Because of the global use of English and the widespread practise of English in business and popular culture, this means that there has been a shift from traditional ideas of national target cultures to a more international viewpoint.

Thus, according to the national syllabus for the first year of upper-secondary school in Sweden, students should be able to “discuss […] some features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used, and also make […] comparisons with their own experiences and knowledge” (Skolverket 2011b p. 4). English language education in Sweden should thus teach the students to reflect on and compare “features” from different contexts. The “cultural features” referred to is meant entail everything from literature and art to the everyday life of people, as well as their values and expectations (Skolverket 2011c p.6)

2.2 Culture in foreign language education
The term culture is very complex and difficult to define. The definition found in the Cambridge dictionary reads “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time” (Cambridge Dictionaries Online 2015). As previously mentioned the term culture is used in a broad, anthropological sense and seen as a process, something that is constantly changing and evolving (Giroux 1997 p.6-7). Tornberg also mentions this view of culture within the field of culture studies; however, she points to the fact that historically, the nationalism of the 19th century brought the idea that one nation equalled one unified culture (Tornberg 2000 p.69).

Therefore, in traditional foreign language education in Sweden culture and aspects of it has often been taught as “a fulfilled fact” (Tornberg 2000 p. 283). That means that
culture is viewed as something that can be taught objectively and it also presupposes that culture is defined by nationality (Tornberg 2000 p.63). Similar points have been put forward by Kramsch (1991) when it comes to American language teaching. She writes that culture in American language teaching traditionally consists of “big C” and “little c” culture. Big C is described as works of art and literature, while little c is described as ”the culture of the four Fs: foods, fairs, folklore, and statistical facts” (Kramsch 1991 p. 218). Both Tornberg and Kramsch point out that this approach to language teaching is no longer justifiable and call for an approach that sees culture as something that is not distinguishable from the language and a conception of the culture as a process that is constantly changing and evolving rather than a constant series of facts (Tornberg 2000 p.283; Kramsch 1991 p.237).

2.3 English as an international language and the cultural content of language pedagogy

English has become a world language and as English has spread across the world, several different kinds of English have emerged. Kuchru has developed the concept of “Concentric Circles of English” (127) as a way of understanding how the English language has spread and is used around the world. Kuchru’s model consists of the Inner Circle, where English is the first language, for example Great Britain, The US and Canada. The Outer Circle countries such as India, Nigeria and Pakistan are countries where colonial history has made English an official language. Finally, there is the Expanding Circle, countries like China, Sweden, Japan, and Russia where English is used as a foreign language. English of different varieties is used within all these different circles as well as across borders (Kuchru 1989 p.127-128). Because of this, researchers have noted that a shift towards an international and transnational view of English is needed within language pedagogy as well. One such researcher, McKay (2003) argues that a comprehensive teaching of English as an international language (EIL) has to be built on theory of language learning that is complex enough to adequately account for the diversity of the English language.

Consequently, McKay maintains that a change must be made within language pedagogy and that traditional ideas of English language teaching (ELT) have to be challenged. Among these ideas are the ideas that EFL learners should aspire to “nativelike
competence” (18) and that cultures of native English speakers should make up the cultural content of English education. Instead, McKay puts forward three assumptions on which EIL pedagogy should be based, and one of them is the recognition that English has become so international that it does not belong to any culture and that the teaching of it must regard this (McKay 2003 p. 3-18). This way of seeing culture has been observed in EFL education internationally by researchers (e.g. Risager 2007; Byram 2014; Baker 2014). Similar to McKay, Risager (2007) points out that it is important to view English as a language that will be used throughout the world in an international context (Risager 2007 p.159).

2.4 Intercultural competence

The European Council has developed The Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) and according to the Swedish National Agency of Education it is important for everyone who works with language education in Sweden since the national syllabus relates directly to the framework (Skolverket 2011c p.1). The CEFR is meant to improve communications within Europe and concerns the practices of language teaching and learning (European Council 2009 p.4). The framework states that knowledge of the world, sociocultural knowledge as well as intercultural awareness are all competences that the learner needs in order to communicate with others (European Council 2009 p. 101-104). The CEFR’s definition of intercultural awareness is in short the understanding of how one’s own culture of origin and the culture of the target community are both similar and different, and the understanding that cultural diversity exists in both cultures. Intercultural awareness also includes an understanding of other cultures that make up a broader context, as well as knowledge of how different cultures may be perceived from the others’ perspective, often in forms of national stereotypes (European Council 2009 p.103).

Thus, intercultural awareness ought to be part of any language education and extensive research on intercultural competence and language learning has been conducted. In an article written by Byram and Masuhara (2013), they argue that intercultural competence should be an important focus in language teaching. The authors state that intercultural language teaching needs to provide an education that considers diverse and dynamic cultures on all levels from transnational to local. They write that targeting intercultural
competences such as knowledge and awareness of different cultures and how these might be perceived enables language teachers to “treat language and culture as inseparable” (Byram & Masuhara 2013 p.150).

Moreover, by focusing on these intercultural competences students will gain knowledge and understanding of themselves as well as others which will help them navigate the globalized, transcultural society in which they live. However, teaching intercultural competence is not without issues, as shown by Baker (2014).

Baker notes that even though the importance for intercultural awareness has been widely acknowledged in teaching; it is still not a part of the teacher’s main priorities and notes that this could be a result of the pressure and stressful work many language teachers face (Baker 2014 p.134). In Sweden, Byram depicts another reality that could also be an explanation to why intercultural competence is not part of the teacher’s main priorities. According to Byram, the syllabus in Sweden contradicts other national and international educational aims, the teachers do not have the support or preparation needed to teach the cultural dimension of language education and the national tests do not assess intercultural understanding, which leads to a focus on language proficiency and an inadequate attention to the cultural aspect (Byram 2014 p.217-221).

Additionally, to further add to the problematic aspects of intercultural competence in language teaching, research has shown that textbooks often present a rather limited possibility to teach intercultural competence (Liddicoat & Scarino 2013 p.91). However, the critical and political aspect of intercultural competence is important to consider. A crucial aspect of the intercultural part of language teaching and representations of culture observed by Baker is that it is important for the teacher to be critical towards how culture is represented and to ask the same of the students so they can have an opportunity to consider why culture is represented in a certain way (Baker 2014 p.89).

2.5 Textbooks
Traditionally, textbooks have had a lot of influence in education (Liddicoat & Scarino 2013; Ammert 2011; Cortazzi & Jin 1999). Textbooks are, as Cortazzi and Jin (1999) point out, often expected to cover everything even though they are often
just supposed to be used as a resource. They write that the textbook can have several important functions in the classroom as it can function both as a teacher and a trainer to the students and as such is a valuable resource. Though, as the authors also point out, the textbook cannot be expected to cover everything and extra material often needs to be used. Cortazzi and Jin have outlined three different kinds of cultural material in textbooks:

- target culture, information about cultures in countries where English is the first language,
- source culture, information about the learner’s own culture
- International culture, a variety of cultural representations from everywhere in the world where English is spoken (Cortazzi & Jin 1999 p.199-208)

Despite the variety of cultural representations in textbooks, research (e.g. McKay 2000; Liddicoat & Scarino 2013; Cortazzi & Jin 1999) has shown that the possibility of using textbooks as a way to develop the student’s intercultural competence is rather limited. In Sweden, it is up to the teachers to determine the quality of the textbooks and other teaching materials they use in their profession. Therefore, knowledge about teaching materials ought to be a crucial part of the teacher training programs (Skolverket 2015-01-27).

3. Methodology

This section presents the chosen method of the collection of data as well as the method of analysis. Additionally, the selection criteria and strategies as well as the design of the study are presented.

3.1 Design and selection criteria/strategies

The design of this study is a systematic literature review. A literature review serves several purposes and has many advantages. It is useful because it allows for an in-depth reading of relevant research, contributes to a broader understanding of current issues within the field and could also serve as the base of an empirical study. By conducting a systematic literature review, a selection of research is chosen rather than it being a presentation of all the current research within a particular field. This allows the researcher
to write the literature review more quickly and also focus on the research that has the most relevance to the study. However, there are some drawbacks to using this method as well. Because a selection has to be made, there is a risk that important studies are missed. It is therefore very important that a list of selection criteria is used to make sure that the literature is as relevant to the study as possible (Murray & Beglar 2009 p.158-160).

This thesis is a systematic literature review and due to the scope of the thesis, the material that is to be reviewed has to be limited. The articles have to be directly relevant to the purpose of the study and the focus of the study questions. Therefore the international research chosen has been limited to studies that concerns cultural representations in EFL textbooks for secondary school. In addition, it is important that the review covers the current research on how the English language status as an international language has influenced cultural representations in textbooks (Murray and Beglar 2009 p.159). Consequently, the international articles chosen for the review are studies conducted within the last five years. There is no available Swedish research on this particular topic except for other student essays, and for that reason no Swedish study is included in the review. Because of the international status of the English language and the international influences on Swedish education from e.g. the CEFR, the findings in this literature review of international articles is still of relevance in a Swedish context. In order to further maintain a focus on Swedish EFL education, the results of the analysis will be compared with the content of the Swedish steering documents.

The search engines that were used to collect the material were Summon, which is Dalarna University Library’s search engine, and Google Scholar. For the international studies, the key terms of the search were “Cultural representations”, “EFL education/teaching”, “textbooks”, “teaching material” and “upper secondary school”/”high school”. To limit the hits on each search, the search has been made within the range of the last five years. In the Swedish search, the key search terms were “läroböcker”, “läromedel”, “kultur”, “engelska”, “språkundervisning” and “gymnasieskola”. In some searches, an asterisk has been used to generate more hits. A more detailed presentation of the search is presented on the following page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Database/searchengine</th>
<th>Searchwords</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
<th>Hits</th>
<th>Read titles</th>
<th>Read abstracts</th>
<th>Included in study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Google Scholar</td>
<td>&quot;cultural representations&quot; &quot;textbooks&quot; &quot;EFL&quot;</td>
<td>2010-2015</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summon</td>
<td>&quot;cultural representations&quot; &quot;textbooks&quot; &quot;EFL&quot;</td>
<td>2010-2015 Peer reviewed</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Scholar</td>
<td>“culture*” &quot;textbooks&quot; &quot;ELT&quot; “upper secondary school”/&quot;High school&quot; “representation”</td>
<td>2010-2015</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summon</td>
<td>“culture” “textbook*” “ELT” “upper secondary school”/&quot;High school&quot; “representation”</td>
<td>2010-2015 Peer reviewed</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summon</td>
<td>“Culture” “English education” “Sweden” “textbook”</td>
<td>2010-2015</td>
<td>471</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summon</td>
<td>“kultur” “engelska”</td>
<td>Dissertations Articles</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summon</td>
<td>“kultur” “språkundervisning”</td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google scholar</td>
<td>“läromedelsanalys” “engelska”</td>
<td></td>
<td>297</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libris</td>
<td>“interkulturell” “Engelska”</td>
<td></td>
<td>84</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sum:** 4
3.2 Analytical method

In order to find out what the research says about cultural representations in EFL textbooks and how that reflects the English language status as an international language and relates to the learner’s intercultural competence, the analysis has been divided into three parts. The first two parts of the analysis aims to answer the first research question and investigate what the research says about the geographical origin of the cultural content in EFL-textbooks. The first part of the analysis is based on Kachru’s model of the Concentric Circles of English in order to establish to what extent cultures from around the world where English is used is represented in EFL textbooks. The second part of the analysis is based on Cortazzi and Jin’s outline of the different kinds of cultural material in textbooks and analyses what the research shows regarding the use of source-, target- and international culture in EFL textbooks. The third part of the analysis aims to answer the second research question; what the research reveals about overgeneralization and stereotyping in EFL textbooks.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weninger &amp; Kiss (2014) “Culture in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Textbooks: A Semiotic Approach” TESOL QUARTERLY Vol. 47, No. 4</td>
<td>Problematize quantitative analysis of cultural content in EFL textbooks</td>
<td>A qualitative approach grounded in semiotic theory</td>
<td>Two textbooks used in Hungarian secondary EFL education</td>
<td>Textbooks focus mainly on linguistic competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munandar and Ulwiyah (2012) “Intercultural Approaches to the Cultural Content of Indonesia’s High School ELT Textbooks” Cross-Cultural Communication Vol. 8, No. 5</td>
<td>Study how the cultural content in ELT textbooks makes the learner aware of source-, target- and international culture</td>
<td>A mixed use quantitative and qualitative methods</td>
<td>Two EFL textbooks used in Indonesian high schools</td>
<td>Extensive use of source culture material promotes intercultural awareness and cultural representations tend to be overgeneralized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vettorel (2010) “EIL / ELF and Representation of Culture in Textbooks: Only Food, Fairs, Folklore and Facts?” Linguistic Insights</td>
<td>Study representations of culture in EFL teaching materials</td>
<td>A mix of quantitative and qualitative methods</td>
<td>Sixteen EFL textbooks for secondary and upper secondary education used in international and Italian contexts</td>
<td>A move towards a focus on an EIL perspective in ELT education is noticed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shin, Eslami &amp; Chen (2011)“Presentation of local and international culture in current international English-language teaching textbooks” Language, Culture and Curriculum Vol. 24, No. 3</td>
<td>Study how cultural representations in ELT textbooks relate to EIL</td>
<td>A mix of quantitative and qualitative methods</td>
<td>Seven series of international ELT textbooks used for EFL and ESL education</td>
<td>A domination of inner-circle cultural content, most of the cultural content remains knowledge oriented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Results

The results of the analysis are presented in three parts. The first part focuses on what the research says about the textbook’s cultural content in terms of Kachru’s three circles, the second part on what the research says about the use of target, source and international target culture in textbooks. Finally, the last section of the results presents what the research shows regarding overgeneralization and stereotyping of culture in EFL textbooks.

4.1 Geographical representation in the cultural content of EFL textbooks

Research has shown that because of the English language status as lingua franca, the origin of the cultural content in EFL education ought to include all the regions in the world where English is used and since English has become a global language, that includes most of the world (e.g. Byram 2014; McKay 2003; Risager 2007). Kachru’s model of the concentric circle of English is often used to describe the spread of English around the world and to prove that no culture can claim English as “their” language anymore. In the study “Presentation of Local and International Culture in Current International English-language Teaching Textbooks”, the authors Shin, Eslami and Chen elaborate on this further and claim that textbook writers need to acknowledge that different varieties of English and their related cultures should be included in ELT textbooks (Shin et al 2011 p. 255). They have studied seven series of international ELT textbooks used for ESL/EFL on a lower intermediate to higher intermediate level and found that this is unfortunately not always the case. According to the authors, the cultural content of all the textbooks included in the series mainly originated from inner-circle countries.

However, the authors do conclude that in general, it is possible to see that attempts are being made “to both localise and globalise the texts” (Shin et al 2011 p.262). Similar findings have been made by Vettorel in her study (2010) where she studied 16 ELT textbooks constructed for both Italian and international contexts. Vettorel found that while most textbooks use inner-circle countries as a starting point, they then move on to feature elements of cultures from all around the world (Vettorel 2010 p. 179).

In contrast, Munandar and Ulwiayh (2012) conducted a study on the cultural content of two EFL textbooks used in Indonesian High-school education and the results of their analysis differ somewhat from the other studies included in this paper. Their results
show that the majority of the cultural content came from expanding-circle countries, most of which originated from Indonesia or countries in the south Asian region (Munandar & Ulwiyah 2012 p.69).

Despite the differences in the origins of the cultural content found in the EFL-textbooks in terms of Kachru’s model, all four articles point toward a similar conclusion as the one McKay presented in 2003. This conclusion is that the overrepresentation of inner-circle countries’ culture should be challenged since English has become an international language (McKay 2003 p.3). Munandar and Uliwiyah also points out that it is important to remember that varieties of English and cultures also exist within the inner-circle countries (Munandar & Uliwiyah 2012 p. 72).

The study conducted by Weininger and Kiss (2013) has a different focus than the other studies included in this paper, since they do not focus on the cultural content of the textbooks in terms of what origin they have but rather what meaning the textbooks offer in terms of the student’s cultural understanding. Weininger and Kiss criticise other research on the cultural content in textbooks because they argue that the process of making cultural meanings is very complex and that the cultural content needs to be examined for its potential for meaning making rather than seeing it as fixed representation. Despite the difference in approach however, Weininger and Kiss still agree with the other researchers in that they think cultural representations from around the world is important and should be included in EFL textbooks (Weininger & Kiss 2013 p.695-710).

4.2 Varieties of cultural material in EFL textbooks

The model of different kinds of cultural material outlined by Cortazzi and Jin (1999) provides perspective on cultural representations in textbooks that differs slightly from Kachru’s model. They write about culture in terms of source, target and international culture. Source culture is the learner’s own culture (C1) and according to McKay, including source cultural material in textbooks will help develop the student’s ability to connect with the material (McKay 2003 p.10).

Furthermore, similar ideas are presented by Munandar and Ulwiayh in their study of EFL textbooks used in Indonesian high schools. They found that a majority of the cultural content of the textbooks were C1 material and concluded that this would aid the
student’s ability to adapt the language to their own context. They also argue that a focus on source culture is a helpful way to get students to reflect over their own cultures (Munandar & Ulwiayh 2012 p.69-72). Correspondingly, Vettorel found in her study that the tasks in the textbooks that required reflection over cultural elements were mainly connected to the source cultural content although, according to Vettorel, there was a dominance of target culture material. She did notice however, a beginning of a development that challenges the dominance of the native speaker ideal as more elements of source and international target culture are included in the EFL textbooks. Vettorel writes that this could be part of a bigger shift towards a focus on intercultural education (Vettorel 2010 p. 177-179).

As noted above, Byram and Masuhara (2013) claims that an intercultural approach to language teaching would require representations of all kinds of culture, from local to global (Byram & Masuhara 2013 p. 150). Shin, Eslami and Chen agrees with Byram and Masuhara’s statement that a plurality of cultures is needed in textbooks and yet what they found in their study was that even though the textbooks had cultural elements from different parts of the world, target culture material was still dominating. According to the authors, this is troubling because of the fact that most people use English in an international context and yet native speaker competence remains more highly valued (Shin et al. 2001 p. 261-266). Weininger and Kiss share the other researchers’ view that it is important to make it visible that some cultures still dominate when it comes to cultural representation in textbooks in international foreign language teaching and yet they argue that a wider view of culture is not enough. The activities and tasks in the textbook have to aid the students’ ability to reflect over the cultural content of the textbooks (Weininger & Kiss 2013 p.695-710). This will be further analysed in the next section, as the focus will be on what the research reveals regarding overgeneralization and stereotyping of the cultural content in EFL textbooks.

4.3 Stereotyping and overgeneralizing of culture in EFL textbooks
Tornberg (2009) explains that one of the problematic aspects of teaching culture in a foreign language classroom is that the teacher and teaching materials risk presenting an overgeneralized and stereotype representation of various cultures (Tornberg 2009 p. 71).
This problematic aspect of foreign language teaching is acknowledged in several of the studies included in this paper as well, one such study is Munandar and Ulwiyiah’s (2012) study of Indonesian High School EFL textbooks.

In their study, Munandar and Ulwiyiah reached the same conclusion as Tornberg when it came to the representation of target culture. They found that target culture was often overgeneralised in the textbooks they studied. They based their conclusion on the fact that expressions such as “in America”, “British people” or “Australians” were used often in target culture representations. They also concluded that textbooks ought to enable the student’s ability to challenge stereotypes by making them aware of why people tend to stereotype (Munandar & Ulwiyiah 2012 p.69-72). This argument is similar to Baker’s assessment that it is important that the students are given the opportunity to reflect on why representations of culture are presented the way they are (Baker 2014 p.89).

In addition, similar findings have been made by the other researchers as well. Vettorel for example found that the traditional themes of the cultural content of EFL textbooks such as the aforementioned “four F’s” (foods, fair, folklore and statistical facts) (Kramsch 1991 p. 218) were often presented in a stereotypical way. Vettorel does however point out that there were some parts of the textbook that presented the students with more challenging tasks that required further reflection on why culture is presented in a certain way (Vettorel 2010 p.171).

Furthermore, Weninger and Kiss found that in one of the Hungarian textbooks, the cultural representations consisted of caricatures in order to make denotation easier for the students. They present an example of how an image of a Scottish man dressed in traditional clothing represents “British” while a Hungarian man wearing traditional csiskós (horseman) clothing represents “Hungarian”. Weninger and Kiss argued that cultural representations such as these and a great deal of the other cultural content of the textbooks was focused on denotation and rarely gave the students an opportunity to reflect on why culture was represented in a certain way (Weninger & Kiss 2013 p.70-710). Chin, Eslami and Chen reached a similar conclusion in their study, when they looked at whether the cultural presentations in the textbook went beyond a simple knowledge level of cultural facts and gave the students an opportunity to develop intercultural competence by presenting a deeper, more communicative oriented level in the presentations of culture.
authors found that most of the textbooks in their study, especially those intended for lower-levels of ELT, only or mostly presented culture on a surface level that did not require the students to reflect or develop intercultural awareness (Chin et al 2011 p. 259-264).

5. Concluding discussion

This paper has analysed four different studies of cultural representations in EFL textbooks in order to see what the research shows about what influence the spread of the English language and its status as an international language has had on how culture is represented in cross-cultural and intercultural terms. The findings presented in the first two parts of the results section indicate that some attempts are made to create textbooks that promote intercultural awareness. The research shows that to some extent, textbooks presents a diverse and dynamic view on cultures from all around the world which can stimulate intercultural awareness as described by Byram and Masuhara (Byram & Masuhara 2012 p.150). However, the results also show that there still is a long way to go. Except for the study conducted by Munandar and Ulwiyah, the research suggests that the cultural representations of the target culture of inner-circle countries remains dominant in EFL-textbooks. Consequently, this also indicates that the change from a traditional ELT pedagogy to one that could account for the diversity of English as a global language that McKay recommends has not yet been fully made (McKay 2003 p.10).

The findings presented in the last part of the results section show that overgeneralizations and stereotype representations of culture in EFL textbooks is a problematic aspect of foreign language teaching. The results of the studies show that target culture references often are overgeneralized and stereotype representations of culture. The examples brought up by Munandar and Ulwiyah (2012) and Weininger and Kiss (2013) indicate that this could be because of a focus on denotation in textbooks (Weninger & Kiss 2013 p.707; Munandar & Ulwiyiah 2012 p.69). Their studies point toward a similar conclusion to that of Tornberg (2009) and Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) namely that in order to make it easier for students to make connections between different countries and cultural events, textbook authors risk representing cultures in an overgeneralized and stereotypical manner (Tornberg 2009 p.71; Liddicoat & Scarino 2013 p.91).
Though the other studies included in the analysis support the claim that culture often is presented in a way that is not complex enough to adequately represent reality, Vettorel’s as well as Chin, Eslami and Chen’s studies show that there are some textbooks, particularly ones that are used in higher levels of English teaching, that include tasks and activities that require students to reflect on cultural representations (Vettorel 2010 p.171; Chen et al 2011 p.261). This shows that although there is still work to do, steps are being made to make available textbooks that promote students’ intercultural awareness.

Additionally, in relation to the Swedish curriculum, the results of this study might be said to indicate that there are both differences and similarities in teaching culture between the findings in the articles and Swedish language teaching. As previously mentioned, Byram claimed that the Swedish curriculum focused too heavily on language proficiency in comparison to the cultural aspect of language teaching (Byram 2014 p. 219-222). As noted earlier, this is very similar to the critique from some of the authors in this study (e.g. Chen et al 2011 p.264). The authors of the studies included in this thesis, most notably Munandar and Ulwiyah, concluded that a local context is an important and effective way of developing students’ intercultural awareness, as it prompts them to reflect over culture/cultures that they are familiar with. Consequently, this requires a focus on source culture material in textbooks (Munandar & Ulwiah 2012 p. 71). In the Swedish national curriculum however, the focus on reflection seems to be directed at the international target culture, as students should be able to discuss “features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Skolverket 2011). This difference in focus is interesting to note. However, it is not possible to make any further conclusions without additional research.

The results of this thesis provide an interesting starting point for further research on cultural representations in EFL textbooks. However, there were some limitations to the study that must be noted. Because of the length and scope of the thesis and since a systematic literature review was used rather than a more comprehensive literature review, interesting and important research on the area might have been omitted. The studies were chosen from predetermined criteria, and therefore studies that may have been interesting had to be disregarded for logistical reasons. Because of the large number of hits generated by some searches, many studies were disregarded based on the title of the work, and
that might also mean that studies that could have provided valuable information for the thesis were overlooked. A few studies were also overlooked because they were unavailable online and ordering a printed version from overseas would have taken too much time.

The most problematic limitation to the study is that no Swedish studies beyond student essays were found. Since student essays cannot be considered as reliable enough to use because in a literature review such as this one, this meant that the Swedish perspective in the study had to be only the Swedish curriculum. A more comprehensive analysis of cultural representations in Swedish EFL textbooks would definitely be useful since it would provide an opportunity to compare the Swedish context of EFL teaching to the international one.
References


Byram, M (2014) Twenty-five years on – from cultural studies to intercultural citizenship Language, Culture and Curriculum vol27 issue 3, 209-225


Kachru, B. B World Englishes and Applied Linguistics Studies in the Linguistic Sciences Volume 19, Number 1, 1989


Skolverket (2011c) Om ämnet Engelska Stockholm: Skolverket. Retrieved from skolverket.se


Tornberg, U (2009) Språkdidaktik. Malmö


Weninger, C & Kiss, T (2013) Culture in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Textbooks: A Semiotic Approach. TESOL QUARTERLY Vol. 47, No. 4