



CULTURAL TRANSMISSION THROUGH TEACHING TURKISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSE BOOKS

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ABSTRACT

Communication in foreign language teaching is gaining more importance in today's world. Language students find that learning the vocabulary and grammatical structures of a particular language is not enough to gain proficiency in the language. The close relationship between language and culture reveals the fact that it is impossible to master a language without learning its culture. Therefore, the course books used for teaching a foreign language must improve students' communication skills by raising their cultural awareness.

In this study, culture transfer through course books is analyzed and evaluated within the context of teaching Turkish to foreigners. The *Yeni Hitit Yabancılar için Türkçe* series, the course books used in the Turkish Studies Department at Jagiellonian University, are evaluated according to the following cultural transfer criteria: a) subject area, (b) type of text and (c) visuality.

The evaluation of the *Yeni Hitit Yabancılar için Türkçe* course book series from the perspective of cultural transmission has revealed that they contain elements that present Turkish culture to students with its different aspects and succeed in transmitting the Turkish culture to students for whom they are intended. Course books that promote communicative and intercultural competence should be chosen to teach Turkish as a foreign language at Polish universities.

Key Words: Cultural Transmission, Course Books, Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language.

TÜRKÇENİN YABANCI DİL OLARAK ÖĞRETİMİ DERS KİTAPLARINDA KÜLTÜR AKTARIMI

ÖZET

Günümüzde yabancı dil öğretiminde iletişimin önemi gittikçe artmaktadır. Dil öğrenenler için sadece o dilin kelime ve dilbilgisi yapılarını öğrenmek dil yeterliliği açısından yeterli değildir. Dil ve kültür arasındaki yakın ilişki, bir dile o dilin kültürünü öğrenmeden hâkim olunamayacağı gerçeğini ortaya koymaktadır. Bundan dolayı, yabancı dil öğretimi için kullanılan ders kitapları da kültürel farkındalığı artırarak iletişim becerilerini geliştirmesi beklenmektedir.

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Bu çalışmada, yabancılara Türkçe öğretimi bağlamında ders kitaplarında kültür aktarımı Jagellon Üniversitesi Türkoloji Bölümünde kullanılan *Yabancılar için Türkçe Yeni Hitit* serisi kitapları (a) konu alanı, (b) metin türü ve (c) görsellik kültür aktarım ölçütleri esas alınarak değerlendirilmiştir.

Yabancılar için Türkçe Yeni Hitit serisi ders kitapları kültür aktarımı açısından incelendiğinde, içeriğinde hedef kültür olan Türk kültürünün öğrencilere farklı yönleriyle sunulduğu birçok öge içerdiği ve bu şekilde Türkçe öğretmeyi hedeflediği öğrenci kitlesine Türk kültürünü aktarmada başarı sağlayabilecek nitelikte olduğu görülmüştür. Polonya üniversitelerinde Türkçeyi yabancı dil olarak öğretirken iletişimsel ve kültürlerarası dil yeterliliğini artıran ders kitaplarının seçilmesi gereklidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kültür aktarımı, Ders Kitapları, Türkçenin Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğretimi

Introduction

The concept of culture, often mentioned in many distinct fields, has lately drawn much attention in the field of foreign language teaching. The term *culture* has various definitions in literature. Each definition looks at it from a different perspective. The term culture contains beliefs, ideas, values, and knowledge. Culture also shows the life style of the target community (Brown, 1994).

Since culture and language cannot be separated, culture must be taught while teaching a target language. Culture in foreign language today is undoubtedly much more than teaching the great works of literature. It has made inroads into the fields of applied linguistics and foreign language education. Social values, attitudes, and cultural elements are integrated with the communicative approach to enhance the effectiveness of foreign language acquisition. Recent studies focus on the seamless relationship between foreign language teaching and target culture teaching, especially over the last decade with the writings of scholars such as Byram (1989) and Kramsch (1993).

If languages are taught without their cultures, students remain strangers who are not familiar with the target languages. In language courses, the cultural elements of the target language should be taught carefully. Ellis (1985) states that students who are interested in the social and cultural life of the native country can learn a foreign language better than other students. Therefore, such students should be given support, which will enable them to acquire the necessary cultural knowledge. Jiang (2000) implies that it is impossible to teach the target language without teaching the target culture. Students will be exposed to an empty frame of language if they do not learn the cultural aspects of the target country. Teaching culture in foreign language classrooms has a crucial role in the course. It is a well-known fact that language teaching and culture are bound and, during international communications, students require social and cultural awareness.

In foreign language teaching, cultural transmission most commonly occurs through course books. Teachers, newspapers, television, the Internet, literature, movies, and other auxiliary resources also are essential mediums of cultural transmission. According to Haley and Austin (2004), the course books utilized in foreign language teaching should contain the culture of the target language in an appropriate manner, be unbiased towards the culture, and provide original texts regarding the culture.

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International Periodical For the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 7/3, Summer, 2012

As a Turkish language instructor who is aware of the significance of cultural transmission in foreign language teaching, I will evaluate the series of the *Yeni Hitit* course books (henceforth referred to as *Yeni Hitit 1*, *Yeni Hitit 2*, and *Yeni Hitit 3*) revised in 2009 and used in teaching Turkish at Turkology Department of Jagiellonian University during 2010-2011 academic year. I will assess them in terms of cultural transmission according to three criteria: a) subject area, (b) type of text and (c) visuality. I have prepared this study in order to focus on the significance of cultural transmission since it is a new subject in the field of teaching Turkish for foreigners.

A number of studies have evaluated the foreign language teaching coursebooks. However, none of these studies is directly related to the *Yeni Hitit Yabancılar için Türkçe* series prepared to teach Turkish as a foreign language. Some of these studies include:

- An unpublished mater's thesis "*Hitit ders kitapları örneğinde yabancı dil olarak Türkçe öğretiminde kültür aktarımı sürecine çözümleyici ve değerlendirici bir bakış*" by Ülker (2007).
- An unpublished mater's thesis "*Textbook evaluation in foreign language teaching: Time for English, grade 4 teachers' and students' views*" by Arıkan (2008).
- A study "*Turkish Textbooks Dialogues and Comparable Authentic Conversations*" by Yağız (2009).

Course Books and Culture

Course books are an integral part of language learning in the classrooms. Although there are presently many alternative instructional materials, course books are still very relevant in ascertaining the content, methods and approaches, educational philosophy, linguistic, and cultural information in the classrooms. Hence, it is the intent of this paper to examine the cultural elements in the Turkish language course books used in the Turkish Studies Department at Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland.

The history of teaching Turkish in Poland dates back to 1919, the department of Oriental Philology was established at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. However, although Turkish studies in Poland have a long tradition, no one has yet analyzed the Turkish language course books in Poland. Turkish studies departments have focused more on literature, history, Turkic languages, rather than on teaching Turkish as a foreign language studies. Teaching Turkish as a foreign language used to be based on traditional methods with traditional materials. In recent years, some attempts to implement new methods such as the communicative language teaching method have been integrated into foreign language teaching. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and European Language Portfolio (ELP) have been developed as a reference for language learning, teaching, and assessment by the Council of Europe. Thus in order to meet the increasing demands of learners and to teach Turkish more effectively these newly developed references should be analyzed and integrated into Turkish language teaching.

One of the most common problems teachers face in teaching the Turkish language to foreigners is the shortage of the instructional materials. There are serious limitations in the variety, richness, and volume of resources available to Turkish language learners. The course books are not satisfactory for the students. Most of the students expressed their desire for the course books to help them gain communicative competency and develop their speaking and listening skills.

A discussion on course books is inevitable in light of the arguments advocating the integration of culture in foreign language education. The significance of course books are seen in the many roles that course books play in facilitating foreign language teaching and foreign language learning in the classroom. According to Cortazzi and Jin (1999), the textbook can be a

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teacher, a map, a resource, a trainer, an authority, a de-skinner and an ideology. Hence, the course book can be a major source of cultural elements and can provide linguistic and topical content that necessarily reflect the ideology inherent in the foreign language context of a particular circle.

Course books across the world have different cultural orientations. They can be based on (a) the source culture, (b) the target culture, or (c) on international target cultures. Source cultures refer to the learners' own culture. The target culture is the culture in which the target language is used as a first language while the international target cultures are the various cultures in the foreign language context (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). This categorization will assist in describing the cultural orientation of the course books in this study.

Criteria for the Evaluation of Cultural Transmission

In this study, the concept of cultural transmission in the *Yeni Hitit* course books will be examined according to the following criteria: (a) subject area, (b) type of text and (c) visuality. In the examination, six questions will be considered (Byram & Risager, 1999; Haley & Austin, 2004; Gilmor, 2004; Guariento & Morley, 2001).

When considering subject area, the researcher first asks if the subjects in the book are selected from the fundamental real-life experience areas. Linguists have determined that the following fundamental real-life experience areas are common to all cultures: a) daily life and routines, b) shopping, food and beverages, c) youth culture, fashion, music, d) school and education, e) tourism and travel, f) business life, unemployment, and g) social traditions (Byram & Risager, 1999; Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993, p. 16).

Next, four questions are asked concerning the type of text. First, to what extent are authentic texts included in the course book? Authentic texts are texts that narrate real life as is. The more authentic texts the course books include, the more successful cultural transmission becomes. In elementary course books, authentic texts are generally given in simplified versions through changed forms (Guariento & Morley, 2001).

Second, how is cultural transmission possible through authentic texts. Authentic texts teach students how real language is used and give them the feeling that they are communicating with a native speaker. Authentic texts should be chosen according to the following criteria: a) students should be familiar with the subject matter, b) the length of the reading text should not daunt elementary level students, c) the language level should be a little higher than the student's level, and d) the text should contain many hints for the ease of comprehension (Haley & Austin, 2004, p. 159).

Third, to what extent are fictive texts included? Fictive texts are included in course books mostly to teach grammar rules.

Fourth, to what extent do the texts in the course book reflect the source culture, the target culture, or both? Texts should reflect both the source and the target cultures. Questions regarding cultural comparisons especially fuel students' attentiveness.

Finally, the sixth question concerns the visuality of the course books. Do the pictures, drawings, photos, and caricatures in the book support the texts in terms of culture? For the sake of true cultural transmission via course books, the illustrations used should take into consideration factors like cultural structure, sociocultural environment, and lifestyle pertaining to the target audience. Needless to say, universal values should not be overlooked either.

The Evaluation of Cultural Transmission in the *Yeni Hitit* Course Book Series

Subject Area

Yeni Hitit 1. The majority of the subjects in *Yeni Hitit 1* are selected from the fundamental real-life experience areas. Subjects such as daily life, close surroundings, family, relatives, shopping, eating, bon appétit, a healthy life, sports activities, holiday, and travelling are the subject areas in the units of the book. These subjects exist in every culture but have different cultural peculiarities.

Throughout the book, the units are named with nouns, questions, or sentences. The grammatical structures of these unit titles correspond to the grammar subject covered in the unit. For example:

“*Ne yapıyorsunuz?*” Present continuous tense (p. 20).

“*Ailem ve arkadaşlarım.*” Possessives (p. 32).

“*Ne yiyelim?*” Imperative and optative moods (p. 56).

“*Ne zaman ne oldu?*” Past tense (p. 44).

“*Neler olacak?*” Future tense (p. 84).

“*Rivayet odur ki.*” Past perfect tense (p. 92).

Thus, *Yeni Hitit 1* contributes to cultural transmission in terms of subject area.

Yeni Hitit 2. In *Yeni Hitit 2*, the subject areas are jobs, unemployment, job applications, sports, fashion, cinema, national holidays, and festivals. The texts and exercises are presented mostly on the basis of the grammatical structure intended to be taught in the units. Again, the majority of the units have titles that correspond with the grammar subject and grammatical structure taught in the unit:

“*Yeni bir iş bulmalıyım.*” Necessitative mood (p. 6).

“*Bir dilek tu:t.*” Subjunctive mood (p. 30).

“*Sahnedeki neler oluyor.*” Reciprocal voice (p. 74).

“*İcat edildi ama.*” Causative and passive voices (p. 86).

Therefore, the *Yeni Hitit 2* course book is sufficient for enabling cultural transmission.

Yeni Hitit 3. Subjects such as literary works from the world of literature, poetry, youth, old age, as long as love exists, compulsions, phobias, obsessions, world cuisines, world dances, clothes, language and communication, body language, non-verbal communication are covered in *Yeni Hitit 3*. These subjects might attract the attention of anyone involved in foreign language courses and cultural transmission and could be included in fundamental real-life experience areas.

Again, the titles of the majority of the units correspond with the grammar subject of the units and include the grammatical structure to be taught:

“*Okur yazar mısınız?*” Compound tense – imperfect (p. 6).

“*Eyvah yaşıyorum!*” Gerunds, -dik/-ecek/ possessive suffixes (p. 26).

“*Takmayın kafanıza*” Gerunds, -cesine, -(y)miş (p. 38).

The *Yeni Hitit* course book series are prepared in line with the fundamental real-life experience areas determined by the Council of Europe. The concern of teaching grammar is

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relatively less compared to *Yeni Hitit 1* and *Yeni Hitit 2* and the original texts are enriched with prose, poetry, dialogs, and theater scripts.

Type of text

Yeni Hitit 1. The existing authentic texts in *Yeni Hitit 1* are generally literary texts. For example, “*TV Yayın akış*” (p. 31), “*Mutfak kültürleri ve sağlığımız*,” Çoşkun Aral (p. 64), “*Ah Tamara*” (p. 95), “*Gazete ilanları*” (p. 102), and “*Ece Temelkuran’la röportaj*” (p. 142) However, in addition to these, there are also functional texts such as maps, airport billboards, job postings, user manuals, wedding invitations, and business cards. An insufficient number of authentic texts are included in the book. The reason for this might be the fact that the book is intended mostly for elementary-level students.

Yeni Hitit 1 contains mostly fictive texts. Occasionally, the source and target cultures are juxtaposed through the characters in the dialogs. For example, the meeting dialog between Polish Nicole and Turkish Tamer (p. 8). Nevertheless, not very many texts in the book emphasize the interaction between the two cultures.

The majority of the expressions used in dialogs are the ones used in everyday life. In addition, the communication patterns often provided are also cultural transmitters that reflect the Turkish culture and which make daily life easier. For example, expressions such as “*Kolay gelsin*,” “*Elinize sağlık*,” “*Afiyet olsun*” (p. 64) “*Hoş geldin – Hoş bulduk*,” (p. 16) “*Geçmiş olsun*,” (p. 69), “*Maaşallah*,” “*İnşallah*,” and “*Tabii efendim, buyrun*” (P. 28) are contained in *Yeni Hitit 1*.

Cultural comparisons in Yeni Hitit 1. The writing and speaking sections at the end of certain units in *Yeni Hitit 1* contain essential cultural comparisons:

Unit 3: “*Sizin şehrinizin bir sembolü var mı? Neden bu sembol kullanılıyor? Bu sembolün kültürünüzde önemi nedir?*” Does your city have a symbol? Why is it chosen as a symbol? What is the significance of the symbol in your culture? (p. 40)

Unit 5: “*Ülkenizde insanlar nasıl alışveriş yapıyor? Kültürünüze ait yemekler nelerdir?*” How do people do shopping in your country? What are the dishes in your culture? (p. 63).

Unit 7: “*Kendi ülkenizde düğün törenleri nasıl olur anlatın.*” Explain the wedding ceremonies in your culture (p. 83).

Unit 8: “*Kendi kültürünüzde olan masallar, efsaneleri anlatınız.*” Tell the tales and legends in your culture (p. 95).

Unit 8: “*Kendi ülkenizdeki tarihi ve turistik yerleri anlatınız.*” Talk about the historical and touristic sights in your country (p. 100).

Unit 11: “*Sizin ülkenizde hangi sebze ve meyveler tedavi amaçlı kullanılıyor?*” Which types of fruit and vegetables are used for healing in your country? (p. 129).

Proverbs, idioms and certain phrases in daily language contribute greatly to cultural transmission. Unfortunately, no proverbs or phrases are found in *Yeni Hitit 1*. This is a major deficiency in terms of cultural transmission.

Yeni Hitit 2. In *Yeni Hitit 2*, most of the texts are given with no simplification. However, certain magazine, newspaper, and book articles are simplified and poems are abridged. The authentic texts provided in the book are literary texts such as poems and dialogs as well as authentic and informative texts such as texts from magazines, newspapers, and Internet news. Authentic texts such as “*Tabiatta Geçen Çocukluğum*” by Berkay Camgöz, “*Şehirliye Anlatmak Zor*” by Mehmet Uhri, and “*Altın Portakalın Genç Yüzleri*” (an interview by Elif Berköz) are

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common. Fictional texts such as *Hayatımda keşke olmasa* (p. 34) which aim to provide information about grammar, as in the other topics of the book, are prevalent. The language level of these fictive texts is mostly suitable for the student's level and include elements of Turkish culture such as *oya* (a type of lace), *şalvar* (a type of baggy trousers), *çarık* (a type of sandal), *yemeni* (a type of kerchief), *kasket* (a type of cap), etc. Proverbs and idioms such as "gözüne girmek," "çarçur etmek," "alttan almak," "içine atmak" and "ağaç yaşken eğilir" are provided commonly in this series instead of communication patterns. Expressions used in dialogs within units are the ones used in everyday life such as; "İndirim yapar mısınız?" (p. 46), "Ne yazık ki öyle," "Kolay gelsin," "Çok geçmiş olsun canım," (p. 32).

While the texts in *Yeni Hitit 2* mostly include elements of Turkish culture, they also contain occasional elements of source and universal culture. For example, they mention figures such as Stanisława Walasiewicz (the Polish athlete who won the gold medal in the 1932 Olympic Games), Pele, Bruce Lee, Maria Sharapova, and Oscar Wilde.

Cultural comparisons in Yeni Hitit 2. Again, the abundance of questions contained in *Yeni Hitit 2* contributes to cultural transmission. For example:

"Sizin ülkenizde ne tür batıl inançlar var?" What sort of superstitions exists in your country? (p. 121).

"Şans getirdiğine inandığınız nesnelere neler? Ülkenizde anneler günü nasıl kutlanır?" What are the objects that are believed to bring luck? How do you celebrate Mother's Day in your country? (p. 135).

Yeni Hitit 3. Upon the examination of the *Yeni Hitit 3* course book in terms of type of text, the units contain 5-6 texts on average. These texts are often too long and include dialogs, articles, fictive texts, and original texts. The texts are generally based on Turkish culture and are authentic texts such as "Şimdiki çocuklar bir harika" by Aziz Nesin (p. 10); "Dostlar beni hatırlasın" by Aşık Veysel (p. 11); "Üçüncü Şahsın Şiiri" by Atilla İlhan (p. 13); "Aşk mı İhanet mi?" by Ahmet Altan (p. 22); "Beyaz Gemi" by Cengiz Aytmatov (p. 14); "Osmanlıda Ev Kültürü" by Dr. Mümtaz Aydın (p. 104), and "Büyüme mi yaşlanma mı?" by Duygu Asena (p. 26). However, elements of universal culture are also included occasionally such as "Japon şiir sanatı Haiku," (p. 16), "İskoçya denince akla Kilt gelir" (p. 52).

Since *Yeni Hitit 3* is an advanced-level course book, it contains examples of non-verbal communication. Non-verbal communication is the transmission of feelings and thoughts through body language rather than words. Means of communication such as gestures, stances, and facial expressions are the types of human behavior, which are affected the most by their own culture (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). Just as there are certain structures, which people should know in order to understand each other in verbal communication, there are essential expressions in non-verbal communication, which vary from society to society.

Visuality

The course books in the *Yeni Hitit* series mostly comply with the principle that visual aids should reflect the culture. The course books contain photos along with the texts and exercises which reflect the target/source culture such as: Logos and names of Turkish television's universal fairy tale characters: Alice, Cinderella, Snow White, Red Riding Hood, (*Yeni Hitit 1*, 2009, p. 92); Logos of the government agencies in Turkey (*Yeni Hitit 1*, p. 68); Turkish national holidays (*Yeni Hitit 2*, 2009, p. 126); Nevşehir Derinkuyu (*Yeni Hitit 2*, 2009, p. 122); Turkish Van cat (*Yeni Hitit 2*, 2009, p. 93); Samovar, Ottoman paste, Turkish delight (*Yeni Hitit 3*, 2009, p. 42); Aziz Nesin, Orhan Pamuk (*Yeni Hitit 3*, 2009, p. 9-11); Flamenco (*Yeni Hitit 3*, 2009, p. 46); and The Great

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Wall of China, Egyptian pyramids, Egypt -Cairo, Taj Mahal, India-Agra, Tower of Pisa, Italy- Pisa (*Yeni Hitit 3*, 2009, p. 102).

Conclusion

Within the scope of this study, the concept of culture has been examined, especially from the perspective of foreign language teaching. Within this context, the role and importance of cultural transmission in foreign language teaching, cultural transmission via course books, and the skills, which this process provides to students, have been presented in detail. The *Yeni Hitit* course books were examined and evaluated in the light of three criteria regarding cultural transmission: (a) subject area, (b) type of text and (c) visuality.

Lately, it has become more widespread to teach a foreign language with its respective culture. As teachers of Turkish language, we need to maintain our students' interest all the time in classes. Culture is thus one of the best means of motivation for students and provides authentic settings for students to better comprehend the nature of a given language.

The necessity of cultural transmission in foreign language teaching is an undeniable fact. Students will both better understand their own culture and learn to be unbiased towards foreign cultures by means of the cultural values that they acquire during the process of language learning. Therefore, it is an essential issue that course books, which contain elements from the target culture as well as the source and universal culture for the sake of cultural transmission and enable students to make comparisons between them, should be chosen. Although there are some deficiencies, this evaluation of the *Yeni Hitit* course book series from the perspective of cultural transmission has revealed that they contain elements which present Turkish culture to students with its different aspects and succeed in transmitting the Turkish culture to students for whom they are intended.

In sum, up-to-date course books that focus on all language skills equally and include daily life situations meet the needs of the students, motivate them to study Turkish, and provide an effective teaching environment. Course books that promote communicative and intercultural competence should be chosen to teach the Turkish language at Polish universities. Unfortunately, there is only one Turkish for foreigners course book series currently available that can meet the needs of Polish students, the *New Hitit* series written by Ankara University Turkish and Foreign Languages Research and Application Center, TÖMER. The *New Hitit Turkish for Foreigners* series was designed in consideration of the descriptors of European Language Portfolio. Thus, the *New Hitit Turkish for Foreigners* series has been chosen by the author to teach Turkish to Polish students.

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International Periodical For the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic
Volume 7/3, Summer, 2012

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