

Linguacultural competence in business English communication:

The case of a business English textbook in China

Abstract

Internationally operating professionals in China study business English to develop their language proficiency and transcultural communicative competence. While a variety of business English textbooks are on the market and are used in China, their conceptualizations of culture tend to be nation-based, static, and predictable – views of culture that have been increasingly problematized in the field of second language teaching and learning. This investigation drew on a research-informed conceptualization of linguacultural competence that incorporates three theoretical lenses: Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF), linguaculture, and genre. Competencies identified in the research literature were cross-checked with empirical data from active job-experienced business professionals via semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. These competencies were then used to examine how one popular business English textbook, *Market Leader Intermediate*, fares in developing linguacultural competence. The results revealed that while the textbook includes opportunities to develop several necessary competencies, many others are not addressed. Further, expressions of culture in the textbook are often simplistic or limited. These findings can inform textbook adaptations and development for effectively inculcating linguacultural competence in internationally functioning professional communicators.

Keywords: Business English as a Lingua Franca, BELF, Business English, materials development, linguaculture, *Market Leader*

Introduction

As China's participation in the global economy has grown, companies, individuals, and government policies are focusing on expanding business partnerships overseas. Ventures such as the Belt and Road Initiative are considered crucial for China's socioeconomic development and require a vast resource of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) speakers to implement (He, 2020). To compete in a saturated marketplace, employees must have English abilities that are at least on par with those of competitors, yet there continues to be a gap between English levels in China and the levels of other developed and developing economies (Spicer-Escalante & deJonge-Kannan, 2014). In the English First English Proficiency Indexes 2019 to 2023, Mainland China dropped from 40th to 82nd out of 100+ countries (English First, 2019, 2023), falling from "Moderate" to "Low" proficiency. The need for improved English proficiency has highlighted the importance of Business English (BE) training programs. In China, the majority of BE training happens in three contexts: 1) in universities to prepare students for entering the workforce (pre-experienced participants), 2) in private training centers (both pre-experienced and job-experienced participants), and 3) in on-site training for active professionals (job-experienced participants) (Frendo, 2019). As this investigation focuses on active, internationally functioning job-experienced professionals, a textbook used in private training and in-house contexts, *Market Leader*, was selected for examination.

Despite the prevalence of BE training worldwide, there remains a gap between how international BE functions and how it is taught and learned (Bhatia & Bremner, 2012; Rose et al., 2021). As a result of globalization, it is estimated that over 70% of business communication occurs between non-native English speakers rather than with native speakers (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010; Rose & Galloway, 2019), yet BE textbooks continue to present native English standards and Anglo-American perspectives and cultural knowledge,

which may not even be appropriate or necessary (Hu & McKay, 2014). Further, while many of these textbooks address the issue of communicating transculturally, they tend to present cultures as nation-based, static, and predictable – views of culture that have been increasingly problematized in the field of second language education (Baker, 2022). Therefore, there is a clear need for further research that can bridge the gap between current pedagogy and real-world needs in a changing linguistic and cultural landscape.

Textbooks are a crucial starting point for addressing the above issue for several reasons. First, from a teaching perspective, published textbooks are often the foundation of ELT instruction: “indeed they have remained ... the ‘the visible heart’ of many ELT programmes” (Mishan, 2022, p. 491). According to Tomlinson’s (2010) survey, 92% of teachers “regularly” use a textbook. Second, from the learners’ perspectives, textbooks are “revered in many classrooms as the ultimate authority” (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2017, p. 41). More specifically, there is a lasting tradition of textbooks being central to Chinese classrooms, where “learning is equated with reading books” and textbooks are seen as “the source of knowledge” (Hu, 2002, p. 98). Third, textbooks are often a central aspect of BE learning and teaching with advantages ranging from “a solid framework to work with” to “a window on the business world” (Frendo, 2005, p. 43). Finally, the “nature of teaching language is that it encapsulates the language’s culture, making any language textbook a de facto cultural artefact” (Mishan, 2022, p. 492). In other words, textbooks, by their very nature, include cultural content, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Due to the fundamental position textbooks occupy in BE pedagogy, they are the logical starting point from which to examine linguacultural competence.

Before pedagogy can be adjusted, it is essential to know to what extent and in what manner current textbooks develop linguacultural competence, namely the ability to communicate successfully with people from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds

(Risager, 2006). Improving the linguacultural competence of BE learners/speakers is a complex endeavor, requiring a multidimensional approach (Jabareen, 2009). Therefore, this study draws on three areas of scholarship as theoretical lenses for examining the research questions and integrates them thematically into a new conceptualization called the Linguacultural Competence (LCC) framework. As will be described below, the three theoretical lenses germane to this investigation are Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF), linguaculture, and genre. These lenses function synergistically to offer a multidimensional perspective on BE textbooks' efforts, or lack thereof, to develop linguacultural competence. By identifying necessary adaptations and textbook design implications, this study aims to inform pedagogical actions that can raise the overall communicative proficiency of BELF users in China.

Previous Research

This section reviews extant research that informs our textbook analysis and feeds into the LCC framework.

Materials Analysis and Evaluation

Materials are “anything that can be used to facilitate the learning of the language” (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 2). This study focuses on one type of material: the textbook. Previous investigations have proposed best practices in performing textbook analysis. Proposals have included executing both surface and in-depth analyses using checklists and criteria that are grounded in teaching/learning theories and are context-specific (Littlejohn, 2011; McDonough, 2013; Roberts, 1996; Tomlinson, 2013a; Williams, 1983). Critical of the above types of analysis, which often include frequency counts, researchers have proposed semiotic approaches connecting image, text, and task (Wenninger & Kiss, 2013), and critical discourse analysis (CDA) approaches that examine the textbook messaging more in-depth and critically (Xiong & Qian, 2012). Specific to this study, researchers have examined the cultural content

of ELT textbooks. These investigations have identified general strategies for evaluating cultural content (Adaskou et al., 1990; Mason, 2011; Troncoso, 2011), considered the local versus global orientation of textbooks (Risager, 2021; Risager & Chappelle, 2013), and examined unequal power structures such as Anglo-centric ideologies, neoliberalism, new capitalism, and emphasis on target cultures at the expense of home cultures (Alptekin, 1993; Apple, 1992; Chao, 2011; Gray, 2010; Xiong & Qian, 2012; Yuen, 2011). The general consensus is that textbooks tend to prioritize English-speaking cultures and lack flexible, varied, and cosmopolitan expression of cultures, especially home cultures. Finally, there has been some research attention to BE textbooks, including broad, qualitative reviews (Flinders, 2005; Frendo, 2019), theoretical frameworks developed for BE materials analysis (Chan, 2009), analyses from a lingua franca perspective (Si, 2020), and focus on cultural content (Pashmforoosh & Babaii, 2015). Other BE investigations have drawn on particular frameworks, such as genre analysis (Dalimunte & Pramoolsook, 2020) and Global Englishes for Language Teaching (GELT) principles (e.g., Rose & Galloway, 2019). These investigations have revealed that BE textbooks address the global spread of English but still lean toward native speakerism, static and stereotypical views of culture, and Anglo-American biases (Canale, 2016). A notable gap in the literature, despite the multitude of extant materials analyses, is what researchers have described as a lack of transparent, principle-based inquiry in the overall research landscape (Tomlinson, 2013a). At a more granular level, there has been only a handful of studies pertaining to BE textbooks and even fewer in the Chinese context. This study aims to address both gaps.

Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF)

BELF is a shared language used in business communication by speakers with different mother tongues (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). In facilitating international business, BELF is inherently transcultural communication, and job-experienced professionals

and researchers confirm that linguacultural competence is essential (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010). The past two decades have seen considerable research evaluating and analyzing curricula and textbooks to account for English's international nature (Hu & McKay, 2014; Rose & Galloway, 2019) and a number of studies examining textbooks for cultural orientations (Risager & Chapelle, 2013; Troncoso, 2011), but there have been far fewer studies focusing on BE textbooks (Frendo, 2019; Pullin, 2010). Regarding *ML* specifically, Si (2020) examined the opportunities (in terms of language abilities, language exposure, language ownership and cultural representations) for developing general BELF competence, whereas Pashmforoosh and Babaii (2015) investigated its cultural orientations from a World Englishes perspective. Their insights notwithstanding, these investigations covered limited aspects of BELF transcultural competence, giving little mileage to the concept of linguaculture. It should also be noted that previous studies often focused on materials for pre-experienced learners (i.e., university students) as opposed to job-experienced learners (i.e., working professionals). In response, this study targets job-experienced professionals, a population that remains under-researched (Rose et al., 2021). The neglect of this population represents a crucial gap in the literature, as active professionals can apprise researchers as well as BE curriculum developers and instructors about what is actually needed in day-to-day professional communication. This information will not only improve curricula and pedagogy intended for active business professionals but can also identify the competencies to be developed in pre-experienced learners. Properly addressed, professionals' input will help better align curricula and pedagogy with real professional communication, thus better preparing learners for workplace success.

Linguaculture

Linguaculture is the intersection of language and culture. The concept has been adopted by current ELF and BELF researchers, who highlight its place in modern lingua

franca communication and conceptualize it in terms of worldview, means of expression, and hybridity. Previous research has explored pedagogical approaches to understanding and developing linguacultural competence. The approaches included examining global events to depict transnational cultural and linguistic flow (Risager, 2006) and creating the Developmental Model of Linguacultural Learning (DMLL) to integrate linguacultural development with language learning (Shaules, 2016). Despite these precedents, there are gaps in the literature that this study aims to address. First, there is a notable scarcity of work examining linguacultural pedagogy overall. Second, the construct of linguaculture has been mentioned extensively in the ELF and BELF literature as an essential component of contemporary English communication, but it has yet to be integrated into a systematic analysis of BELF communication or related pedagogy. Specifically, the construct lacks application and testing with respect to materials analysis, including textbook analysis, and its utility in a transdisciplinary framework. This study utilizes the perspective of linguaculture on both theoretical and practical levels in previously untested areas to bridge the theory-practice divide highlighted in the literature (Rose et al., 2021).

Genre as the linchpin of BE communication

Genre is “a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs” (Bhatia, 1993, p. 49). This study incorporates an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) perspective on genre, leveraging its heuristics for identifying, analyzing, creating, and teaching business communication genres. Previous work employed genres to structure BE usage and pedagogy (Bhatia, 1993; Bhatia & Bremner, 2012) and examine BE materials (Bhatia, 1991). However, there are notable gaps in the extant research. First, there is a lack of research connecting genre analysis specifically to ELF and BELF communication. Second, while there have been genre-based

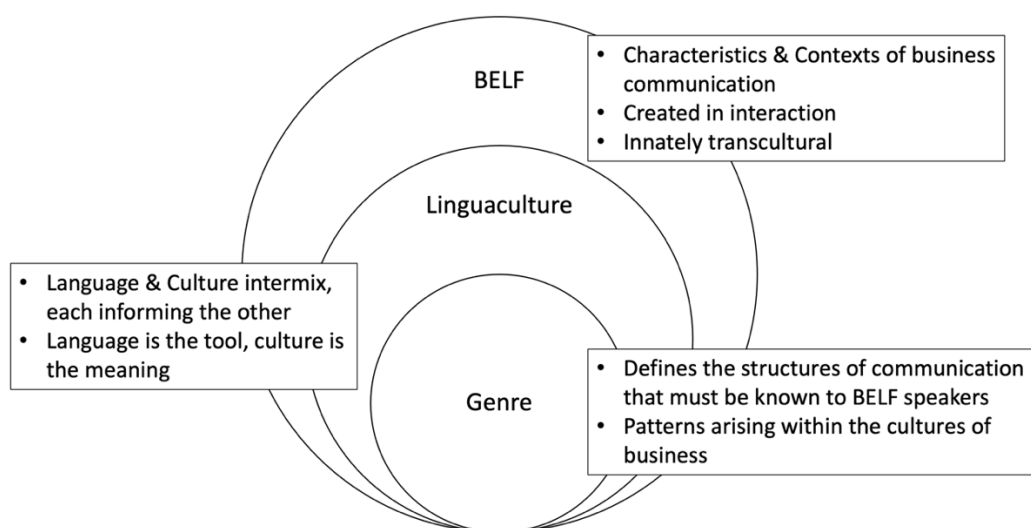
examinations of general ELT textbooks, there are hardly any such investigations into BE textbooks, particularly *ML*. To address these gaps, this study pivots on genre in terms of what it analyzes (a BE textbook), how it analyzes it (using a transdisciplinary framework), and why it analyzes it (the end goal being curricular adjustment). In addition to specific BE genres, it focuses on the distinction between two meta-categories of genre: transactional genres, which concern tasks related to work, and interpersonal genres, which are aimed at building rapport and developing relationships for business purposes (Pullin, 2010).

The LCC framework

The LCC framework is structured multidimensionally, and its constituents have been specifically selected and organized from broad to specific to target the issue of how to develop professionals' linguacultural competence (see Figure 1). BELF is fundamental to this study because it not only identifies the real-world competencies required of business communicators (transcultural competence) but also describes the entire communicative context – who are interacting (business professionals), how (flexible content-focused communication), when (for transactional and/or interpersonal interactions), and why (to facilitate business progresses). Linguaculture complements BELF by illuminating how language and culture intersect, addressing BELF's stated need for cultural understanding and the ability to communicate it (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010). Finally, at the most specific level is the notion of genre. Mastery of business genres is crucial to BELF competence (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010) because they enable the identification, analysis, and conduct of business communication (Bhatia & Bremner, 2012). The construct of genre interacts with linguaculture in that it structures and illustrates typified patterns of communication within a culture (Bhatia, 1993). Research adopting the three theoretical lenses of BELF, linguaculture and genre is positioned to yield a rich understanding of which linguacultural competencies are targeted in BE textbooks.

Figure 1

The LCC Framework



Research Questions

From the above review, it is evident that there is a lack of principle-based, transdisciplinary evaluation and analysis of BE textbooks, particularly with respect to whether and to what extent they develop linguacultural competence. As such, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the distribution of linguacultural competence-building opportunities in the textbook, and how may that distribution impact BE learners' linguacultural competence development?
2. What is the distribution of transactional versus interpersonal genres in the textbook, and how may that distribution impact BE learners' linguacultural competence development?

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a multistage mixed-methods design, in which “researchers use multiple stages of data collection” (Fetters et al., 2013) to provide complementary and

expanding perspectives on the research problem. This design was sequential because it comprised three distinct stages of data collection, each building upon the preceding one.

Stage 1: Establishing potential linguacultural competencies

The literature underpinning the LCC framework suggested critical linguacultural competencies for business professionals that should be present in a textbook, and these were operationalized as “can do” descriptors. The list of descriptors was determined and validated in the following way: The competency 1) appeared in at least three publications in the reviewed literature, representing convergent views, and 2) was corroborated by interviews with 14 business professionals (for interviewee demographics, interview guide, and emergent competencies, see Appendices A, B, and C respectively).

Stage 2: Validating linguacultural competencies and finalizing the descriptors

Based on the results of the interviews and the literature-derived linguacultural competencies, a questionnaire was developed to gather the views of a larger sample. Completed by 82 business professionals, the questionnaire targeted the perceived importance of specific linguacultural competencies (for questionnaire participant demographics, questionnaire items and results, see Appendices D and E). As a final check, the candidate competencies had to be included in a validated instrument such as the Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Culture (FREPA) (Candelier et al., 2012) or the Common European Framework Reference Companion Volume (CEFR-CV) (Council of Europe, 2018). The 20 finalized competencies, along with details of their development and validation support, are presented in Appendix F.

Stage 3: Textbook examination

The main goal of this stage was to determine if opportunities for developing the target linguacultural competencies are present in *ML* and how those opportunities might develop linguacultural competence. Conversely, the absence of such opportunities would indicate a

lack of curricular attention to the relevant competencies. *ML* was selected for analysis in this study because 1) it is a popular, globally-distributed textbook (Pashmforoosh & Babaii, 2015); 2) it is used extensively in China, as it was “endorsed as ‘National Planning Materials’ by the Ministry of Education (MoE), which guarantees [its] wide use in China” (Si, 2020, p. 158); 3) it is, in large part, designed for job-experienced, internationally functioning business professionals, a population of BE learners that has been researched far less often than university BE students (Rose et al., 2021); 4) it scored by far the highest for transcultural, translingual, and global content in an analysis of several textbooks (Rose & Galloway, 2019), making it a strong candidate for linguacultural inquiry, adaptation, and supplementation; and 5) per the first author’s experience as a BE curriculum developer and supervisor at Wall Street English (WSE) in mainland China, it was the primary BE textbook used across the organization’s 70+ centers to teach BE to adult professional students. Relatedly, the first author’s extensive experience with the textbook gives him intimate knowledge of the textbook vis-à-vis classroom application. This study focused on the intermediate level of *ML*, targeting learners with CEFR proficiency levels ranging from B1 to B2. The intermediate level (Cotton et al., 2010) was chosen because learners at this level typically have high enough English proficiency to understand, develop, and express aspects of linguaculture but have not yet had sufficient opportunity to do so (Camerer & Mader, 2012).

The textbook investigation took the form of a content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). Tomlinson (2013) makes a distinction between textbook *analysis* and textbook *evaluation*: An analysis “focuses on the materials and it aims to provide an objective analysis of them” (p. 22). In contrast, an evaluation involves “making judgments about the effects of the materials on the people using them often using scoring rubrics, rating criteria, or critical lenses” (Tomlinson, 2013, p. 21). This study's objective analysis was a quantitative, full-text examination based on the finalized list of linguacultural competency “can do” descriptors. Its

subjective evaluation was an in-depth, qualitative scrutiny of a single unit through the conceptual lenses of the LCC framework.

Data analysis

The textbook consists of 12 regular units and 4 “Working Across Cultures” units. The “Working Across Cultures” units were excluded from the analysis because they were structured differently from the regular units, allowing no meaningful comparisons across the units. The revision sections were also excluded to avoid redundant activities. An included activity was coded against each of the 20 linguacultural competency descriptors. If it addressed a particular linguacultural competency, it was coded as “opportunity present” for developing the competency. Each activity was also coded to determine the distribution of transactional and interpersonal genres (Competencies 19 and 20). To ensure coding reliability, the first author engaged in an intracoder exercise, coding the whole textbook twice at a 3-month interval. Cohen’s kappa coefficient was .903, indicating near perfect agreement. An intercoding exercise was also conducted. A doctoral student with relevant expertise served as a second coder. After several rounds of training, the second coder independently coded a unit of *ML*, and the kappa coefficient was .936, indicating an excellent level of agreement between the two coders.

Based on the results of the quantitative full-text analysis described above, Unit 3 of *ML*, entitled “Change,” was chosen for a more in-depth evaluation because it had a relatively high percentage of linguacultural-building opportunities overall but was not specifically focused on culture, hence a good illustration of how opportunities manifest in a more general context. For this evaluation, all previously coded linguacultural competency-building opportunities in the unit were revisited; however, this time, the focus of the scrutiny was on how, in the context of a specific activity, the presence of an opportunity to develop a linguacultural competency might enhance professionals’ competence in BE communication.

Competencies that were not present were also considered according to how their absence might hinder, or at least detract from, professionals’ linguacultural competence development.

Results

Quantitative patterns across *ML*

Figure 2 presents the number of opportunities present for building various linguacultural competencies across the 12 regular units of the textbook. While it is unsurprising that the unit focusing on Culture (Unit 7) has the most linguaculture-building opportunities, the fact that Unit 3 on “Change” has the second most opportunities warrants an explanation. Within the theme of “change,” much of this unit concerns taking overseas job positions (changing locations) and corporate mergers (changing work life). In these situations, diverse linguacultures are likely to come into contact, contributing to the relatively high incidence and variety of linguacultural competency-building opportunities in this unit.

Figure 2

Competency-building opportunities included by unit

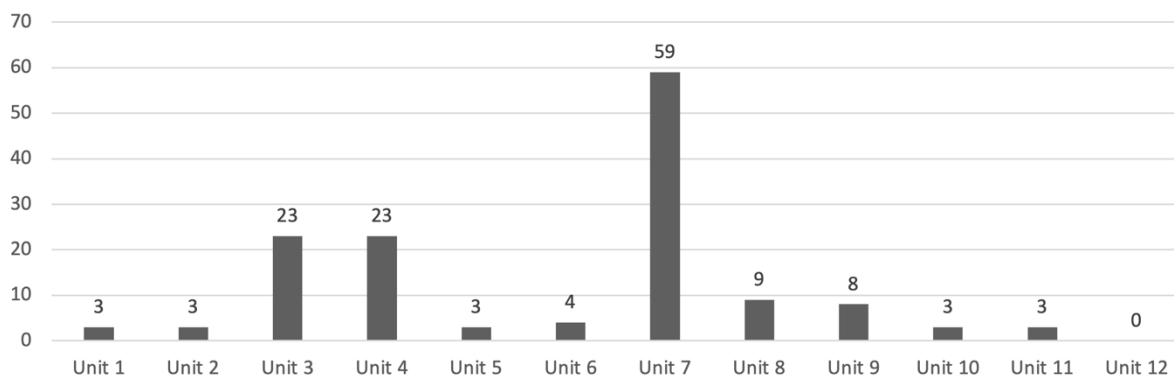
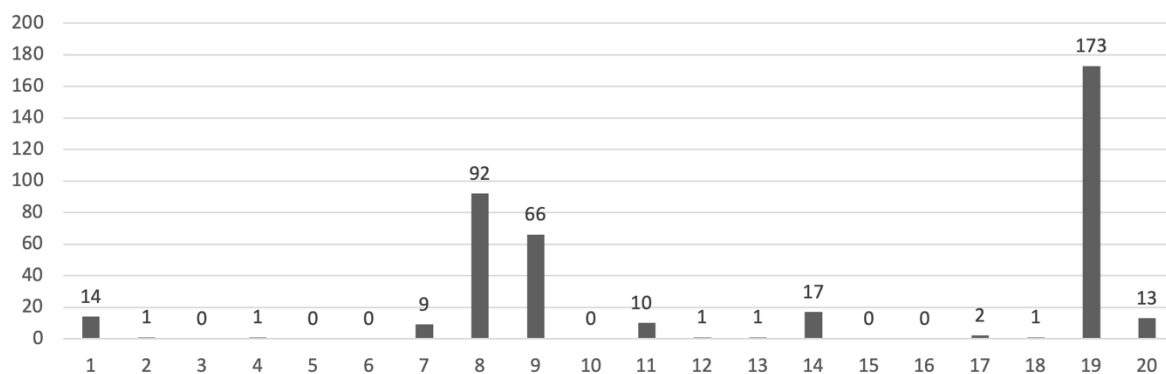


Figure 3 presents the distribution of included opportunities by linguacultural competency. Opportunities for building a variety of linguacultural competencies are included, ranging from issues of corporate culture (e.g., Competencies 2, 7, and 13) and visible and deep culture (e.g., Competencies 1, 9, and 11) to ideas about specific behaviors related to cultural background (e.g., Competencies 4, 12, 14, 17, and 18). Notably, there are few

opportunities for developing several linguacultural competencies. In particular, no competency-building opportunities are included for Competencies 3, 5, 6, 10, 15, and 16, concerned with the relativistic nature of linguacultures, dangers of cultural stereotyping, intracultural diversity, and religion. The lack of attention to these competencies pinpoints areas where *ML* could have done more to enhance learners' linguacultural competence. There is also considerable variation in the opportunities present for the individual linguacultural competencies. While some (e.g., Competencies 1, 5, 7, 11, and 14) are opportunity-rich, others (e.g., Competencies 2, 12, 13, 17, and 18) have meager opportunities.

Figure 3

Opportunities included by linguacultural competency



Finally, the genre analysis revealed that 93% of the genres of business communication present in *ML* are transactional, whereas only 7% are interpersonal. These findings merit attention because interpersonal communication is one of the two meta-categories of professional communicative genres identified in the research literature (Caleffi, 2020; Komori-Glatz, 2017; Pullin, 2010). In other words, interpersonal communication such as building rapport and developing relationships is a fundamental and crucial aspect of workplace communication. As such, the lack of interpersonal genres in *ML* represents a major deficiency in the textbook because it does not match workplace needs. The paucity of

interpersonal genres in *ML* led us to reflect on, in the close-up evaluation of Unit 3, how that might affect learners' linguacultural competence, and how such genres could be included via adaptations.

A close-up of Unit 3

Unit 3 has seven sections, with the first section ("Starting Up") and the last section ("Case Study: Acquiring Asia Entertainment") being the foci of this analysis because they address similar linguacultural competencies and are therefore illustrative of the unit's overall content.

The "Starting Up" section sets the context of the unit's focus on change. It includes the reflective question: "Which of these business situations would worry you most? Why?" The first prompt is: "You find out that your company will be merging with another company." A significant challenge with company mergers is the clash of different corporate cultures and communication styles, which can create difficulties and tension and may even lead to the merger's failure (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). The questions asked at the beginning of the chapter are further developed and illustrated in the case study at the end, described as follows: "Decker has recently merged with a Hong Kong-based media company, Asia Entertainment. In a press release, the deal was described as a merger, but Decker is the real decision-maker." The case study focuses on issues related to the merger, asking students to find solutions.

Though the presence and absence of several linguacultural competencies impact Unit 3, for the purposes of this study, we will focus on two. Arguably the most important linguacultural competency that requires further development in this unit is Competency 1: "Professionals understand cultural dimensions and how they can be beneficial to linguacultural competence." Cultural dimensions offer structured ways of examining the tendencies of different cultures. The case study focuses on issues stemming from a clash

between “Australian” and “Hong Kong Chinese” cultures. To address such issues, researchers have conceptualized cultural dimensions (Frendo, 2005; Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1980; McSweeney, 2015; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2021). For example, Hofstede (1980) posited that certain cultures are more individualistic, focusing on self and personal fulfillment (Australia), whereas others are more collectivist and prioritize group harmony (Hong Kong). Cultural dimensions could be beneficial in solving the issues raised in the case study: Employees who suddenly face colleagues from different regional and corporate cultures and communicative styles could use cultural dimensions as a way of structuring their understanding of a new organizational culture and communicative requirements. The “Starting Up” and “Case Study” sections do not explicitly address cultural dimensions, missing valuable linguacultural competency-building opportunities.

Also relevant to the unit yet undeveloped is Competency 16: “Professionals can understand religion in terms of holiday schedule, food, and beliefs and interact accordingly.” In Unit 3’s case study, the Australian holiday calendar does not match the Hong Kong one. Australia tends to follow a Western calendar, which includes several holidays with religious origins. In contrast, Hong Kong mixes Western holidays with Chinese ones, thus leading to a linguacultural mismatch that can have tangible effects on business and communication. For example, the management of the newly merged organization will have to determine a holiday policy; however, if the Australian management chooses simply to follow the Australian Decker schedule, the local staff may feel even more alienated, having already expressed to their HR Director that they “feel we’re losing our Chinese identity. Our bosses don’t understand us, our customs are so different” (Cotton et al., 2010, p. 29). In other words, though indirect, the influence of religion on the new workplace and resulting communication has contributed to misalignments and discomfort that are so intense that the locals’ identities are threatened. Even so, opportunities for fostering the religion-related linguacultural

competency are absent not only from Unit 3 but also from all of *ML*. In the above contexts, religion need not be considered taboo or controversial; instead, it must be addressed practically.

Discussion

Two Key Linguacultural Competencies

For RQ 1 on the availability of linguacultural competence building opportunities in the textbook and their impact on BE learners' linguacultural competence development, two crucial competencies were identified as conspicuously missing: Competency 1, regarding cultural dimensions, and Competency 16, regarding religion's impact on communication.

Cultural dimensions address a key challenge in developing linguacultural competence, namely structuring understanding of culture. That said, they must be considered with caution: Criticisms of cultural dimensions promoting static, homogenized, or stereotypical views of cultural groups are also valid (McSweeney, 2015). These criticisms have prompted a revision of how the dimensions should be understood: Contemporary conceptualizations of culture, especially as they relate to international lingua franca communication, are that "cultural reference, identities and practices [are] fluid and contestable, operating at multiple scales, as well as being emergent and constructed in situ" (Baker, 2022, p. 289). A salient example of the malleability of cultural dimensions was provided by interviewee Alice, who explained that "I think it depends on the subjects, the objects. Like, if I [talk to] the foreigners, my culture maybe is China's culture. If the objects are people from Meizhou, [then] my culture is Guangzhou *Guangfu*." Alice's cultural orientation depended on the context of her communication. In other words, rather than existing within the constraints of permanent and static cultural roles, individuals such as Alice develop their perspectives and status in situations through their interactions, which are fluid, changing, and ephemeral. Cultural dimensions are manifested contextually and in communication.

This competency is crucial to Chinese BELF speakers as it relates to current ELT policy, deeply ingrained beliefs about English language learning, and pedagogy on the mainland. It is well-established that, in the Chinese system of English language teaching (ELT), the cultural focus has been on Anglo-American target cultures, with Chinese learners aspiring to be able to function within those cultures (Rose & Galloway, 2017; Wang, 2013). Further, as a matter of policy, to be qualified as a foreign English teacher in mainland China, one must be from one of seven native English-speaking countries (Ministry of Justice of the People's Republic of China, 2020). The impact of this policy has created a gap between policy and professional practice, illustrated by the first author's personal experience: When he taught members of the mergers and acquisitions team of a Chinese state-owned enterprise – a department that was tasked with partnering with overseas governments to develop electricity infrastructure – he was the only native English speaker they interacted during a given week. The rest of their English language communication was with stakeholders in Southeast Asia, South America, and Eastern Europe. This experience mirrors research findings that the vast majority of BELF communication is between non-native speakers (NNS), findings that were supported by this study's questionnaire data (61% of respondents' communication is with NNS). Accordingly, these users' linguacultural understanding and skills must be broadened beyond the static, Anglo-American-centric cultural content of BE textbooks (Baker, 2018; Rose & Galloway, 2019). Cultural dimensions, as described above, anchor a broadened understanding by structuring the vast array of cultural tendencies but with a sophisticated and nuanced perspective that is not reductionist or essentialist, going beyond merely acclimating BELF users to different accents or providing knowledge about festivals. BE textbook adaptations and future design could leverage the power of cultural dimensions to develop linguacultural competence, thus nurturing highly competent BELF users in China.

Next, the importance of understanding religion, as it relates to holiday schedules, food, and beliefs, was not identified in the literature review but emerged during the semi-structured interviews. Interestingly, in the questionnaire responses, this competency scored an average of 3.38/5, making it the lowest-scoring of all the target competencies. However, instead of interpreting that result at face value and treating the competency as the least important, it can also be argued that the score was relatively low because it was the least considered competency. In other words, the score could suggest the participants' lack of knowledge about or comfort with religion. Further support for this interpretation was that religion was a recurring communicative issue in the interviews. For example, when working in Saudi Arabia, interviewee Steven had to adjust to a Sunday through Thursday work schedule based on the Islamic prayer calendar. He also needed to learn to avoid sending out or expecting communication on Fridays. Similarly, another interviewee, Kim, shared an anecdote about wishing a Muslim colleague a merry Christmas. After the colleague patiently explained why that was inappropriate, Kim came to see why "you can't say 'Merry Christmas' to a Muslim." That experience made Kim realize the importance of religion in her international work and communication. As she oversaw employee onboarding, she began explicitly asking new overseas employees what their faith was so that she could adjust to their calendar and customs when communicating with them for both interpersonal and transactional purposes. Both Steven's and Kim's conceptions of communication regarding holidays and schedules had to change based on issues related to religion. In linguacultural terminology, such mismatches of understanding are "rich points" and are opportunities for learning and development (Agar, 2002), which both Kim and Steven took advantage of. As such, even though religion is almost entirely absent from the literature underpinning the LCC Framework or *ML*, the religion-related linguacultural competency is crucial to effective transcultural communication, both transactional and interpersonal.

The described misunderstandings and need to develop linguacultural competency related to religion are particularly relevant to the Chinese context. One explanation for the near total absence of religion in *ML* is that the topic of religion is highly sensitive in the West and constitutes one of the global textbook taboos (i.e., PARSNIPS - politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, isms, and pork) (Brown & Nanguy, 2021). However, these are taboos that have been established in Western publishing, according to Western experiences and outlook. Put another way, these “guidelines for inappropriacy are based on customers’ perceived sensitivities” (Gray, 2002, p. 144). One consequence is that textbooks may have been “stripped of” important cultural content, in this case, religion (Gray, 2002, p. 143). Mainland China is a largely secular society without the same history or dynamics of religious tensions as other regions, which could have two results: First, religion is likely a less sensitive topic in the Chinese context and could be addressed more directly in pedagogy. Second, the extent of Chinese BELF users’ ability to understand religious implications for business and communication might be more limited than that of those from more religious societies simply because their exposure has been more limited (Camerer & Mader, 2012; Council of Europe, 2001). **As illustrated above, religious understanding is a necessary competency.** As such, it is even more crucial that this competency is addressed – in a sensitive, nonjudgmental, and sophisticated way – via adaptations or development of BE materials for Chinese BELF speakers functioning internationally.

Transactional versus Interpersonal Genres

Regarding RQ 2 on the availability of transactional versus interpersonal genres in the textbook and their impact on BE learners’ linguacultural competence development, we have argued that genres are the foundational chunks of communication necessary for functioning within and between different cultural groups (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010). The importance of interpersonal communicative genres is well documented in the literature

(Planken, 2005; Pullin, 2010; Yang, 2012) and was confirmed by the participants in the interviews and the survey: 33% of respondents indicated that interpersonal communication was at least half of their overall communication in the workplace, and the item asking about the importance of interpersonal communication scored an average of 4/5, which was one of the highest scores in the questionnaire data. For example, Tina explained in the interview that one of her primary management tasks was facilitating and maintaining smooth relationships between her company's polarized linguacultural groups and that interpersonal communication was the key to doing so:

You know, like when you work together, you usually need each other's help, right? So, if you have a good relationship with someone else, even though it's a tough job or maybe someone else is not willing to do, but based on the rapport, based on the relationship you have with that person, probably the person is more willing to help you finish that task.

The importance of interpersonal genres notwithstanding, *ML* only once explicitly labels such a genre and structures its stages for learners. The significantly skewed distribution of 93% transactional versus 7% interpersonal genres in *ML* and the complete absence of any interpersonal genres in Unit 3 highlight a significant deficiency. This gap is particularly conspicuous in the case study of Unit 3, which focuses on difficulties in communication and mismatches of understanding between the company's new Australian owners and the local staff. This section of the unit fails to raise an awareness of the usefulness of interpersonal genres in building rapport, establishing personal relationships, and engaging in team building – all activities that might improve the discordant situation after the merger.

The lack of opportunities to develop interpersonal genre proficiency is even more severe when considering that Chinese BELF users have consistently and specifically self-reported difficulty with interpersonal communication (Du, 2021; Du-Babcock & Yao, 2020)

and have been observed to struggle with rapport management or relationship-building with interlocutors of different backgrounds (Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2004; Wei et al., 2001), causing sometimes major miscommunications. As such, adaptations to current BE textbooks and the design of future textbooks used in the Chinese context must address the importance of interpersonal communication. Interpersonal genres can offer the structure to understand and address such communication pedagogically.

Breaking New Ground in Textbook Research

This study aimed to be innovative in terms of methodology, theory, content and population, and pedagogy. First, regarding methodology, materials evaluation researchers argue for principled, criterion-referenced evaluation because “making an evaluation criterion-referenced can reduce (but not remove) subjectivity and can certainly help to make an evaluation more principled, rigorous, systematic, and reliable” (Tomlinson, 2013a, p. 311). Accordingly, this study has followed best practices by including a thick description of the analysis and evaluation conducted within an original conceptual framework (i.e., the LCC framework), the creation and validation of which have also been described transparently in this paper and the accompanying appendices (Macalister & Nation, 2020; Nation & Macalister, 2010). Second, this study has broken new conceptual ground by developing an inventory of linguacultural competencies firmly grounded in the literature and multiple sources of empirical data. With the aid of this inventory, a competency profile can be developed for each textbook analyzed, and informed adaptations and adjustments of the learning materials can be made to match learners’ transcultural communicative needs. Third, as pointed out earlier, there have been few studies of BE materials and even fewer focusing on job-experienced professionals (Rose et al., 2021). Job-experienced professionals have a direct and tangible relationship to such materials, as they are communicating in English with people from different backgrounds on a daily basis (Frendo, 2005). Their authentic

communicative needs provide a litmus test of the relevance and adequacy of the learning materials, and they have the experience to evaluate which competencies are important to them, as our participants were asked to do in the interviews and survey. Their input informs the effective development of materials for not only job-experienced professionals but also pre-experienced learners, who do not yet have experience-informed frames of reference. Finally, in terms of pedagogy, the findings of this study can inform the analysis, evaluation, development, and adaptations of other BE materials to address BELF learners' linguacultural competencies in the classroom. As the competency descriptors are detailed and tangible, the competencies can be addressed in the classroom through various activities and tasks, depending on the specific needs of the particular teaching context. In our case, the teaching context was mainland China with its unique set of needs and considerations. Although such needs and considerations vary from context to context, the LCC framework is flexible enough to accommodate them.

Conclusion

This study focused on a popular BE textbook to determine to what extent and exactly how linguacultural competence-building opportunities manifest, which also indicates which competencies do not receive curricular attention. A quantitative whole-text analysis revealed which competence-building opportunities are present in the textbook, and a close-up analysis made explicit the implications of the presence/absence of such opportunities. Overall, the results aligned with Rose and Galloway's (2019) finding: *ML* has a solid global orientation in that it offers a variety of linguacultural competence-developing opportunities. Although these opportunities are presented to varying degrees, that they are identifiable in the textbook means that *ML* provides a useful foundation upon which adaptations can be made or future textbooks can be designed.

Several pedagogical implications can be derived. Knowledge of cultural dimensions and their flexible, contextual use could be developed through activities that proceed from creating awareness of and identifying cultural dimensions to applying this knowledge in writing, role plays, and simulations. Self-reflection on one's relationship with and burgeoning understanding of the dimensions would be necessary to support contemporary BELF communicators in developing the linguacultural tools required for the workplace. Second, how religion impacts the work calendar, the holidays observed, food, and related communication must be presented to students in a clear, sensitive, and nuanced fashion. Students need to acquire knowledge about the impact of religion on linguacultures, especially those that they know they will interact with. They also need to practice skills in engaging with interlocutors of different faiths. These interactions should be structured, workshopped, and reflected on in the safety of the classroom so that learners can avoid the difficulties faced by interviewees Kim and Steven as well as the characters in Unit 3's case study. Finally, more curricular space should be given to interpersonal genres because they are of enormous importance to developing the relationships that enable business tasks to be completed smoothly. Accordingly, role-plays, small talk strategy charts, and consideration of casual talk topics should all be part of classroom practice. Only when learners have ample opportunities to develop various linguacultural competencies and master frequently encountered genres of business communication will they be well prepared for effective transcultural BELF communication.

While this study has yielded some useful findings about the presence (and absence) of linguacultural competencies in the *ML* textbook, it has several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the study focused on a single level of a single BE textbook. Similar investigations should be conducted on each level of all the major BE textbooks to understand the entire landscape and *Market Leader Intermediate*'s position

within that landscape. Second, this study focused on the meta-categories of genres (transactional versus interpersonal). Future studies should examine individual genres in BE textbooks to determine their alignment with workplace needs and design follow-up pedagogical actions. Finally, the above recommendations based on our textbook analysis need to be tested empirically in the classroom. Pedagogical interventions informed by these recommendations should be conducted experimentally to test the effectiveness and efficacy of the proposed curricular adjustments, which, in turn, could inform further research endeavors.

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