Analyzing Moran's dimensions of culture in an english conversational course at UCR

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Abstract

Understanding the source of cultural differences contributes to effective communication when working across cultures. EFL learners must build intercultural skills not only for improving their communication skills, but also for satisfying their future work demands. This mixed methods research study examines EFL learners as users of English in multicultural environments in a conversational course at the University of Costa Rica. A book analysis, a questionnaire, and an interview were used to collect data about the number and importance of culture-related activities found in the textbook used, about the instructor and learners' level of cultural awareness, and about their degree of satisfaction in terms of teaching and learning about culture to determine if the culture-related course objectives are being met. The results reflect that Moran's dimensions of culture are not being explicitly taught, that learners may have difficulties explaining what learning culture is about, and that their overall satisfaction can be rated with a 6 out of 10. The conclusion can also be drawn that the learners' general dissatisfaction may have to do with the fact they are not exposed to cultural learning outcomes explicitly. Following an analysis of the research results, some recommendations for teaching culture will also be presented.

Key words: Moran's dimensions of culture, cultural awareness, teaching culture, language syllabuses

Resumen

Entender el origen de las diferencias culturales contribuye a tener una comunicación intercultural eficaz. Los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera deben desarrollar este tipo de comunicación no solo para mejorar sus habilidades a la hora de hablar, sino también para satisfacer las futuras exigencias laborales. Este estudio se realizó en un curso de inglés conversacional en la Universidad de Costa Rica. Para recolectar los datos se analizó el libro de texto utilizado y se pasó un cuestionario a los estudiantes; asimismo, se entrevistó al docente con el fin de obtener información sobre la cantidad e importancia de las actividades relacionadas con cultura que contenía el libro, sobre el nivel de conciencia social del docente y los estudiantes, y sobre el nivel de satisfacción de estos participantes en cuestiones de enseñar y aprender sobre cultura, con el propósito de determinar si los objetivos del curso relacionados con cultura se estaban cumpliendo. Los resultados evidencian que las dimensiones culturales propuestas por Moran no se están enseñando explícitamente, que los estudiantes tienden a tener dificultades para explicar qué es aprender sobre cultura y que su satisfacción en términos del aprendizaje sobre culturas se puede evaluar con una calificación de 6 de 10. La conclusión es que el grado de insatisfacción puede darse por la falta de carácter explícito de los resultados de aprendizaje de temas culturales. Seguidas de un análisis de los resultados, se presentarán algunas recomendaciones para la enseñanza de temas relacionados con la cultura.

Palabras claves: dimensiones culturales según Moran, consciencia social, enseñanza de cultura, programas de cursos de idiomas

1. Introduction

Teaching culture has been understood by many English instructors as showing learners what people wear during winter in the US or explaining what a typical breakfast is like in a foreign country. Nonetheless, teaching culture goes beyond that. Moran (2001), Hall (1989), and Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2001) propose highly distinctive theories and approaches to teaching and learning about culture in a way that it would not be seen as merely additional information in a language program. When looking for sources about how EFL teachers are studying the impact that teaching culture can have in their classrooms, only one entry, a licenciatura thesis, could be found at the library of the University of Costa Rica. That may indicate that, somehow, program administrators, as well as teachers, at the University of Costa Rica have believed for many years that culture has been part of their programs, at least implicitly. Nonetheless, because of this, course programs may not include explicit approaches to teaching culture. Many of the culture-related units or lessons in the textbooks used to teach English do not explicitly teach culture, and when they do, they commonly refer to surface-level information. As a result, this specific conversational course may or may not be facing a clear absence of cultural components that would result in weak cultural outcomes that are not

addressing the different culture-related course objectives as well as expected; this is a weakness that could be solved by teaching culture explicitly making use of Moran's dimensions of culture.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Teaching Culture

Some language instructors and program administrators believe that culture can be regarded as a "plus" when teaching language macro skills, while others consider culture as the core element to be taught in class, inasmuch as speakers' linguistic choices will be determined based on what is appropriate or not in a certain context, which is culturally-bound. As Moran (2001) explains it, "language, therefore, is a window to the culture" (p. 35). In other words, individuals need language to be able to manipulate cultural products and to participate successfully in cultural practices and, in turn, need to know how a specific culture works to use a foreign language correctly. As Scarcella and Oxford (1992) noted, language is a "vehicle for explaining or expressing culture" (p. 183). Thus, one could say that "it is becoming increasingly apparent that the study of language cannot be divorced from the study of culture, and vice versa" (Seelye, 1993, p. 22). This can be achieved if instructors develop activities in class that would "encourage [learners] to go beyond fact, so that they begin to perceive and experience vicariously the deeper levels of the culture of the speakers of the language (Rivers, 1981, pp. 324-5)." In the same fashion, Seelye explains that: "learning a language in

isolation of its cultural roots prevents one from becoming socialized into its contextual use. Knowledge of linguistic structure alone does not carry with it any special insight into the political, social, religious, or economic system (1993, p. 10)." Consequently, entering lightly into the world of teaching and learning languages without taking into consideration their intrinsic nexus to culture may hinder language learners from understanding and experiencing paramount features of it.

Another issue related to teaching culture is about who is in charge of teaching culture and how this could be achieved. Kramsch points out that commonly native language speakers "transmit, with language, a view of the world that reflects only the values and cultural assumptions of the native speaker's society" (1993, p.12). However, foreign language instructors teaching a second language tend to transmit with that language the values and cultural assumptions of the L1 educational system, which is referred to as the conflict inhérent à la condition pédagogique by Yves Châlon (Riley 1985, p. 1). Even though many teachers may opt for a more eclectic and balanced approach to solve this dichotomy, there is evidence that for teachers there is no consensus on what culture is (Moran 2001, p. 13). For this reason, he proposes different frameworks to standardize what the cultural experience should consist of so that administrators and instructors could have clear guidelines to follow when designing and evaluating the culture-related contents and objectives in language programs.

2.2. Dimensions of Culture

As culture can be defined differently from one researcher to the other, Moran's (2001) definition of culture will be the guiding principle for this research study. He clearly states that "culture is the evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of a shared group of practices associated with a shared set of products, based upon a shared set of perspectives on the world, and set within specific social contexts" (p. 24). It is, therefore, imperative to define what he means with this description of the three dimensions of culture that will be part of this research study. The first dimension refers to products. They refer to both tangible and intangible constructions produced or adapted by the members of a specific culture. They are also described as "the things that a group of people make, use, or build" (National Standards for Foreign Language Education Project, 1999, n. p.). Due to the fact that culture can be viewed through the eyes of multiple disciplines, Moran (2001) explains that culture can be viewed as civilization (p. 4). Based on that, products are part of what is considered the "big C" in culture, in simple words: "the greatest achievements of a people as reflected in their history, social institutions, works of art" (p. 4) among other features. Examples of products are clothing, buildings, language, music, education, and religion. Under this theory, the "big C" refers to products, while the "small C" means practices.

Practices refer to actions and interactions among the members of a culture. These can be verbal or non-verbal, and they frequently indicate appropriate or inappropriate behaviors under specific circumstances. Moran (2001) affirms that, throughout the years, practices have been described as expected sets and expected sequences to cultural practice (p. 37). These are divided, in turn, into operations, acts, scenarios, and lives. Operations are practices that involve the manipulation of cultural artifacts. They refer to the relationship between a product and the person. Commonly, they might not require the use of verbal or non-verbal language. An illustration of this would be filing a tax form. A person just requires the necessary cultural knowledge to perform this practice successfully but does not require oral language to do so. Acts are more related to all of those communicative features that do require verbal and extra linguistic features of the language to produce meaning. In brief, they can be described as ritualized, short responses or established expressions used under certain circumstances. Examples of this would be complimenting and greeting people in the target language. Scenarios indicate where a practice takes place. They can be time-based, event-based, group-based, institution-based, and life-cycled-based. Finally, the last element in this framework refers to lives. In short, it means that every culture has sets of practices organized by individuals, according to the way they live.

When analyzing culture and language, language instructors can see that the way people live has a direct effect on the linguistic choices they favor. As evidence, Damen (1987) claims that "culture is transmitted in great part through language; cultural patterns in turn are reflected in language (p. 97). Consequently, to understand this phenomenon, Moran proposed

another framework to describe and study cultural perspectives. These mainly refer to tacit perceptions of the lifestyles of a determined culture. If you asked one member of a community why he or she does what he or she does—let us say "trimming" a Christmas tree—, this person would most probably say: "That is just the way it is." Perspectives, then, include perceptions, beliefs, values and attitudes in a culture. These concepts can be described as what people believe or ignore—the deep nature of things—, what is held to be true or untrue, what is right or wrong, and finally their disposition—what people consider is the correct way people should behave under certain circumstances. As one may imagine, each culture and its individuals understand what motivates them to behave in distinctive ways differently. This is what experts call the emic and the etic perspectives. Agar (2011 in Olive) claims that etic and emic perspectives stand for the universal and the historical particular description of phenomena (p. 39). To explain this further, Lett (1990) describes an etic approach as "accounts, descriptions, and analyses expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the community of scientific observers" (p. 130). Consequently, it can be considered as the "outsider" point of view towards a specific culture and the way they live their lives. On the other hand, the emic perspective can be described as simple explanations from one's own background. In other words, "an emic perspective attempts to capture participants' indigenous meanings of real-world events" (Yin, 2010 in Olive, p. 11) and "looks at things through the eyes of members of the culture being studied" (Willis, 2007 in Olive, p. 10). Thus, learning how the speakers of a culture construct meaning, through the use of cultural frameworks, enables language learners to interpret cultural perspectives correctly.

2.3 Culture Learning Outcomes

Learning outcomes refer to the specific objectives of a course program; in other words, those language functions or tasks learners are to show mastery of at the end of a class, unit, or course. For those language program administrators and instructors who want their learners to show mastery of culture learning outcomes, they might want to consider the following description of culture learning outcomes proposed by Moran (2001). The following table summarizes seven culture learning outcomes.

Table 1
Moran's culture learning outcomes

Culture-specific understanding	Learners can develop appreciation and empathy for people and their way of life from one specific culture.
Culture-general understanding	Learners end up identifying perspectives from their own culture, which they contrast with those of others.
Competence	It is viewed as: Language proficiency (standards such as the ones proposed by CEFR or ACTFL). Communicative competence (effective and appropriate communication with people of the target language). Cultural competence (manipulation of cultural products). Intercultural competence (interaction in intercultural communities, regardless of the cultures involved). Intercultural communicative competence (communicative competence and intercultural competence).
Adaptation	Learners are able to adjust, fit in, live, and work in the host culture. Martin and Nakayama (1997 in Moran 2001, p. 113) describe it in modes: Separation (learners retain their original culture and language and avoid interacting with other groups in the target culture). Assimilation (learners lose many aspects of their original culture and establish relationships with groups in the target culture). Integration (learners maintain their original language and culture while they also maintain daily interactions with groups in target culture). Marginalization (learners do not show interest in maintaining cultural ties with dominant groups either in the target or the original culture).
Social change	Learners act as change agents, based on understanding other cultures and their own.
Identity	This outcome results in a learner's enhanced or transformed sense of self.
Personal competence	Learners can develop self-esteem, self-confidence, willingness to take risks, acceptance of errors, openness, and seeing one's potential (Stern, 1983 in Moran 2001, p. 118).

Source: compiled by author (2017).

Having culture learning outcomes in mind while creating or evaluating course syllabuses entails paying attention to clear and concise course objectives that would address not only those targeting language macro and micro skills but also culture learning outcomes explicitly. As seen in this chart, Moran explains that culture learning outcomes can be varied and can tackle different learners' needs. Because of that, language program administrators and instructors should consider learners' needs so that they include the most suitable culture learning outcomes in their syllabuses that would help learners accomplish their specific goals.

3. Purpose of the Research Study

The general objective of this mixed methods research study is to analyze if American products, practices, and perspectives are being taught explicitly in Level 8 from Cursos de Conversación at the University of Costa Rica. Hopefully, this study will shed light on the direction these courses should take in regard to the teaching of culture. More specifically, the author of this study will measure the relevance of the culture-related activities in the book by quantifying the number of activities in which culture is explicitly taught. Moreover, after conducting the surveys and interviewing the teacher of this level, the author expects to obtain information about the teacher and learners' understanding of culture. In this fashion, the researcher envisions to answer if the learners and the instructor can recognize one specific dimension of culture and if the course needs to be modified to increase, maintain, or reduce the number of cultural

components being taught in this level. The possible outcome of the study is to find out where the program Cursos de Conversación stands on the teaching of culture, and hopefully from there, recommending continuing with the current methodology or implementing a more culture-oriented approach.

4. Methodology

This project consists of four main stages. First, the researcher analyzed the book used in Level 8. The idea was to identify the activities that were related to culture explicitly. The second stage had to do with a classroom observation. In here, the writer wanted to confirm whether or not the teacher included cultural dimensions in her class and how the learners reacted to this information. Finally, the third and fourth stages were about interviewing the cooperating teacher who was teaching this level and surveying the learners' opinions on different topics related to learning culture through a written questionnaire. Both the questionnaire and the questions for the interview were designed in Spanish. To avoid any misinterpretation of the answers and to obtain more rich data for the analysis English was not going to be used in the instruments.

4.1 Stage 1. Textbook Evaluation Project

4.1.1 Description of the course

The course selected for this project is English Level 8 from Programa de Cursos de Conversación at the University of Costa Rica. This is an intermediate,

general English course. The contents as well as the evaluation have been designed to help learners become proficient users of the language, placing a strong emphasis on the speaking component. The learners of the program are commonly adults, and their ages range from fifteen to sixty years old on average. This is Level 8 out of 12. It is relevant to mention that for this research study, 9 out of the 14 participants started the program from Level 1, and their ages ranged from nineteen to fifty-three.

As this program is going through important evaluation and curriculum changes, the book being piloted at the moment is Four Corners 3 by Cambridge University Press. Taking this into account, by the end of Level 9, learners must have acquired the necessary skills to be considered B1 speakers under the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). To achieve this, learners have a three-hour session twice a week, which means 60 hours of exposure to the language in a 10-week period.

4.1.2 Objectives of the course:

The following information corresponds to the general and specific objectives of the course being analyzed.

General objective: to understand conversations and texts in English and to be able to appropriately communicate orally (and to a lesser extent through writing) at an intermediate level.

Specific objectives:
1. To develop their listening comprehension and oral production in conversations, presentations, and group discussions in class at an intermediate level.
2. To incorporate grammatical and lexical functions, expressions, and structures, as well as pronunciation aspects at an intermediate level in order to maintain conversations on different topics studied in class.
3. To use different strategies to develop the four macro skills (speaking, reading, listening, and writing) and the micro skills (especially vocabulary and grammar).
4. To appreciate and discuss cultural differences between Costa Rica and English-speaking cultures. (Taken from the course outline, Conversational English Level 8)

It is important to highlight that as part of the objectives, learners are expected to make use of lexical expressions, which are in most of the cases culturally-bound, and to appreciate and discuss cultural differences. Having these specific objectives signaling the importance of learning about English-speaking cultures might seem to indicate that teaching about culture is a seminal feature of this language program. Hence, this contributed to the researcher's motivation to know if these objectives were being met.

4.1.3 Textbook

The activities in the book Four Corners 3 (Richards, 2012) are communicative; therefore, they require learners to participate actively in class. Each unit is made up of four lessons. In each of them, one or two language functions are addressed. By the end of every unit, learners have a box with can-do statements so that they can self-evaluate their progress throughout the course. The units studied in this project are 5, 6, 7, and 8.

4.2 Stage 2. Classroom observation report

4.2.1 Procedure

The researcher visited this class on two occasions during Week 5 (out of 10). The course teacher suggested making the observations the second class of Week 5 and the second class of Week 6. Nonetheless, due to time constraints, the author could not afford waiting that much. Hence, he concluded that it was better to visit the class during Week 5 exclusively. It is important to mention that for these visits an instrument was used. It can be found as Appendix 1.

4.3 Stages 3 & 4. Interviews and questionnaires

4.3.1 Procedure

Two weeks after Stage 2, the researcher visited the class one last time. On this occasion, the researcher explained to the group that they were going to answer some questions about their learning about culture in this level by answering a questionnaire (see Appendix 2), while their teacher was going to be interviewed outside of the classroom (see Appendix 3). The stages were completed during the second class of Week 7.

5. Analysis of the Results

5.1 Stage 1. Textbook evaluation project

For this first part, all of the activities from Units 5 to 8 were analyzed. The idea was to find the ones that were explicitly culture-related. Additionally, the writer described the kind of relevance these activities had within the lesson. The researcher analyzed 165 activities in these four units and only 12 of them contained explicit culture-related aspects. These numbers provided the author with enough information to deduce that the culture-related activities in the book are not as relevant as expected because just 7% of them deal with culture explicitly.

For a more detailed account of each unit, the researcher counted the number of the culture-related activities of each of them in Table 2. The fact that 10 out of the 12 culture-related activities in these four units are included in Unit 5 might be due to the fact that this unit has to do with vacationing and travelling. Despite the nature of the topic of this unit, only 24% of the activities are aimed to teach culture explicitly. Because of that, the activities could have incidentally coincided with topics related to culture. This might explain why in Units 6, 7, and 8 there are only 2 more activities related to culture of the 124 included in these three other units. Hence, a very small percentage of the activities are culture-related.

Table 2
Analysis of culture-related activities per unit

Units	Activities related to culture per unit	Number of activities per unit	Percentage of culture-related activities per unit
Unit 5: Our world	10	41	24%
Unit 6: Organizing your time	1	43	2%
Unit 7: Personalities	0	40	0%
Unit 8: The Environment	1	41	2%

Source: compiled by author (2017).

More specifically, Table 3 summarizes the description of the culture-related activities the author found in Unit 5. It must be noted first that out of the 10 culture-related activities identified in this unit, only 5 of them involve speaking as a macro skill. That could be considered as beneficial for the learners, but these 5 speaking activities are proposed by the book authors as pre-tasks, post-tasks, and follow up activities, which can be regarded as marginal activities. It is also important to highlight that one of these speaking activities was the most culturally rich one in Unit 5, yet it was left out and placed as an extra activity at the end of the book. Interestingly, there was only one case in which one of 10 activities was actually the main task within a lesson. This was the one time learners had the opportunity to write about their own cultures and possibly compare it to the target culture. Even though this was a clear, main activity related to culture, it was a writing one, and as this book is used in a conversational course, teachers of this level may not get to carry out this activity in class fully.

Table 3
Description of culture related activities in Unit 5 (Our World)

Name of activity/ Unit	Objective	Procedure	Skills involved	Relevance
Two Amazing Views Unit 5 Activity 2A, Lesson A	Use vocabulary for human-made wonders.	Read the questions posted on a website for visitors to New York City. Which view does the site recommend?	Reading	This is a warm-up activity at the bottom of the page. It does not represent the core activity of the lesson.
Two Amazing Views Unit 5 Activity 2B, Lesson 2	See comparisons with adjectives and nouns in context.	Go over the questions. Have learners answer the questions in pairs or in small groups.	Speaking	It is a follow-up activity to introduce a grammatical structure (comparatives and superlatives).
Interesting and Unknown Facts Unit 5 Activity 1A, Lesson B.	Practice expressing disbelief and saying you don't know.	Ss share what the oldest human-made structures are in their countries and how old they are.	Speaking	It introduces a listening activity. It is a pre-task.
Did you know…? Unit 5 Activity 4A & 4B, Lesson B.	Express disbelief; say they don't know something.	Make a list of three interesting facts about human-made structures and react to what your classmates wrote down.	Writing & Speaking	This is the seminal part of this lesson.
Superlatives with adjectives and nouns Unit 5 Activity 3B, Lesson C.	Practices superlatives with adjectives and nouns.	Make true sentences about your country with the phrases below.	Writing* There were no instructions.	It is a follow-up activity. It does not say what skill should be emphasized. It could have been the core activity of the lesson had it been designed to compare and contrast different cultures.

Planning a visit Unit 5 Activity 5A, Lesson C.	Talk about the best places to go in their country	Imagine that a friend from another country is planning to visit you and asks you the questions in the e-mail below. Discuss your responses.	Speaking	It is a marginal activity placed as an extra practice at the end of the book. It could have been a perfect complement to the previous activity. It could have also been the core activity of this lesson.
The Great Barrier Reef Unit 5 Activity 2A, Lesson D.	Develop skills in listening for specific information.	Listen to a guide talk to two tourists at the Great Barrier Reef. Which statements surprise the tourists?	Listening	It is somewhat important. It is a pre-task.
A natural wonder Unit 5 Activity 3A, Lesson D.	Write a paragraph a natural wonder.	Think of a natural wonder in your country. Answer the questions.	Writing	We consider it a pre-task for the next activity.
A natural wonder Unit 5 Activity 3B, Lesson D.	Write a paragraph about a natural wonder.	Write a paragraph about a natural wonder. Use the model in your answers in part A to help you.	Writing	This is the most important activity in the lesson.
Seven wonders of my country Unit 5 Activity 4A, Lesson D.	Describe natural wonders in your country.	Make a list of the top seven natural or human-made wonders in your country. Why are they wonderful? Take notes.	Speaking	This is a post-task. It is somewhat marginal.

Source: compiled by author (2017).

Table 4 provides a short description of the one culture-related activity in Unit 6. This activity is the only one that has to do with a cultural perspective in the four units analyzed. In it, it is implied that learners must speak and share their opinion on what they think it is happening in some pictures, which show how a person procrastinated and later failed to meet his deadlines. As learners are exposed to how Americans perceive the concept of time, they can agree or disagree with it and refer to their own perception of how valuable time is in their culture.

Table 4
Description of culture related activities in Unit 6 (Organizing your time)

Name of activity/ Unit	Objective	Procedure	Skills involved	Relevance
Warm-Up	Preview the topic and discuss organizing time.	Look at the pictures. What's happening? Do you think the man organizes his time well?	Speaking (implied)	It is the warm-up activity for Unit 6. Learners will be able to express their perception of time. It is a relatively important activity.

Source: compiled by author (2017).

As there were no activities related to culture in Unit 7, Table 5 shows the information related to the culture-related activity in Unit 8. Even though this activity could be used to compare how different cultures deal with environmental issues, the focus of the activity is placed on the grammar element to be studied.

Table 5
Description of culture related activities in Unit 8 (The Environment)

Name of activity/ Unit	Objective	Procedure	Skills involved	Relevance
Our community Unit 8 Activity 5A Lesson A	Discuss environmental problems.	What environmental problems does your community have? Complete the sentences.	Speaking	It is somewhat relevant. It does provide learners with room for extra practice. However, the feature to be practiced is the grammar element in the unit.

Source: compiled by author (2017).

By and large, the approach to culture of most activities was merely implicit. There were no sections in which the instructions or tasks indicated culture-related information overtly. After examining the Teacher's Guide, the researcher also noticed that there were no specific references for instructors to teach culture, either. What is more, in these activities the cultural elements to be learned were clear, visible features of culture. Only one of the activities dealt with a tacit feature of the American culture: time management. This was the only activity that showed an American cultural perspective. The rest of the culture-related activities were related to "touristy" information that reflected surface level culture. For this reason, the estimate of the types of cultural knowledge represented shows that out of 12 activities related to culture 11 of them dealt with visible features of culture, which accounts for 92% of the total percentage. This indicates that the book authors may have favored presenting the dimension of cultural products over practices and perspectives. Additionally, the relevance of the activities varied from core tasks to follow-ups or secondary pre/post tasks. Clearly, the goal of the book is not to teach culture. Instead, the book uses a more traditional approach, focusing on teaching grammar, speaking, listening, and writing skills.

5.2 Stage 2. Classroom observation

For this stage, the researcher observed the two classes completely and divided the analysis into two main parts (Class 1 and Class 2).

5.2.1 Class 1

There was no explanation of any topic related to the dimensions of culture because the learners were mainly practicing for an oral presentation that they had to deliver in pairs. Consequently, this feature was absent. The teacher asked the learners to sit in pairs. Then, she distributed pieces of paper with different topics related to Unit 6 (Organizing your time). In them, the learners were given a topic to discuss, such as time management, plans for the weekend, taking a phone message, among others. These topics could have reflected some dimensions of culture, but there was no explicit evidence to say that that was the teacher's intention. Additionally, the pieces of paper did not include a context or a model for the learners to perform one or the other practice in the target language. The situations did not have culture components since they were not related to culture. To exemplify, some of the situations were:

"Describe how you manage your time. Ask and answer questions."

"Talk about your plans for the weekend. Ask and answer questions."

Most of the situations were related to making plans for the weekend. The focus of this activity was to use the present continuous verb tense to describe their plans. Because of this, the researcher could see that most of the situations were grammar-focused. The situation that had to do with time management was not used to compare how Americans manage their time versus how Costa Ricans do so. It was mainly a description of a weekly routine. The learners resorted to using a limited approach to it by just describing

what they normally do every day. Just one pair talked about different techniques to manage their time effectively.

Evidently, the outcome expected was competence, and more specifically language proficiency. As this book has been designed to accomplish can-do statements mapped to the Common European Framework of Reference, learners are expected to: (a) ask and talk about weekend plans, (b) offer to take a message, (c) leave a message, (d) make requests, promises, and offers, (e) discuss ways to manage time effectively.

All of the learning outcomes in the situations given to the learners for their oral presentations reflected language proficiency outcomes without a doubt. At first look, it seemed that these situations could also expose the learners to cultural knowledge about different products, practices, and perspectives in different matters; however, the way they were used only requested the learners to show command of grammar structures and language proficiency, not taking into account the target culture. As explained before, this language program does not specify clear and concise culture learning outcomes in their course syllabus; consequently, the instructor does not seem to be including cultural contents in class that would yield one or the other cultural learning outcome other than general language proficiency.

5.2.2 Class 2

For the first part of the class, the teacher brought copies of the book American Crime Stories—a compilation of short stories and reading comprehension exercises— to the class. The dimension of products, in this case,

literature was explicitly presented to the learners through reading one of the short stories in the book. However, the way the materials were used did not reflect learning culture directly, but rather as a result of being exposed to them. The teacher did not describe how or why this had to do with the target culture; instead, she just played a track so that the learners could read along. This activity then was solely used as a reading comprehension one. Initially, the researcher thought that the book American Crime Stories was going to be used to teach about a cultural product explicitly. However, there were no comments related to the information presented in the story. The teacher's only purpose was to use it for reading comprehension. In this short story, the learners were implicitly exposed to a practice and a perspective. Nonetheless, these two features were totally absent when the learners were assigned their reading comprehension questions. What is more, the content of this book had nothing to do with the contents or objectives of the course. The short stories in it might be somewhat related to the target culture if used properly, but that was not the case in this class.

For the second part of the class, the teacher covered Unit 7, which had to do with Personalities. For this section, she wrote some questions on the board, and the learners were to answer them in pairs. One of the questions was "Do people in Costa Rica have a specific personality? How is it?" To this question most of the learners in the classroom made negative comments about Costa Ricans and their culture (irresponsible, "alcoholic," not punctual). The most salient comment was that

Costa Ricans are lazy and that they favor lying. To this, the teacher made comments such as "Costa Ricans are definitely lazy, alcoholic, and yes, liars." When a learner said that Costa Rica is the happiest place on Earth, she replied with a comment such as "That's why we're the happiest people on Earth; we're lying about that, too," and as a follow-up question she asked, "Do you think Costa Ricans are independent?" For this, she explained —as a perspective— why in Costa Rica it is common to see people over the age of 30 living with their parents while in other countries that is considered not so common. She explained how 18-year olds leave home in America and what they would think of you if you said that you are a 30-year-old, living with your parents. To be more explicit, she used the phrase "You're not normal in other countries if you're an adult who lives with your parents." In her attempt to develop the topic further, she also made the following comment: "People in Panama are impolite, right?" Consequently, many people reacted to this by saying "Yes, they are really impolite. They are weird and rude," showing a judgmental disapproval of their culture, which was originated and kindled by the teacher.

In this class, some learners asked for the meaning of several words and the translation of others, but the teacher failed to provide them with correct answers. To exemplify, she did not know how to refer to the dwarfs in the fairy tale Snow White. She said, "in English there are many kinds of enanos and they have subdivisions and more, so I don't know how to call these ones." This showed then a lack of knowing about literature, a product

in the target language. Also, she did not know how to say the word "crease" when asked how people say arrugas (in bed sheets). She said that of course she knew about "wrinkles," but she was not sure if she could use the word in that case. Hence, this could have been an opportunity to expose how language and culture are linked because one would need the cultural knowledge to understand when to say "wrinkle" and when to say "crease." Furthermore, one learner introduced the concept of "framing" when analyzing the short story. He asked: "so professor, can we say that he was framed, right?" and the teacher hesitated in her answer, repeated the word several times, and said "I would prefer the term involved." In fact, the character the learner was talking about was actually framed, but it seemed the instructor did not know the concept of framing. Under other circumstances, the researcher thought this would not have been considered as something relevant, but the fact that the book was all about crime made this word a pivotal element in this lesson.

There were some cultural misunderstandings that were not addressed or corrected by the teacher, and most of them had to do with L1 interference issues. To illustrate, when talking about personal traits, the teacher asked: "Are you ambitious?" and most of the learners said that being ambitious was really bad and that people should not be ambitious. Based on what they were saying, the researcher knew that what they meant was the use of the word ambitious in Spanish to describe "being greedy." However, the teacher never made that clarification and also supported their opinion, saying that people should not be very ambitious.

What is more, the teacher translated some Spanish sayings literally into English to make some of her points. She had to provide different examples so that people would understand what she was translating into English. For example, she said that "good jealous" was a good trait. By this she meant envidia de la buena in Spanish. Instead of using "healthy jealousy" she preferred using a literal translation that caused some confusion. The teacher also used the expression "You only see the black spot in the sheet" when talking about people who tend to focus on the negative aspects of a situation. However, after consulting different native speakers of English, they confessed that they had never heard that expression. They said that something similar could be "to see the glass half-empty." Consequently, because these expressions had been literally translated, it was really difficult to find examples in the target culture because they reflected the native culture of the teacher.

Both the situations for the oral presentations and the extra materials the teacher provided the learners with had lots of potential to teach them about American products, practices, and perspectives, while developing cultural awareness. The teacher could have addressed the culture-specific understanding outcome by making explicit the connections between the content studied and the context in which they took place. Even though the teacher did try to include some culture in the second class, the researcher believes that she did so because she knew what the class observation was about. Consequently, she tried to expand on topics related to cultural perspectives to make sure that she was mentioning cultural components in the class. Nonetheless, the lack of culturally-sensitive feedback and the absence of planned culture learning outcomes generated conflict and prejudice against other cultures and that of the learners. Based on this, the researcher believes that some instructors do not make that connection explicit because they take for granted the fact that the learners might make that link on their own, either because they know about the American culture or because they are exposed to different technologies and social networks that can provide them with cultural knowledge. Nonetheless, when these connections are not clearly described as features of the target culture, they may go unnoticed, as it was the case in this course. When the learners were asked in the questionnaire to write about a cultural practice, product, or perspective that they had studied in this course, 50% of them said they did not remember one in particular. What this shows is that when instructors do not address culture learning outcomes as such in class, learners may fail to perceive them and, consequently, understand them.

5.3 Stage 3. Data collected from the learners' forms

For this section of the research study, the writer created a questionnaire for the learners of this course (see Appendix 2). In it, the first eight questions were yes/no questions mainly about Moran's dimensions of culture. Also, the purpose was to find out if the learners consider they are learning culture in this class and if the course instructor teaches culture explicitly. The second eight open-ended

questions were designed to obtain data on specific dimensions of culture taught in this course, how satisfied the learners are with the teaching of culture and whether the language program should add, maintain or reduce the load of culture content being taught at this level. Since the researcher had been some of these learners' instructor in the past, the entire questionnaire was given in Spanish as a way to reduce the anxiety these learners could feel when dealing with a former instructor. The idea was not to make them feel exposed to being evaluated again in an activity that had nothing to do with their course evaluation.

After analyzing these results, a contradiction takes place. When the participants were asked if in this class "culture" was taught, 86% percent of them answered Yes. Initially, the researcher thought that this may indicate that culture actually played an important role in this class. However, 78% of them said that the teacher does not take the time to teach culture explicitly. At the same time, when asked about cultural practices and perspectives, 86% said that there have not been any explicit explanations of cultural practices, and 71% said there have not been any explicit explanations of cultural perspectives. Because of this, the writer later hypothesized that if the participants were not learning culture from the explicit instruction of the teacher, they were acquiring it from the

materials used in class. Nonetheless, 78% of them said that the materials do not include a strong cultural component; this fact reinforces the writer's findings in the textbook report. What they did agree on was that the culture of the target language being studied must be studied in class; 93% of them agreed on this, to be more specific. If one goes back to the first percentage, 86% of the participants believe that they are learning culture, but they specifically said that they have not studied cultural practices or perspectives from either the instructor or the book. Interestingly, 71% answered question 2 (whether or not cultural differences between English speaking cultures and Costa Rica were explicitly taught) affirmatively. Consequently, they think they are learning culture but when asked specifically about any of the dimensions of culture explained in Moran (2011) —included in the instruments with examples and accessible terminology—, the results reveal a clear absence of these elements.

Even though 86% of the learners believe that they are learning culture, when asked about how satisfied they are in terms of their learning of cultural components in this specific course, the average satisfaction rating was a 5.7%, which made the researcher ponder over the causes of this discrepancy. The ratings can be seen in the following table:

Table 6
Learners' average satisfaction rating of cultural components in Level 8

Scale from 1-10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Number of participants	1	1	0	0	4	3	2	2	0	1
Percentage	7.1	7.1	0	0	28.5	21.4	14.2	14.2	0	7.1

Source: compiled by author (2017).

Because of the multiple factors that can influence a learner's opinion about one single course, the researcher also asked them to indicate how satisfied they feel with how culture-related components have been taught in all of the other levels of the language program. The numbers did not change much. In this case, the average satisfaction rating was of 6. It is worth mentioning that 64% of these learners started the program from Level 1. This means that they have been part of the transition from one textbook to the other, but the low ratings for both book series show no variation, as seen in Table 7. Additionally, there were no comments indicating that in previous courses, which made use of a different book series, cultural components were explicitly taught or that other teachers in previous levels did emphasize cultural elements.

Table 7
Learners' average satisfaction rating of cultural components throughout the English program in Cursos de Conversación.

Scale from 1-10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Number of participants	1	0	1	1	2	3	2	3	0	1
Percentage	7.1	0	7.1	7.1	14.2	21.4	14.2	21.4	0	7.1

Source: compiled by author (2017).

In this section of the survey, the learners' discontent with the level of culture being taught in Level 8 is made evident. With ratings of 5.7 and 6, the learners show that this program lacks cultural components and 78.5% of them expect it to increase in the future. A solid 93% of the learners also

stated that culture-related elements must be included in a class when studying a foreign language, and evidently this is not being accomplished at the moment.

As described in Table 7, the results demonstrate that the lack of cultural components is not determined by the book series used in this language program. The author can affirm this because the ratings that describe the learners' satisfaction in terms of learning culture in this level are practically the same as the ones they provided for their overall satisfaction in terms of learning culture throughout the program. It can be stated, then, that both book series have been part of what has caused learners' dissatisfaction, but the author cannot affirm that this is the only source of discontent. The fact that there were no comments about how teachers in previous levels included or did not include culture in their classes intrigued the author because he thought that the learners would write something about their experiences learning culture in other courses. This suggests that what they learned was not memorable enough or that they actually did not learn culture-related information. It is worth mentioning that when the learners were asked to complete the phrase "learning about culture is…" in the questionnaire, most of them agreed that culture had to do with different lifestyles, traditions, and beliefs and that culture had an important role when learning a language. However, one learner stated that learning a language implied learning a new world view, showing Moran's perception of what learning culture is really about.

5.4 Stage 4. Data collected from the teacher's interview

To interview the course instructor, a questionnaire similar to the one given to the learners was used (see Appendix 3). The focus of the first eight yes/no questions was mainly to determine if the instructor teaches Moran's dimensions of culture in her class. Additionally, the purpose was to find out if the instructor considers that she is teaching culture and if she is doing that explicitly. The second eight open-ended questions were designed to obtain data on how the instructor is teaching specific dimensions of culture, how satisfied she is with her actual teaching of culture and whether the language program should add, maintain or reduce the load of culture content being taught at this level. The instructor was asked if she wanted to have the interview in English or Spanish, and since the researcher was also Costa Rican, she decided to have the interview in Spanish.

Similar to the data obtained from the learners' surveys, the teacher's interview revealed some misconceptions about what teaching culture is. For example, at the beginning, she said that she does teach the cultural elements included in the textbook, but she stated that she normally does not go beyond that. Consequently, she only covers the material the textbook tells her to teach. At some point during the interview, she was asked to explain about one the topics or activities that she has talked about/done to cover one of Moran's cultural dimensions —not using technical words—. To this she had no answer. A moment later, the teacher said in the interview that she does not teach culture beyond the

contents of the book but believes that she has explained differences between the cultures. However, when asked about specific examples of the cultural dimensions that she has taught, she seems hesitant and points out that she has not taught those. The researcher can see that she realized in that moment that her perception of what teaching culture really implies did not reflect her actual teaching practice. At the end of the interview when she was asked to rate her teaching practice in terms of teaching culture, she said she would rate herself with a 7. What can be inferred from this is that throughout the interview she might have realized that Moran's cultural dimensions were more complex to define and implement in class than expected. Additionally, the teacher explains that she thinks that the book does not have a strong culture component, and she asserts that it is necessary to increase the culture content in this level. She thinks this could be achieved by creating extra materials developed by the teachers of the program. She says the book does not show what the American culture is really like but includes video activities that are staged and misrepresent the way people behave in real life. The teacher also provides some recommendations to improve the teaching of culture in this language program. For instance, she says that the learners in this level could have real interaction with native English-speaking people, taking advantage of the exchange programs the university has with different American colleges.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Out of 165 activities included in Units 5, 6, 7, and 8, only 12 were explicitly related to culture. This clearly indicates that this book has a weak cultural focus. The learners in this program will not develop culture-specific understanding or culture-general understanding if they are not openly exposed to these culture learning outcomes. Cultural products, practices, and perspectives are not being explicitly taught in this language program. Based on the book report, the classroom observation, and the instruments used, culture does not play an important role in this language program. 79% of the learners agree that this language program should include more cultural components. The learners' rating their overall satisfaction in terms of culture with a 6 shows a negative perception of this specific feature in the English language program. Because of the lack of clearly established culture learning outcomes in the course syllabus and in the textbook used for this level, the author could see that when culture learning outcomes are not explicitly mentioned in the course syllabus or in the textbook used, teachers might tend to disregard them completely, as it was the case of the course analyzed.

For this project, the author only analyzed Units 5, 6, 7 and 8 from the book Four Corners 3. The author recommends doing further research in terms of studying the other eight units pending. All of the data collected for this part was limited to how culture-related content was taught in Level 8. To understand how the book writers included cultural components in this

book, a more in-depth study of the entire book series would be necessary, using Moran's framework for studying the different dimensions of culture as the guiding principle. As 78% of the learners stated, the teachers who work for this program should make connections between language/content and culture evident. Based on the questionnaire given, a vast majority of the learners believe that their instructors are not taking their time to teach culture explicitly in class. That is why 76% of them said that this course should include more cultural components. The researcher recommends including in each instructor's evaluation a specific item that would ask learners to say how much teachers are making connections explicit between language and culture. The syllabus of this course clearly establishes that one of its specific objectives is to "appreciate cultural differences among English-speaking cultures and Costa Rica." Although 71% of the learners believe that this is being accomplished, the author has already pointed out that the learners rate their learning of cultural components in this program with a 6 out of 10. As in the previous recommendation, the researcher suggests that this program's administrators include another item in the course evaluation, asking each learner to rate each instructor's performance in terms of how much they have helped learners achieve this specific course objective. Learners and teachers alike might have the wrong idea about what teaching/learning culture is about. In most of the cases, teachers believe that culture is an "extra feature" in their textbooks and because of this, the researcher recommends the administrators of this program to find ways to help

their teachers develop lesson plans that would address cultural dimensions and culture learning outcomes explicitly that would have already been concretely detailed in the course objectives.

7. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

It is important to mention the methodological limitations of this research study. As previously indicated, a limitation of this study is that for the textbook report analysis, the writer only analyzed four units of the book Four Corners 3. Also, only one group of learners from Level 8 was observed and given a questionnaire. This offers a very limited number of participants. Hence, their experience cannot be taken as a representative sample of the entire population of learners enrolled in this language program. For this reason, future research would benefit from the use of a larger sample of participants and classes observed. At the same time, a thorough analysis of the entire book series can shed light on how culture is presented explicitly thought the entire book series.

It would also be relevant to identify the kind of formal instruction the teachers of this program may have in terms of teaching culture. Adding a question that provides future researchers with this information may contribute to understanding teachers' pedagogical practices in terms of fostering or ignoring cultural elements. Equally important, future researches can interview the administrators of this program to learn how important culture learning outcomes are in these conversational courses and to determine the suitability of the culture-related course objectives

throughout the 12 levels of this English conversational program.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Class Observation form

The class being observed is Level 8, taught at Cursos de Conversación (UCR). The course teacher agreed to be observed during Week 5 (out of 10).

Abbreviations used in this form: Teacher:Tr   Students: Ss

Element to be observed	Explicit/ Implicit	Absent	Relevance within lesson	Evidence
1. Does Tr explain any of the 5 dimensions of culture in her activities?				
2. Does Tr execute activities that reflect any of the 5 cultural knowings framework?				
3. Does Tr bring extra materials to cover cultural elements that are not included in the textbook?				
4. Do Ss ask for cultural information while the lesson takes place? Do they obtain valid answers?				
5. Does Tr develop the culture-related activities included in the units being studied?				
6. What are the possible outcomes of the tasks developed by Tr?				
7. Are the instructions given by Tr perceived by the evaluator as low-context or high-context messages?				

8. How are proxemics and chronemics perceived among Tr and Ss?				
9. Does Tr provide culturally-sensitive feedback?				
10. Are there any cultural misunderstandings? If so, what causes them? How does Tr resolve them?				

Other comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for learners

El siguiente cuestionario está dirigido a los estudiantes del Nivel 8 del programa de Cursos de Conversación de la Universidad de Costa Rica. El propósito es reunir insumos sobre la percepción de la importancia de la enseñanza de la cultura en los cursos libres de inglés que ofrece la UCR en este nivel en específico. La siguiente encuesta es total y completamente anónima. Asimismo, si considera que no se siente en capacidad de contestar una pregunta o simplemente no se siente a gusto con la información solicitada, puede dejar la respuesta en blanco.

Edad: _____   Nivel desde el cual inició este programa: _____

Instrucciones. Para esta primera parte, por favor contestar las siguientes preguntas con Sí o No.

Pregunta	Sí	No
1. ¿Se aprende sobre cultura en esta clase?		
2. ¿Se dan explicaciones sobre las diferencias culturales entre las culturas angloparlantes y Costa Rica de una manera explícita?		
3. ¿Contiene el material utilizado en clase un componente fuerte de cultura?		

4. ¿Se han dado explicaciones explícitas sobre cómo participar en ciertos contextos sociales (fuera de la cultura costarricense)? Por ejemplo, ¿se han dado explicaciones sobre "cómo y cuándo utilizar el lenguaje verbal y no verbal para felicitar a algún conocido por haber tenido un bebé?		
5. ¿Se han dado explicaciones explícitas sobre el porqué las personas angloparlantes tienen ciertas creencias que los motivan a vivir su vida de una manera diferente a la costarricense? Por ejemplo, ¿se ha explicado por qué los estadounidenses creen en el "Sueño Americano"?		
6. ¿La docente ha dedicado tiempo en clase para enseñar cultura explícitamente?		
7. ¿Se debería enseñar la cultura del idioma meta en una clase?		
8. ¿Cree que las clases deberían integrar más componentes culturales?		

Para la segunda parte, les solicitamos contestar estas preguntas con toda la información que puedan proveer. Sus respuestas enriquecerán tanto este curso como el programa en sí.

1. Complete la siguiente frase. Aprender sobre cultura es aprender:

_____

2. ¿Qué conocimientos culturales ha aprendido en esta clase? Por favor mencione alguno en específico.

_____

3. ¿Considera que la enseñanza de la cultura es necesaria para desarrollar la competencia oral? ¿Por qué?

_____

4. ¿Cuál es el componente cultural más contrastante con la cultura costarricense que ha aprendido en este curso?

_____

5. ¿Cuál es su grado de satisfacción del 1 al 10 con respecto a la enseñanza de componentes culturales en este curso en específico? (1= no satisfecho/ 10=muy satisfecho) ¿Cómo justifica su calificación?

_____

6. ¿Cuál es su grado de satisfacción del 1 al 10 con respecto a la enseñanza de componentes culturales en el Programa de Cursos de Conversación? (1= no satisfecho/ 10=muy satisfecho) ¿Cómo justifica su calificación?

_____

7. ¿Tiene alguna recomendación para el docente de este curso para aumentar, mantener o disminuir el componente de la enseñanza de la cultura en este nivel?

_____

8. ¿Tiene alguna recomendación para el Programa de Cursos de Conversación de este curso para aumentar, mantener o disminuir el componente de la enseñanza de la cultura en este programa?

_____

¡Muchas gracias!

Appendix 3: Questionnaire for the course instructor

El siguiente cuestionario está dirigido a la docente del Nivel 8 del programa de Cursos de Conversación de la Universidad de Costa Rica. El propósito es reunir insumos sobre la percepción de la importancia de la enseñanza de la cultura en los cursos libres de inglés que ofrece la UCR en este nivel en específico. Si considera que no se siente en capacidad de contestar una pregunta o simplemente no se siente a gusto con la información solicitada, puede dejar la respuesta en blanco.

Número de veces que ha impartido este nivel: _____
Año desde el cual trabaja para el programa: _____

Instrucciones. Para esta primera parte, por favor contestar las siguientes preguntas con Sí o No.

Pregunta	Sí	No
1. ¿Enseña cultura en esta clase?		
2. ¿Da explicaciones sobre las diferencias culturales entre las culturas angloparlantes y Costa Rica de una manera explícita?		
3. ¿Considera que el material utilizado en clase contiene un componente fuerte de cultura?		
4. ¿Ha brindado explicaciones explícitas sobre cómo participar en ciertos contextos sociales (fuera de la cultura costarricense)? Por ejemplo, ¿ha dado explicaciones sobre "cómo y cuándo utilizar el lenguaje verbal y no verbal para felicitar a algún conocido por tener haber tenido un bebé?		

5. ¿Ha dado explicaciones explícitas sobre el porqué las personas angloparlantes tienen ciertas creencias que los motivan a vivir su vida de una manera diferente a la costarricense? Por ejemplo, ¿ha explicado por qué los estadounidenses creen en el "Sueño Americano"?		
6. ¿Ha dedicado tiempo en clase para enseñar cultura explícitamente?		
7. ¿Considera que se debería enseñar la cultura del idioma meta en una clase?		
8. ¿Cree que las clases deberían integrar más componentes culturales?		

Para la segunda parte, les solicitamos contestar estas preguntas con toda la información que puedan proveer. Sus respuestas enriquecerán tanto este curso como el programa en sí.

1. Complete la siguiente frase. Enseñar cultura es enseñar sobre:
_____

2. ¿Qué conocimientos culturales ha enseñado en esta clase? Por favor mencione alguno en específico.
_____

3. ¿Considera que la enseñanza de la cultura es necesaria para desarrollar la competencia oral? ¿Por qué?
_____

4. ¿Cuál es el componente cultural más contrastante con la cultura costarricense que ha enseñado en este curso?
_____

5. ¿Cuál es su grado de satisfacción del 1 al 10 con respecto a su práctica docente en términos de la enseñanza de componentes culturales en este curso en específico? (1= no satisfecha/ 10=muy satisfecha) ¿Cómo justifica su calificación?
_____

6. ¿Cuál es su grado de satisfacción del 1 al 10 con respecto a su práctica docente en términos de la enseñanza de componentes culturales en el Programa de Cursos de Conversación? (1= no satisfecha/ 10=muy satisfecha) ¿Cómo justifica su calificación?
_____

7. ¿Tiene alguna recomendación para el programa de este curso para aumentar, mantener o disminuir el componente de la enseñanza de la cultura en este nivel?
_____

8. ¿Tiene alguna recomendación para el Programa de Cursos de Conversación de este curso para aumentar, mantener o disminuir el componente de la enseñanza de la cultura en este programa?

¡Muchas gracias!