

A Qualitative Analysis of EFL Textbooks for Primary School Children in Croatia from a Sociolinguistic Perspective

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A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF EFL TEXTBOOKS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL
CHILDREN IN CROATIA FROM A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

Submitted in partial fulfilments of the requirements for the M.A. in English Language and
Literature and Italian Language and Literature at the University of Rijeka

SUPERVISOR: Dr Branka Drljača Margić

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Abstract

The present study aims to provide a qualitative analysis of a selection of English textbooks used in Croatian early primary school education from a sociolinguistic point of view, given that this seems to be a perspective less frequently represented in the evaluation of foreign language textbooks. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, the study offers an analysis of nine textbooks belonging to three different series. The results indicate that, despite the significant progress and numerous changes implemented in structuring foreign language textbooks, there is still room for improvement in terms of ethnic inclusivity, relativisation of stereotypes, reduction of factual content and raising awareness of the global dimension of the English language by acknowledging and promoting the somewhat disregarded yet official English language varieties.

Keywords: EFL textbooks, English language varieties, inclusivity, intercultural competence, primary school education, sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

Contemporary foreign language classroom has undoubtedly changed and evolved over the past few decades, progressively switching the focus from grammar, translation and memorising vocabulary to opening up space for culture, inclusivity, social skills and values. How that has been realised in Croatia, particularly in the context of teaching English as a foreign language, still remains somewhat under-researched, especially when it comes to early primary school education.

Early primary school children are a sensitive group of young learners with limited ability to understand concepts and highly abstract content. Their learning process consists of gradually building up on what they have so far learned through highly demonstrative, concrete form of teaching. Moreover, their ability to read and write is at its infancy and their discipline and attention are yet to be exercised. Their learning ability, however, is extremely high, as their brains are similar to sponges, absorbing almost everything they encounter thanks to their plasticity. The aforementioned concreteness, on the other hand, may impel young learners to take things quite literally and perceive them in a rather absolute way.

It is for this reason that sociolinguistic and cultural topics are to be handled with particular attention, care and balance, as well as caution, in order to enable young learners to mediate between cultures without having formed stereotypical and prejudiced images of specific social groups due to misrepresentation and/or poor teaching choices.

Major responsibility is, naturally, on the teacher, whose teaching styles and choices will, without a doubt, affect the children's learning process. The teacher, however, is not and should never be alone in the process, which is why there are many teaching resources and materials that the teacher may choose from in order to provide their students with the best possible learning experience. One of the main teaching tools is the textbook, the choice of which may be extremely challenging, as textbooks are required to meet a vast array of very specific needs of the students.

English textbooks used in Croatian schools are evaluated on a statal and local level and their formation, publication and distribution are defined by Croatian laws and legal norms. Each teacher is entitled to select the textbook they find to be the most in line with their teaching programme and national curriculum. While there have been significant, widely acknowledged improvements in terms of grammar and vocabulary units in the textbooks, the

sociocultural aspects of the textbooks often seem to fall into a secondary position, and even more so when it comes to beginner's textbooks.

The present study was conducted with the scope of addressing some of the noted gaps in the field. Its primary purpose lies in providing an evaluation of a selection of English textbooks used in Croatian primary schools from a sociolinguistic perspective.

Firstly, a theoretical framework will be presented, after which the methodology and purpose will be explained in close detail. The results will be presented in the order of the posed research questions, followed by discussion and, finally, conclusion, addressing both the advantages and the limitations of the study, as well as the possibility of further research related to the sociolinguistic dimension of foreign language teaching and learning.

2. Theoretical background

The historical profile of foreign language teaching and learning is an extensive one – from grammar focus, rewriting and copying texts, and memorising word lists to translational methods and, ultimately, modern-day communicative and referential approaches. This overview will, however, focus only on the contemporary findings presented in the course of the 20th and 21st century, which relate to the implementation of sociolinguistic findings in the foreign language classroom.

2.1. Sociolinguistic and sociocultural implications in language teaching and learning

In the second half of the 20th century, language learning and language teaching benefitted significantly from the ground-breaking research of Dell Hymes (1966), Michael Canale (1980) and Merrill Swain (1980). Their theories on communicative competence and its importance in mastering a language set the base for revising and improving the way language was taught, considering that, apart from grammatical/linguistic and discourse/strategic knowledge, equal importance was given to sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence. This switched the focus from prioritising grammar to equipping the learner with sociolinguistic and cultural knowledge that would allow them to mediate between cultures in different communicative contexts.

One of the more recent ways of fostering the integration of sociolinguistic and sociocultural factors in foreign language acquisition is intercultural competence or, more specifically, the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in the English as a second language (EL2) curricula. Byram (1997) views ICC as the learner's ability to interact with people of different background, beliefs and culture in a foreign language, accommodating and relating appropriately to given cultural contexts. This implies a high degree of social, linguistic and cultural awareness in different communicative situations involving culturally diverse interlocutors. Deardorff's (2006) study, on the other hand, indicates that a consensus on what exactly the term "intercultural competence" intends has not yet been reached due to the complexity of culture, attitudes and skills in mediating between cultures. According to the Language Policy Division's (LPD) *Guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education* (2010), the primary aim of ICC is to enable speakers to mediate between different cultures, social groups and communicative environments, as well as "to make cognitive and affective connections between past and new

experiences of alterity” (LPD, 2010, p. 8). It is, therefore, clear that language learning does not and, in fact, cannot revolve merely around linguistic competence and direct verbal communication but also has to integrate and correlate to skills and knowledge related to various extralinguistic factors, such as different social norms, positions, cultural diversity, cultural contexts and similar.

Having noted this strong correlation between language learning and sociocultural factors in many of his observations back in the 1980s and 1990s, Dr Bennett devised the now well-known *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* (DMIS), which he revised in 2013. His theory outlines six developmental stages of sensitivity to cultural difference, which form a continuum of positions and ways in which people generally perceive and experience cultural differences:

- 1) Denial → suppressing the awareness of cultural diversity and failing to understand its relevance;
- 2) Defence → enforcing a negative critical attitude towards other cultures and using stereotypes in a negative way to widen the gap between “us” and “them”;
- 3) Minimisation → focusing on experiences, worldviews and similarities shared cross-culturally but disregarding the equally important deeper cultural differences;
- 4) Acceptance → developing tolerance for other cultures and striving towards inclusivity, yet still falling into the pitfalls of superficial acceptance;
- 5) Adaptation → taking “the other” perspective, developing empathy for other cultures and shifting between different cultures but struggling to define authenticity due to so many different cultural contexts that surround us;
- 6) Integration → full ability of cross-cultural mediation and constructing cultural bridges (Bennett, 2017, pp. 3-5).

The six stages represent a transition from the so-called ethnocentrism (viewing one’s own culture as central to reality) to ethnorelativism (viewing every culture, including one’s own, as relative to context). Interestingly enough, as shown above, acceptance of other cultures is not the final stage because it takes more than acknowledging and tolerating other cultures to obtain true intercultural competence; it takes accommodating different cultural contexts and being able to mediate between different cultural worldviews (Bennett, 2017).

Snow (2015), in addition, distinguishes between intercultural competence and culture learning. The former, which has been much more common in educational practice, stands for

factual knowledge about particular cultures, while the latter implies a solid competence “based at least as heavily on skills and habits as on knowledge” (Snow, 2015, p. 286). In relation to this distinction, Barac & Košuta (2011) emphasize the fact that foreign culture in the classroom is mainly observed from the perspective of one’s own culture, which often leads to generalisation and misconception. The most common way of generating the two is poor use of stereotypes, which – when used inappropriately – may paint an inaccurate picture of the target culture. Stereotypes as such, by contrast, cannot be considered inherently bad or futile. They should be relativised and explained to learners (especially the young ones) by their language teacher (Barac & Košuta, 2011).

When focusing on the English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) classroom in particular, Ryan (2012) underlines the fact that the number of EL2 speakers has significantly exceeded the number of native English speakers worldwide, which raises the question of “the ownership of the language” (Ryan, 2012; Crystal, 2003) because “in many parts of the world, English is no longer viewed as being attached to a specific culture or nation” (Ryan, 2012, p. 423). This might be precisely why the native-like speaker paradigm in EFL seems to be slowly becoming a matter of the past (Blažević, 2021).

As for the Croatian EFL classroom, English has been predominantly associated with two countries, England and the USA, which means that the varieties taught at school have alternated only between Standard British or Standard American English, and, between the two, the British variety has been much more common. According to Vodopija-Krstanović & Brala-Vukanović (2012), the reason for this is that:

[...] teaching is embedded in the sociocultural context and decisions relative to the teaching and learning of English are influenced by tradition and socially situated beliefs and practices (e.g. it seems appropriate to teach what we were taught, and thus 'pure' English varieties tend to be favoured, in particular BE).

Outside of the context of the foreign language classroom, intercultural competence seems to no longer be seen merely as a matter of foreign language acquisition (FLA) for the purposes of preparing learners for life or temporary stays abroad. Harper (2019, p. 49), for instance, claims that “given current trends toward globalisation, [...] a student may very well need intercultural communication skills even if he/she never leaves his/her own country”.

In addition, Crystal (2003) explains that the globalisation of English through its historical, political, cultural and educational dimension, underlining the fact that English was simply “in

the right place at the right time” (Crystal, 2003, p. 120), resulting in becoming the language of economy, politics, education, technology and many other sectors essential for the progress of humanity.

2.2. Recommendations of The Council of Europe

One of the main promoters and representatives of ICC implementation in European school curricula is The Council of Europe, a European authority advocating language diversity and language learning within educational systems since 1954. The Council of Europe is also the creator of the Language Education Policy and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), which are the two main documents recommended to form the base of national language syllabi in European countries.

The Council of Europe recognises and actively encourages the development of sociolinguistic competence in foreign language learners. What is intended by the term of *sociolinguistic competence* is being familiar with: “markers of social relations, politeness conventions, expressions of folk wisdom, register differences, [and] dialect and accent” (LPD, 2010, p. 33). The executive version of the *Guide* affirms:

Analysing the socio-linguistic context and school culture is particularly important: language varieties present, perceptions of languages and plurilingualism, requirements and existing ways of meeting them, teaching traditions, verbal behaviour expected, etc. (LPD, 2010, p. 5).

Furthermore, the CEFR-Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2018) builds upon the work of Hymes (1966), Canale (1980) and Swain (1980), featuring, among others, a chapter on sociolinguistic competence in which the key concepts of sociolinguistic appropriateness are listed as follows:

- ❖ using polite forms and showing awareness of politeness conventions;
- ❖ performing language functions in an appropriate way (at lower levels in a neutral register);
- ❖ socialising, following basic routines at lower levels, without requiring the interlocutor(s) to behave differently (from B2) and employing idiomatic expressions, allusive usage and humour (at C levels);
- ❖ recognising sociocultural cues, especially those pointing to differences, and acting accordingly;
- ❖ adopting an appropriate register (from B2) (Council of Europe, 2018, pp. 139-140).

Although quite a few of the items above refer to language levels higher than A1 and A2, which are mainly associated with primary school children, the Council deems that the basis for these items may be set right from the learners' beginnings, even before starting school education:

In short, the aims of pre-primary schooling in this area are to accommodate language plurality, open children's minds to cultural diversity, establish the status of the language of schooling and familiarise children with its normal conventions, while also - informally and with the help of various illustrations and activities - helping them to master it and realise its potential (LPD, 2010, p. 52).

As shown, sociolinguistic and intercultural competence are inextricable, sometimes even to a point of being used synonymously. The *Guide* promotes intercultural competence as a "transversal objective" (LPD, 2010, p. 30) in language teaching and learning, comprising four key elements: *knowledge*, *comprehension*, *existential competences* and *commitment* (LPD, 2010, p. 18). The former two refer to being familiar with different ways of communicating in multilingual contexts and successfully identifying and juxtaposing similar/different phenomena in different cultures and social groups, while the latter two take a step further from factual knowledge on different cultural contexts and emphasize the importance of curiosity regarding other cultures, awareness of the relativity in cultural references, and the ability of critically assessing and recognising different cultural values, starting from one's own (LPD, 2010). The latter two seem to be rather suitable for teaching in early primary education because they intend to develop awareness and not merely memorise facts and pre-given information.

The aim of teaching and learning sociolinguistic competence in early education, as well as later on, is "to build up a system of (inter)cultural references which [the learners] can mobilise in dealing responsibly and effectively with later intercultural encounters, both direct (exchanges, meetings, etc.) and indirect (media, books, etc.)" (LPD, 2010, p. 21). According to the same document, the sociolinguistic context is formed by analysing particular points of communication, some of which are:

- ❖ the language varieties present in the area;
- ❖ languages and socio-linguistic varieties;
- ❖ languages of nearby frontier regions,
- ❖ languages accessed via the media;

- ❖ the views of learners, teachers, and others on languages (utility, ease of learning, aesthetic qualities, prestige value, path to modernity, prosperity, etc.) and plurilingualism (perceptions of native competence, bilingualism, language diversity, etc.) (LPD, 2010, p. 27).

The language varieties above correlate strongly with Trudgill's (2000) division of aspects related to language (society, social class, ethnicity, sex, social interaction, geography, contact, etc.), as well as to Byram's (1997) models of ICC. Given that the aspects listed can be a rather sensitive area of teaching and discussion, the Council agrees that adequate teacher training is essential (LPD, 2010) for the implementation and realisation of ICC in schools.

2.3. Primary school education and language learning

Early primary school education in Croatia encompasses children from the age of seven to the age of eleven, which coincides with the first four grades of elementary school as well as, to use Piaget's (1936; in Berk, 2008, pp. 284-287) terminology, the concrete operational stage of cognitive development. This means that abstract concepts are fairly difficult for children to understand, as their existing concepts are, in fact, co-dependent and attached to concrete, familiar situations (Berk, 2008). It is, therefore, rather important to bear this developmental characteristic in mind during language teaching, especially when it comes to teaching sociolinguistic and cultural differences because differences – being what they are – may be difficult to grasp by such young students due to being unfamiliar and unattached to their concrete personal experience.

UNESCO, too, recognised the importance of the developmental features mentioned above and designed an instrument that would classify education based on the level of the learner – the *International Standard Classification of Education* (ISCED). ISCED was revised on multiple occasions, lastly in 2011. ISCED 1 (LPD, 2010, pp. 46-48) focuses on primary school or first years of basic education and lists several experiences considered mandatory in this period: literacy, metalinguistic and metacultural reflection, decoding and using semiotic resources, awareness of written literature and personal expression, self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, global linguistic and intercultural education, and more. As may be noticed right off the bat, many of these experiences are interrelated with the sociolinguistic contexts and cultural diversity. Furthermore, ISCED anticipates teaching regional and minority languages, as well as acceptance of sociolinguistic and cultural differences between learners and interlocutors from migrant or underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds (LPD, 2010). The

only issue, according to the *Guide* (LPD, 2010, p. 47), is that this plan may be “too ambitious at this level and likely to over-burden the curriculum – possibly with negative effects on the most vulnerable groups”. By contrast, the Council of Europe deems that ensuring the aforementioned experiences for children of this age should be a priority, regardless of the possible, but not as likely, negative effects (LPD, 2010), emphasising that it is not too ambitious to start building grounds for intercultural and sociolinguistic competency during the first years of primary education, especially if one employs concrete tools, such as personal files or portfolios (e.g. the European Language Portfolio – ELP). Additionally, the *Guide* states:

Highlighting cultural diversity with the help of resources within the class group and the school’s environment, storytelling, songs, festivals, products, decoration and posters. Relying, not on the exotic and folkloric, but on the surrounding community’s multicultural dimensions; presenting cultural diversity as the everyday norm (LPD, 2010, p. 52).

Generally speaking, Croatian students are provided with many resources from which they may hear about or even come into contact with a global language or a member of a different social or ethnic group, given that internet access is nowadays granted in most households, schools, libraries and other public places (Drljača Margić and Širola, 2014). Some even come from mixed-culture families. The majority of them, however, is simply not surrounded by nor exposed to regular communication with, for instance, African-American or Asian people, which is why acceptance, tolerance and inclusivity of what/who is different should be explicitly or implicitly taught. Schooling is required to take on the larger – if not the largest – portion of this responsibility. In order to do that, school curricula have included many segments the implementation of which is aimed at building up on sociocultural and sociolinguistic knowledge. Inevitably, the most significant changes have been introduced into the foreign language classroom, given that linguistic knowledge is so tightly connected to the social realm. This is why good teaching tools and materials have become imperative for foreign language teaching, and foreign language textbooks have been required to reflect these new objectives. The path of change, however, has not been easy, unhindered or completed.

One of the teacher’s primary teaching tools is, naturally, the textbook, which means that its adequacy must not be disregarded, especially in terms of cultural and sociolinguistic development. For this reason, Blažević (2021) conducted a study in which she assessed the

representations of culture, race, class and gender in EFL textbooks for first-grade high-school students. Her findings show that there are significant discrepancies in the representations of men vs. women, coloured skin vs. white skin and native vs. non-native English-speaking communities. Women were often represented as housewives in dresses and skirts, and they were fewer in number than men. White-skinned characters and figures appeared much more often than African-American or Asian ones. Finally, there was a notable inclination towards learning about target cultures of English-speaking countries, such as the UK and the USA (primarily the UK).

Another almost inevitable segment of learning about cultures are stereotypes. According to Andraka (2019), linguistic structures are important; however, they should be inserted in sociocultural contexts in order to ensure that the students gain an insight into the target culture, its members, their attitudes and the communicative situations in which they operate. Similarly to Barac & Košuta (2011), Andraka (2019, p. 286) emphasises the role of stereotypes and the common misconceptions that may occur when stereotypes are misrepresented and not relativised, which is why she lists the terms and conditions to be met by any foreign language textbook:

- ❖ provide accurate, updated and valid information,
- ❖ paint an accurate, realistic cultural picture, unaffected by ideological tendencies,
- ❖ contextualise and correlate between past and present events,
- ❖ develop behavioural awareness in different cultural communicative situations,
- ❖ avoid or neutrally represent stereotypes.

3. Methodology

3.1. Aims

The present study aims to provide an overview of how and to what extent the current primary school English textbooks in early education in Croatia implement the sociocultural and sociolinguistic factors that, according to the European standards, should be integrated in foreign language learning.

3.2. Research questions

In view of the sociocultural and sociolinguistic implications in language learning described in the previous chapter, as well as the aforementioned recommendations made by the European Council, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Are EFL textbooks for early primary school children in Croatia culturally and ethnically inclusive?
- 2) Are they suitable for teaching intercultural competence?
- 3) How much media, music and literary works are referenced in the textbooks (how authentic are the materials)?
- 4) How are stereotypes represented and used in the textbooks?
- 5) Do their respective audio or video recordings include any English variety other than the American or the British one?

The questions above represent the study's main criteria for determining sociolinguistic appropriateness of the ELF textbooks in Croatian primary schools and are based on the criteria described in the works of Andraka (2019), Barac & Košuta (2011), the LPD (2010) and Vodopija-Krstanović & Brala-Vukanović (2012).

3.3. Corpus

The corpus under study consists of nine currently used primary school textbooks for students from second to fourth grade. The textbooks are the following: *Tiptoes 2* (Reić Šućur et al., 2020), *Tiptoes 3* (Ban et al., 2020), *Tiptoes 4* (Žepina et al., 2021), *Dip in 2* (Džeba and Mardešić, 2020), *Dip in 3* (Mardešić, 2020), *Dip in 4* (Ban and Blažić, 2021), *Smiles 2*

(Dooley, 2020), *Smiles 3* (Dooley, 2020), and *Smileys 4* (Dooley and Evans, 2013). The former six were published by *Školska knjiga*, while the latter three were published by *Express Publishing* in collaboration with the Croatian publisher *Alfa*. Apart from the printed copies of the textbooks, the corpus includes all of their respective audio or video recordings used in comprehension (listening and speaking) tasks. As there was no access granted to the audio material relative to the 2013 issue of *Smileys 4*, audio materials for the newest edition of the textbook, *Smiles 4* (2020), were analysed. The recordings in which there was no speech were excluded.

The reason for excluding first grade textbooks is the fact that during the first year of learning, the learning process is not as focused on subject-related material as it is on grasping the concept of school education, learning to read and write, learning discipline and merely introducing the subjects to young learners.

3.4. Methods

The methodological approach chosen for conducting the present study was a mixed one, combining mainly qualitative but also quantitative research methods to provide a better qualitative description and minimise subjectivity in the descriptive analysis.

The source of the primary data was the corpus described above. The data were obtained using the observational method of corpus analysis. Observation was deemed the most suitable of all methods, given that the ultimate goal was to establish whether the selected EFL textbooks in Croatian primary schools may be considered adequate in terms of sociolinguistic appropriateness.

Given that learners of this age are only entering the world of literacy, visual aids, such as pictures and images, play a rather important role. For this reason, pictures and images were analysed in order to determine how proportionate the representations of different races are in the textbooks teaching a language of such global proportions, as is English. The analysis was conducted by observing each picture/image/photograph that included people/a person with visible skin colour and calculating the percentage of visual aids involving coloured-skin persons/characters. The very same procedure was applied in determining the presence of people with visible disabilities and differences due to medical condition. Each photograph, image and picture was treated as a single unit, regardless of the number of people in it. Those

images that appeared more than once in their original form were calculated into the total as a single unit. Cover pages were included in the calculations.

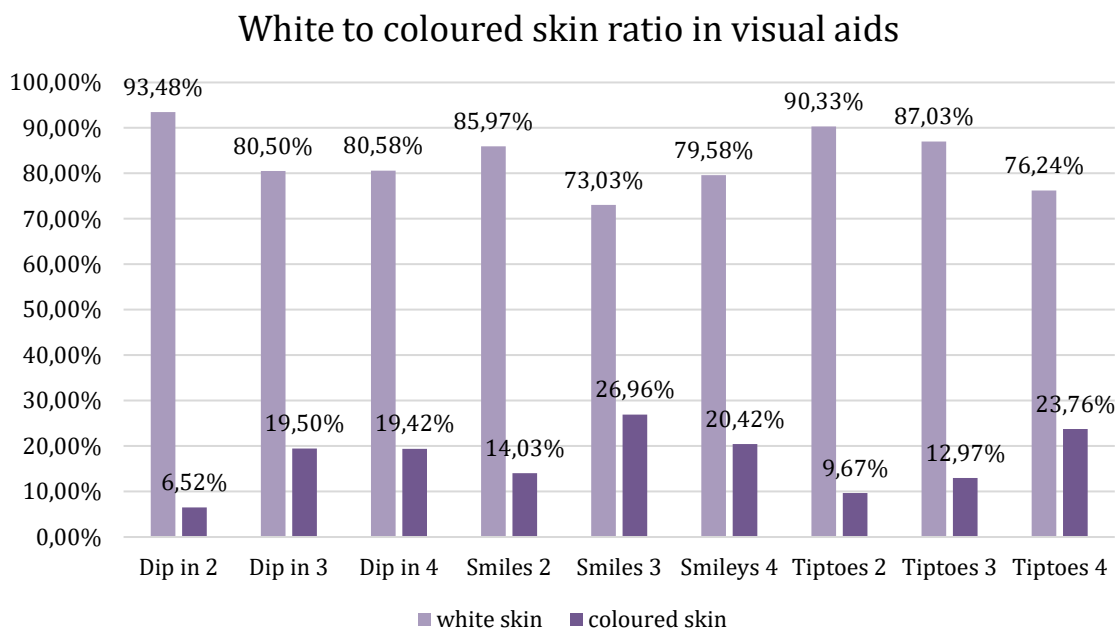
When it came to cultural topics, literary, music or media references and stereotypical representations, a more descriptive approach was taken. The references were counted and analysed in terms of their elaborateness and utility, while cultural and stereotypical representations were described and assessed in relation to the theoretical underpinning of the present study.

The respective audio material from each textbook was played twice with the scope of identifying varieties other than the British or the American one. Each recording was treated as a single unit, regardless of it having more than one speaker. In other words, if some recordings involved five speakers – four of which were, for instance, British and only one that was, for instance, Irish – the recording was marked as “variety-inclusive”. It should also be noted that the Canadian variety was excluded from research due to the author being insufficiently equipped to recognise it in spoken language.

4. Results

4.1. Ethnic and social inclusivity

One of the main research questions this study aimed to answer was whether the selected EFL textbooks used in Croatian primary school education were ethnically inclusive. *Graph 1* shows white to coloured skin ratio in images, pictures and photographs present in the selected textbooks:



Graph 1: White to coloured skin ratio in visual aids included in the textbooks

As shown above, the frequency of coloured skin characters/persons in all textbooks is significantly lower than that of white skin characters/persons. In fact, visual aids inclusive of coloured-skin characters almost never exceed a quarter of their total number. There is, however, a significant increase in percentages from the second-grade textbooks to third- and fourth-grade textbooks in all three series. The *Dip in* series rises from 6,52% to 19,50% in one year and retains a similar score in the following year. The *Smiles/Smileys* series shows a similar increase within the second and third year of learning, but the percentage drops in the fourth year by 9,54%. The *Tiptoes* series displays a more gradual increase, the highest percentage being reached in the fourth year of learning (23,76%).

Out of all three series, the best overall score is achieved by the *Smiles/Smileys* series, which takes a significant lead in the second and third year of learning. The lead in the fourth year of learning, however, belongs to the *Tiptoes* series. The lowest percentage is noted in the

Dip in's second-grade textbook (6,52%). The lowest overall score is found in the *Dip in* series, as well. When looking at each year individually, the most inclusiveness is noted in the third-grade textbooks, *Dip in 3* (2020) and *Smiles 3* (2020).

For the sake of measuring social inclusiveness from another social perspective, the number of visual aids representing visible disabilities or differences due to medical conditions was also analysed. The results are shown in the *Table 1*:

| / | Dip in 2 | Dip in 3 | Dip in 4 | Smiles 2 | Smiles 3 | Smileys 4 | Tiptoes 2 | Tiptoes 3 | Tiptoes 4 |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Number of disability-inclusive visual aids | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Table 1: The number of visual aids representing persons/characters with a visible disability/difference due to a medical condition

The results were not displayed in percentages due to the textbooks containing very few to no pictures/images/photographs representing people with visible disabilities or differences due to medical conditions (e.g. Down's Syndrome, recognisable in facial features). In fact, only two textbooks, *Dip in 2* and *Smiles 3*, contained such visual aids, each having no more than a single unit. In both cases, the images represented children with limited mobility aided by wheelchair (see *Image 1*).



Image 1: Visual representations of children with limited mobility in “Dip in 2” (2020, p. 63) and “Smiles 3” (2020, p. 98)

4.2. Stereotypical representations

In line with the first part of the study, which focused on representations of different ethical and social groups, attention was also paid to stereotypes in the selected textbooks. A brief overview of main characteristics for each series is offered below.

When it comes to stereotypes, the *Dip in* series appears rather neutral. *Dip in 2* (2020), for instance, does not seem to contain a single stereotype related to race, ethnicity or gender. In fact, the main character, Tracy, tends to be represented in a way most common observers would describe as “non-feminine”, given that she does not wear pink dresses and skirts, does not have a typical “girly” haircut and does not, for instance, present dolls as her favourite toy (see *Image 2*).



Image 2: Tracy from “Dip in 2” (2020, p. 22)

Dip in 3 (2020) follows its precedent’s footsteps, leaning, however, a bit more toward gender differences when it comes to interests (male characters’ personalities are mostly related to sports and technology). A slight tendency to differentiate between male and female occupations was noted in their visual representations in *Dip in 4* (2021, pp. 66-67). The fourth-grade textbook featured a task on the differences between Croatian and American people (see *Image 3*). A potential issue was noted in the task due to the statements about habits and behaviour being rather generalised and not at all hedged, but absolute, regardless of them being untrue for some members of the group.

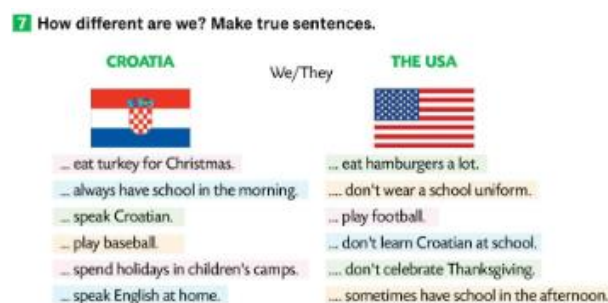


Image 3: A task on cultural differences in “Dip in 4”(2021, p. 97)

The *Smiles/Smileys* series appears less neutral in its representations of different social groups. Female characters are predominantly dressed in brightly coloured skirts or dresses and their respective toys seem to be prevalently dolls, ballerinas, tea sets, ponies, rocking horses, etc., while boys are associated with balls, sport, trains, bikes, cars, etc. Some stereotypical representations are used in food-themed lessons, in which dishes are related to nations. For instance, in *Smiles 2* (2020, p. 44), Brian’s (UK) favourite dish is fish and chips, Bianca’s (Italy) is pasta and Isi’s (Japan) is rice, even though a person needs not to like the dish simply because it originates from their respective country.

Being published by the same publisher, the *Tiptoes* series seems to get back on the neutral track followed by the *Dip in* series. The switches, such as the one in gender dynamics in the aforementioned take on *Cinderella* (titled *Cinderello*), seem to take a step away from the well-established “damsel-in-distress” or “women-won-over-by-men” dynamics found in classic fairy tales for young children. Generalisations are extremely rare in the second- and third-grade textbook. *Tiptoes 4* (2021), on the other hand, features several texts on different cultures that contain rather generalised and absolute statements, such as “Everybody in Peru has got a poncho.” (p. 67) or “Girls in India wear saris.” (p. 66), which do not necessarily have to be true for all members of the population in these countries.

4.3. References to literature, media, popular culture, music

The next component subjected to analysis were references to books, music, celebrities and media present in the selected textbooks. *Tables 2, 3 and 4* show the number and the list of references (marked *ref.* in the tables) found in each textbook.

| | Dip in 2 (5 ref.) | Dip in 3 (6 ref.) | Dip in 4 (7 ref.) |
|---|---|--|---|
| Ref. to literary works, music, celebrities and media | “Simon says”, the Alphabet song, Goldilocks and the Three Bears, “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star”, “Jingle Bells” | <i>Asterix and Obelix</i> , <i>Lego</i> , <i>Tom & Jerry</i> , <i>the Royal Family</i> , <i>Batman</i> , <i>Little Red Riding Hood</i> | logos (FBI, CNN, BBC news, NBA, MTV), Alphabet song, <i>The Ugly Duckling</i> , <i>Old McDonald Had a Farm</i> , <i>Cinderella</i> , “Oh Susanna”, “Jingle Bells”, <i>Humpty Dumpty</i> |

Table 2: List of references to books, music, celebrities and media in the “Dip in” series

As shown, the *Dip in* series contains multiple age-appropriate references to popular fairy tales, animated movies, TV shows and popular children's songs. The number of references grows each year of learning but not significantly.

Dip in 2 (2020) generally dedicates two to three pages of exercises to its music and literary references. Each reference is re-used or elaborated in multiple different tasks (pointing, circling, repeating, imitating, identifying, etc.). The tale of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* in comic book form represents a lesson unit for practicing reading and developing vocabulary, as well as literary/cultural knowledge. *Simon says* game is implemented in exercising imperative forms in a non-explicit way. The *Jingle Bells* song, as well as *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*, is used once but with transcribed lyrics, which may serve as a reference for comparison between the English and the Croatian versions of the songs.

Alternatively, *Dip in 3* (2020) seems not to dedicate many tasks to its literary, music and media references. *Asterix and Obelix*, *Lego*, *Tom & Jerry* and *Batman*, for instance, are merely mentioned in a unit on toys. The British royal family is a bit more elaborated, being individualised in a sort of a "Learn more" box for developing cultural knowledge on an English-speaking country. *Little Red Riding Hood* in form of a theatre piece is the only reference elaborated and used for language learning, connecting literature with theatre and facilitating both linguistic and cultural development.

Similarly to its second-grade predecessor, *Dip in 4* (2021) seems to pay more attention to its media/literary/music references. In one of its tasks, this textbook introduces a selection of logotypes originating from the UK and the USA in order for the learners to be able to recognise the images and explain the meaning of the famous acronyms. The tales of *The Ugly Duckling* and *Cinderella* are well-elaborated on two to four pages each and used for reading, vocabulary and comprehension tasks, adding to the cultural/literary knowledge development. The songs are inserted into thematically corresponding units (e.g. animals, farm life, Christmas) and seem to work nicely with the rest of their respective units.

It may be concluded from *Table 2* that the higher number of references does not necessarily imply superiority in terms of sociocultural elaborateness of the textbooks.

| | Smiles 2 (14 ref.) | Smiles 3 (14 ref.) | Smileys 4 (9 ref.) |
|--|---|---|--|
| References to books, music, celebrities and media | <i>Alphabet Song, the Flintstones, The King and the Bee (Russia), The Fire Owl (Canada), Happy B-day song, Mummy's Birthday (Sri Lanka), At the Circus in the Town song, The Drum (India), Pinocchio, the Gingerbread Man (the USA), The North Wind and the Sun (Greece), Baltazar, Hlapić, Jingle Bells song</i> | <i>The Rainbow (America), the Griffins - Family Guy, The Spaghetti Family, Twinklinka (Sri Lanka), Harry Kane (UK), Katie Ledecky (USA), Naomi Osaka (Japan), The Monster on the Hill (Japan), Pennies from the Sky (England), The Lazy Girl (Hungary), Luka Modrić, Nina Badrić, Domagoj Duvnjak, Oh Christmas Tree song</i> | <i>Harry Potter (UK), Tintin (Belgium), Mint Aizawa (Japan), The Princess and the Pea (Denmark), Too-too-moo and the Giant (Indonesia), The Best Fruit (Bulgaria), Anansi the Spider (Jamaica), The Twelve Months (Russia), Here Comes Santa Claus</i> |

Table 3: List of references to books, music, celebrities and media in the “Smiles/Smileys” series

As shown in Table 3, the *Smiles/Smileys* series of EFL textbooks features a vast array of literary, music and media references. Main lessons within units focus predominantly on authentic stories (in comic book form) originating from different countries around the world. They are presented within multiple sections titled *Smiles Magazine* in a column titled *A story from...*, which features (relatively) popular folk tales, stories and legends from around the world. Each story takes up two to three pages and serves as a reading task developing vocabulary, grammar and socio-cultural knowledge. The tasks related to the stories that are aimed at working on the text, however, are not pre-planned in the textbooks.

Additionally, *Smiles Magazine* includes a second column titled *Our World*, dedicated to worldwide known athletes, famous figures and characters, such as Kathie Ledecky, Naomi Osaka, Harry Kane, Mint Aizawa, Harry Potter and many more (see Table 3 for more references).

There is another component consistent in all three textbooks: a recurring section titled *My Magazine*, dedicated primarily to Croatian culture and famous Croatian figures and characters, among which are Nina Badrić (singer), Luka Modrić (soccer player), Domagoj Duvnjak (handball player), Hlapić the apprentice (literary character) and Professor Balthazar (animated TV show character).

The musical references in the series are inserted into thematically corresponding units and contribute to the authenticity of the materials. Holiday and birthday songs appear to be suitable for intercultural comparison and translation, given the recognisable tunes and catchy lyrics. It is safe to say that *Smiles 2* (2020) and *Smiles 3* (2020) contain a consistently higher number of references in respect to their pre-published fourth-grade version. Their overall elaborateness and utility, however, remain equal.

| | Tiptoes 2 (6 ref.) | Tiptoes 3 (4 ref.) | Tiptoes 4 (13 ref.) |
|--|---|---|---|
| References to books, music, celebrities and media | <i>the Alphabet Song, Three Little Pigs, Batman, Little Red Riding Hood, Peter Pan, Jingle Bells song</i> | <i>ABC song, Cinderello (a take on Cinderella), Goldilocks and Three Bears, Gingerbread Man</i> | <i>Three Kind Wolves and the Big Bully (a take on the three pigs), The Hare and the Tortoise, Peter Pan, Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Hansel and Gretel, Pinocchio, Little Mermaid, The Story of a Hat (Bartholomew Cubbins), Call of Duty, The Pea and the Princess, Tooth Fairy, The Ant and the Grasshopper</i> |

Table 4: List of references to books, music, celebrities and media in the “Tiptoes” series

Finally, the *Tiptoes* series displays a significant rise in the number of references found in the fourth-year textbook with respect to its precedents. In fact, the second- and the third-year textbooks combined do not reach the fourth-grade textbook’s numbers.

Tiptoes 2 (2020) dedicates four to six pages to the three classic fairy tales in comic book form, using them as the base for different reading, listening, vocabulary and comprehension tasks, making sure that ways to understand and analyse a story are taught along the learning process (identifying main characters, developing critical thinking and explaining cause and effect). Two tasks are centred around Batman, and they seem to be effective in teaching young learners about the culture of science fiction (the concept of a superhero, his motives and abilities, etc.).

Tiptoes 3 (2020) presents its referenced stories in two pages each, which is fewer pages per story than in *Tiptoes 2* (2020). However, the textbook still offers a solid variety of

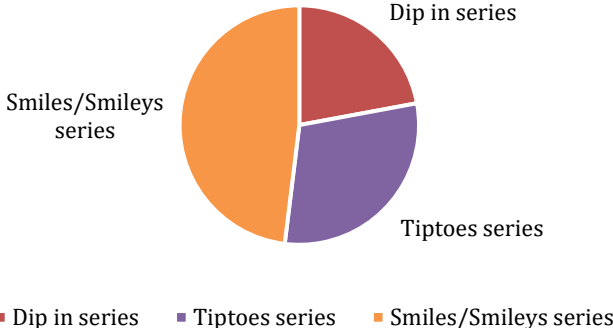
different vocabulary and comprehension tasks, as well as creative tasks, such as acting out a story, miming or singing.

Following the model of its precedent, *Tiptoes 4* (2021) dedicates two pages per referenced story, as well, including a variety of matching, guessing, describing and acting out tasks aimed at developing critical thinking, establishing relationships between characters and events and analysing the story. Some of the characters from different stories are brought together and referenced in a new context within a made-up story called *School of Fairy Tales*, which features a variety of characters from the classic tales.

It may also be interesting to note that this series features some rather innovative renderings of a selection of classics. For instance, the story titled *Three Kind Wolves and the Big Bully* is a take on the well-known *Three Little Pigs*, with its “hero-villain” dynamics being completely reversed. Similarly, the story *Cinderello* is a take on the classic princess story of *Cinderella*, with modifications in gender dynamics, Cinderello being a boy who gets noticed at the ball by a princess.

As far as the audio references are concerned, all songs included in the textbooks seem to be used adequately and in accordance with their theme, mostly for listening and singing with no exact follow-up tasks.

Textbook series comparison based on the number of literary/music/media references



Graph 2: The comparison of the three series based on the number of contained references to literature, music, pop culture and media

Between the three series, the *Smiles/Smileys* series seems to be the one featuring the most references to media, popular and literary culture, followed by the *Tiptoes* series and, ultimately, the *Dip in* series. The same order could describe the level of elaborateness and utility of the textbooks from a sociolinguistic point of view, given that, as seen in the descriptions above, the most was done with the references in the *Smiles/Smileys* series, in which references are not only elaborated individually but also inserted into the context of in-book magazines and columns, adding to the authentic value of the materials.


4.4. Cultural topics

Within the sphere of cultural references, more general cultural topics were also analysed. *Tables 5, 6 and 7* list the cultural topics present in the selected textbooks.

| | Dip in 2 | Dip in 3 | Dip in 4 |
|------------------------|---|--|---|
| Cultural topics | <i>Croatia vs. UK, English in Africa, Easter, Christmas</i> | <i>English in USA and Australia, Big Ben, school life in the UK, London, Zagreb, Easter, Christmas</i> | <i>USA, Thanksgiving in America, USA vs. Croatia, Indian tribe, African Ashanti tale (Nyame and Anancy), Halloween, Easter, Christmas</i> |


Table 5: Cultural topics in the “Dip in” textbooks

The *Dip in* series appears to contain rather few cultural topics, most of which are related to holidays, such as Easter, Christmas and Halloween. The number of cultural topics increases each year. There are multiple mentions of English being spoken in countries other than the UK or the USA, however, there are no differences explicitly pointed out in the audio material. When it comes to geographical topics, the most common approach seems to be building up on factual knowledge. Most facts refer to Croatia, the UK and the USA, primarily the UK (see *Image 4*).


LONDON 

1 Look at the map.
Can you find Croatia? Zagreb is the capital of Croatia.
Can you find the United Kingdom? London is the capital of the United Kingdom.


2 Look at these words. What do they mean?
Can you find them in the pictures?
river bridge the Guard uniform crown church palace

3 Listen and read.  L 24.1


PART 1
There is a river in London.
It is **the River Thames**.
There are some ships on the river.
There are some bridges over the river.
Tower Bridge goes up when big ships go under it.



The London Eye is a big wheel on the River Thames.





There are some nice parks in London.
Regent's Park is the home of London Zoo.





FIND OUT GO TO LONDON ZOO WEB PAGE. WRITE DOWN 10 ANIMALS YOU CAN SEE THERE.


4 Answer the questions.
What goes round and round?
What goes up and down?
Where is the London Zoo?
I like London. What about you?

Part 2  L 24.2 


Buckingham Palace
There are a lot of people in front of the palace. They want to see the Queen or **the Guard**. The Guard has red uniforms and black hats.


The Tower of London is very old.
It's a museum now. You can see the crowns there.




There are a lot of museums in London.
The Museum of London tells the story of London.



There are a lot of churches in London.
The biggest is **St Paul's Cathedral**.



There are a lot of shops, double-deckers and black taxis in **Oxford Street**.



FIND OUT WHAT ARE THE MUSEUM OF LONDON OPENING TIMES? VISIT THE SITE.

5 Answer the questions.
Do you remember the bell called Big Ben?
What's the name of the church, built by Mr Wren?
Are the buses in London blue or red?
What colour are the hats on the Guard's heads?

Image 4: A cultural lesson on the city of London in “Dip in 3” (2020, pp. 108-109)

The authenticity level seems to vary from topic to topic. For instance, in a lesson on Indian tribes, the tale at its core seems to be tailored specifically for the lesson instead of being extracted directly from Indian folklore. The Ashanti tale, on the other hand, is based on the Ashanti tradition and its mythical figures. Thanksgiving in America is also presented rather faithfully through customs, gastronomy and tradition.

| | Smiles 2 | Smiles 3 | Smileys 4 |
|-----------------|---|--|--|
| Cultural topics | <p>London Eye, Egyptian pyramids, the UK; Canada, Holland, Spain, Scotland, Italy, Russia, the UK, Mexico, Croatia (Veli Lošinj, Senj, Pula, Zagreb, Lonjsko Polje), Halloween, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Easter, Christmas</p> | <p>Flags - Poland, England, Mexico, weather - London, Moscow, Buenos Aires, food - apple pie (USA), kosher (Egypt), spring rolls (China), Plitvice Lakes, Vis Island, Mount Sljeme, NP Risnjak, Halloween, Christmas, Easter</p> | <p>occupations - UK, Mexico, Russia, clothes - Scotland, Japan, Peru, Australia and Italy, Russia, Italy, Turkey, Japan, Mexico, Egypt, Croatian food, Halloween, Bonfire Night (UK), Christmas, Valentine's Day, Easter</p> |

Table 6: Cultural topics in the “Smiles/Smileys” textbooks

As previously mentioned, the *Smiles/Smileys* series contains three segments that seem to open up space for a number of cultural topics. The first is *My Magazine*, which presents Croatian culture, introduces Croatian public figures and gives the students a chance to talk about their own culture in a foreign language. It mostly contains facts on people, places and events but it appears to be well-connected to the rest of its respective unit. The second segment is *Smiles Magazine* with its column *Our world*, in which the main focus is on cultures around the globe (geography, food, dance, tradition, etc.). Similarly to other series, the approach revolves very much around factual knowledge and the most elaborated English-speaking country seems to be the UK. Within this sphere, there are multiple *Content and Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL) lessons. The third segment is the series of folktales and legends titled *A story from...*, which familiarises young learners with literary heritage and folklore of different countries around the world. Geographical orientation is incorporated into learning everyday vocabulary related to clothes, food and customs, which appears to be beneficial in juxtaposing different cultures. The number of cultural topics in each textbook from the series seems to be more or less consistent throughout primary education. The undeniable cross-cultural and cross-curricular approach seems to benefit the series in terms of sociocultural elaborateness.

| | Tiptoes 2 | Tiptoes 3 | Tiptoes 4 |
|------------------------|---|---|--|
| Cultural topics | <i>USA, Australia, England, Christmas, Easter</i> | <i>greetings, polite words, Christmas, Easter</i> | <i>sign language, classrooms around the world, India, unusual occupations, food - British vs. American, Unit 7: In my shoes, Red Noses organisation, Christmas, Easter</i> |

Table 7: Cultural topics in the “Tiptoes” textbooks

The *Tiptoes* series shows a significant increase in cultural topics from the second and third to the fourth year of learning. In fact, the first two textbooks seem to have a much greater focus on vocabulary and specifically designed textbook material, while *Tiptoes 4* (2021) seems to have gone a step further, dedicating, among others, an entire unit to social differences (see *Image 5*).

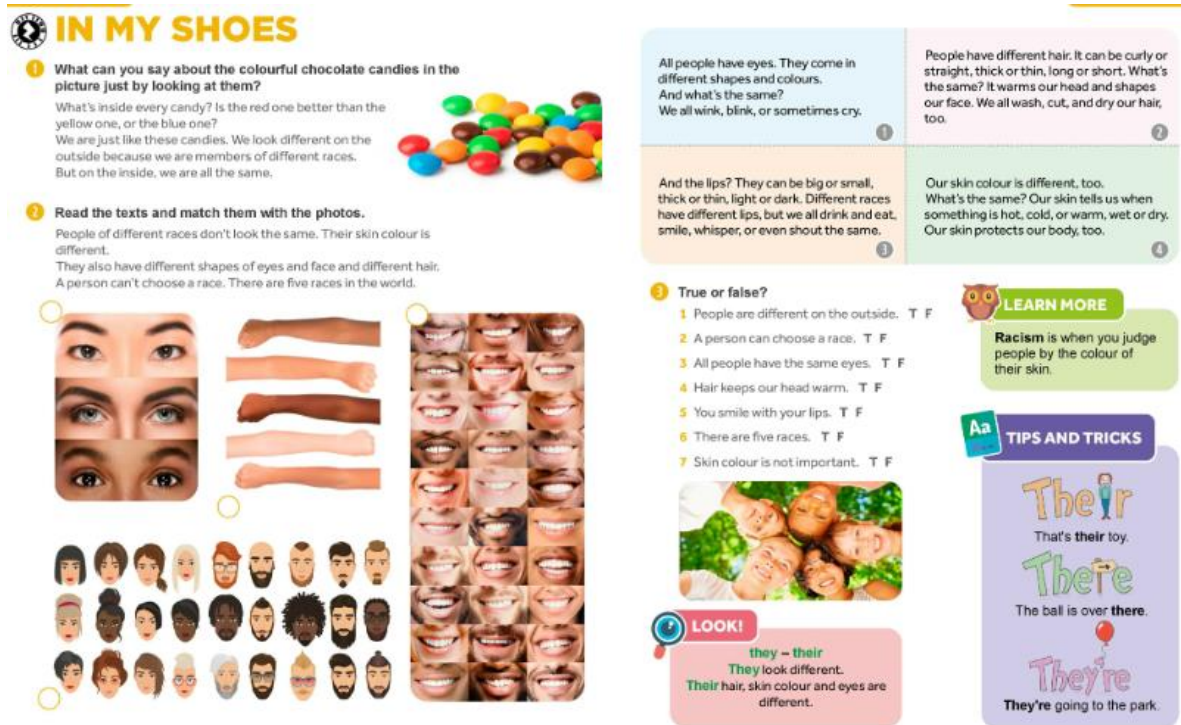
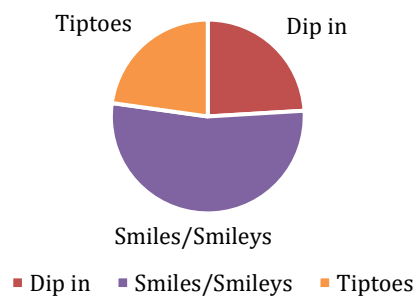


Image 5: A lesson on social differences in “Tiptoes 4” (2021, pp. 110-111)

The focus, as shown in *Table 7*, is mainly on the UK or the USA, however, there is a significant number of other countries mentioned in the lessons, although many do seem to greatly rely on factual knowledge. The *Tiptoes* series, however, seems to be the only one out of the three that pays explicit attention to greetings, polite words and expressions, sign language and humanitarian work in our society.

The comparison of the series based on the number of cultural topics



Graph 3: The comparison of the three textbook series based on the number of cultural topics included

Graph 3 shows that, from a cultural point of view, the *Smiles/Smileys* series contains more cultural topics than the remaining two series combined. The *Tiptoes* appears to have the lowest score but not by much. In terms of elaborateness, on the other hand, *Tiptoes* would surpass the *Dip in* series but not the *Smiles/Smileys* series. It should be noted that *Tiptoes 4* (2021) in particular might also overshadow some of the *Smiles/Smileys* textbooks with several of its lessons on politeness, greetings, sign language and environmental responsibility.

4.5. English language varieties

The final segment of analysis were English varieties present in the selected textbooks, both in printed and audio format. The main point of the analysis was to establish whether there were any other official English varieties (Australian, South-African, Irish, Indian, Nigerian), other than the British and the American ones, included in the materials.

| | <i>Dip in 2</i> | <i>Dip in 3</i> | <i>Dip in 4</i> | <i>Smiles 2</i> | <i>Smiles 3</i> | <i>Smiles 4</i> | <i>Tiptoes 2</i> | <i>Tiptoes 3</i> | <i>Tiptoes 4</i> |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|--|
| Variety-inclusive audio recordings | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | # | # | # |
| Vocabulary and spelling | BrE | BrE | BrE | BrE | BrE | BrE | BrE | BrE | BrE+ AmE spelling/vocab. for comparison + occasionally AusE versions |

Table 8: English varieties in audio recordings, vocabulary and spelling

As seen in the table above, almost all textbooks opt for British English as the standard for vocabulary and spelling. *Tiptoes 4* (2021) does the same; however, it explicitly includes American and Australian versions of spelling and vocabulary in visual boxes labelled “Learn more” (see Image 6).



Image 6: Examples of the English language varieties in “Tiptoes 4”(2021, pp. 12, 15 and 59)

Audio recordings, on the other hand, are much more complex in terms of variety-inclusiveness. The *Dip in* series is rather straightforward in its recordings. The speakers mostly use British or American variety, and no other official English variety seems to be recognisable in the recordings. Several speakers seem to have a non-native accent in their spoken English; however, a strong tendency towards British/American native-like sound may be noted in all cases. Interestingly, there seem to be certain opportunities which, had they been seized, would have set a great base for including an English variety other than British and American varieties. For instance, many lessons revolve around a family trip to Africa, where they meet their future pen pal, Toby. Toby, however, did not speak English any differently than his visitors. Other possible opportunities were noted in texts which were narrated from start to finish by the same two speakers throughout the textbook, even though there was direct speech involved in the texts.

The *Smiles/Smileys* series seems to have followed the same footpath as the *Dip in* series, given that there appear to be no recognisable English varieties present in the recordings, other than British English and, occasionally, American English. The speakers appear to be mostly native and those who do not, have a strong tendency toward the two most widely used varieties, American English and British English. Among the two, British English is significantly prevalent. The written texts almost exclusively contain the British standard spelling and vocabulary. Much like the other two series, the *Smiles/Smileys* series missed what seemed to have been an opportunity to include variety in English pronunciation and vocabulary. For instance, the stories from the USA, Australia or India could have been read differently and more in line with the English variety used in their country of origin but, instead, they have been narrated in British/American English.

The *Tiptoes* series is the most complex one when it comes to varieties present in the audio material, which is why its scores are marked with a hashtag sign. The reason for this is that,

although there seems to be no recognisable English variety other than the British or the American one, there also appears to be almost no native speakers of English in the recordings. Instead, there is a plethora of discernible non-native accents present in the audio material throughout the series, which may ultimately render the series variety-inclusive, even though the varieties do not belong to the group of official English language varieties. There are, however, certain accents that are, pronunciation-wise, rather reminiscent of the Australian variety (e.g. *Tiptoes 2*: unit 3, lesson 3 and unit 4, lesson 4, task 1, or *Tiptoes 4*: unit 5, lesson 4, task 3) but there seems to be no certainty in labelling them. Similarly to the *Dip in* second-grade textbook, there were certain opportunities which seemed like they would have set a good base for presenting different varieties. For instance, in *Tiptoes 2* (2020, p. 22), there was a group of three speakers from England, the US and Australia, presenting themselves. The differences in their spoken English, however, were barely noticeable. Furthermore, similarly to the *Dip in* series, some texts involving direct speech were read by one speaker in a rather monotonous way, which seemed to have taken away the opportunity to include other varieties of speech.

5. Discussion

Much like Andraka (2019), the LPD (2010) or The Council of Europe (n.d.)^{1,2}, Bowen & Hopper (2022, p. 1), too, recognise that “ensuring adequate inclusivity in educational materials is a matter of ethics and fairness, as well as a means to maximize learning processes”. The results, however, seem to point in another direction, given that the visual aids inclusive of coloured-skin characters and persons almost never exceed a quarter of their total number. Bowen & Hopper (2022, p. 5) claim that “this kind of homogeneous exposure at an early age is more likely to lead to implicit and explicit racial biases in later life”. In other words, when looked at from the perspective of implicit learning, such a setup may be considered somewhat problematic due to the possibility of sending off the message that white race is entitled to some sort of supremacy over the “others”.

If, however, the previously mentioned remark by Vodopija-Krstanović & Brala-Vukanović (2012) on sociocultural embeddedness in teaching choices is taken into consideration, it is not unusual that Croatian EFL textbooks still do not equally represent different skin colours. After all, Croatian population is still predominantly light-skinned, as is its European surrounding area (see *Figure 1*), including the motherland of English – England, which means that visual representations in textbooks would have to significantly alter the all-too-familiar reality students in Croatia have so far lived in.

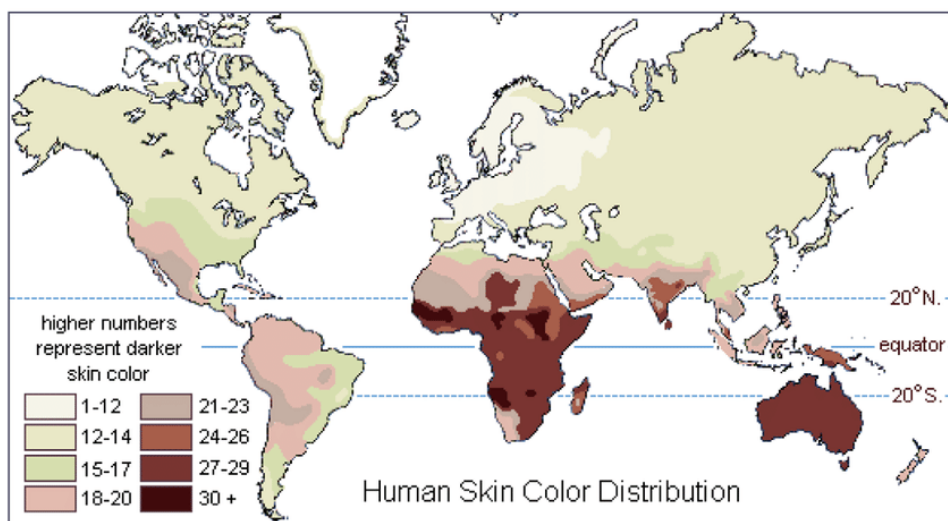


Figure 1: Ethnic and Mouse Strain Differences in Central Corneal Thickness and Association with Pigmentation Phenotype - Scientific Figure on ResearchGate. Source:

https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Global-skin-colour-distribution-of-native-populations-The-colours-on-the-map-are-based_fig6_51582145 [accessed 20 Aug, 2022]

The gradual increase in visual inclusivity may be explained by the simple fact that as learners become older, the topics become more mature and elaborate, giving space to more complex topics, such as moral values, ethnic differences, ethics and similar (in as concrete of a way as possible). The drop in percentage seen in the fourth-grade textbook *Smileys 4* (2013), however, may be explained by the fact that the edition analysed was published several years prior to *Smiles 2* (2020) and *Smiles 3* (2020), which indicates that there really has been notable progress within the publishing community related to the improvement of EFL textbooks.

When it comes to the second part of the analysis of visual representations in the textbooks, it is clear that the health-related dimension of one's social status has not yet been tackled enough. The reason for this may simply be the sensitivity of the issue, which may render editors' choices a bit difficult, given that publishers and editors may not have the sufficient knowledge on the matter, and no publisher wishes to accidentally misrepresent an already sensitive social group in any way. Furthermore, it may be particularly challenging to sensibly, openly and clearly present and explain some conditions to children so young, especially in a foreign language. Although the relation of this segment to the linguistic focus of the research may at first seem unclear, it is actually rather straightforward, as polite and politically correct expressions related to physical or mental differences enter the sociolinguistic concepts listed by the *CEFR-Companion Volume with new descriptors* (2018).

According to Blažević (2021), a textbook's content is based on the moral values and beliefs of its author(s) and, due to this human factor and the ways the human brain registers and collects data, there is a certain risk of promoting ideological implications, which can have a significant impact on the personal formation of the learner. In this context, stereotypes are a common, non-surprising occurrence in foreign language textbooks. Blažević (2021, p. 4) adds that the "ideological background of teaching materials shapes students' behaviour and expectations without their direct consciousness about it", which may lead to the "subliminal perpetuation of social inequality" (Blažević, 2021, p. 4). Furthermore, Bartulović (2013) warns about the recurring implicit objectivisation of the relationship between males and females through stereotypical portrayal of women as passive, gentle and submissive, while men are represented primarily as strong and protective. Additionally, Bartulović (2013) underlines that objectivization is the most common mechanism found in one's attitude towards "the other", which can be found in many aspects of a textbook. She claims that objectivization is inevitably found in the "superficial selection of cultural elements we find

attractive” (Bartulović, 2013, p. 265), such as festivals, food or exotic traditions, as well as in “stereotypical, hermetic gender roles” (Bartulović, 2013, p. 265). The results of the present study do seem to (at least partially) corroborate the arguments by Blažević (2021) and Bartulović (2013), as food, curious/exotic customs and females in dresses and skirts have, indeed, been a recurring element in all textbooks.

On the other hand, interesting topics, curiosities, fun facts and exotic food may simply be a way of engaging and motivating the students in the process of learning by familiarising them with something out of their ordinary. Additionally, dresses and skirts are usually found in women’s clothing lines, and young girls may simply identify easier with the characters from the textbook if they share a common interest or a similar style. Furthermore, stereotypical representations may sometimes be useful in memorising and organising information. For instance, the origin of a dish could be recalled easier if it is represented by a speaker who comes from the same country that the dish originates from (Bianca from Italy who likes pasta, Isi from Japan who likes rice or Brian from the UK who likes fish and chips). Regardless of the motive or the benefit, however, Barac & Košuta (2011) strongly advocate raising awareness of how stereotypes are implemented, used and explained in language teaching and learning. They agree that it is the teacher’s responsibility to correct cultural misrepresentations and relativise any stereotype related to a specific nation, urging the learner to question and critically assess such representations before accepting them and to never view them as absolute truths.

When speaking of cultural topics and units/lessons on cultures, traditions and customs, Blažević (2021, p. 8) reminds the reader that “the factual knowledge we possess on a specific culture is not synonymous with our identification with it”. In other words, knowing facts about the motherland of a specific language does not imply empathy, understanding and immediate intercultural competence. This may be seen as an issue for the analysed textbooks, given that their cultural content contains a significant number of facts, which seem to be mainly related to the USA and the UK.

Pennycook (2017) questions the neutrality of internationally published EFL textbooks, assessing them as inclined toward the Western understanding of language, communication and the teaching/learning process. Chao (2011), too, supports this claim, adding that the international publications have for a long time been considered somewhat superior in the linguistic and cultural context. It may, however, be interesting to note that, in the case of the

three series selected for this study, the internationally published one – *Smiles/Smileys* – pays much closer attention to the Croatian culture than the two Croatian series.

The propensity for the two leading English-speaking countries (the UK and the USA) is further emphasised through English varieties present in print or in audio. As noted by Vodopija-Krstanović & Brala-Vukanović (2012), there is a strong tendency toward the “pure” varieties (BrE and AmE), especially in writing. The fact that only one textbook out of nine also included the Australian variety in the written segment seems to stand in favour of their claim.

The choice of AmE and BrE over other varieties may be explained with the help of Kachru’s (1986) model of three concentric circles of the English language: the Inner Circle, representing traditional, mother-tongue varieties of English (the UK, Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand), the Outer Circle, showing English in multilingual settings where it is given an important social and political role (former colonies such as India, Ghana, Kenya, etc.), and the Expanding Circle, which comprises territories where English is learned as a foreign language. Given that there have been many tendencies towards native-like proficiency, it does not seem strange that textbook authors opted for the Inner Circle’s mother-tongue varieties. It is, however, noticeable that not all varieties within the Inner Circle are equally represented in foreign language teaching.

In addition, the audio materials included no recognisable variety other than AmE and BrE, which indicates that the two mother-tongue varieties might still be commonly perceived as “more representative” than the others in terms of nativeness. Native-like proficiency is often set as a goal in language learning because authentic accent and pronunciation are generally considered maximum competence, regardless of the possibility that their vocabulary and grammar skills or their sociocultural knowledge might not be as strong. The national curricula often enforce educational goals and objectives that encourage the development of the *correct* pronunciation, even though sufficient and clear reasoning behind the adjective *correct* seems not to be provided. Lütze-Miculinić (2019) affirms that recommendations in language teaching mainly point toward teaching the *standard* variety of the language, which is widely accepted, spoken within the academic sphere and based on a well-defined grammatical norm. Additionally, Kachru’s (1986) seminal model shows awareness of the situation described, the Inner Circle being labelled as “norm-providing” and the Expanding Circle as “norm-dependent”.

The one series that seems to be fully aware of the dynamics between English language varieties is the *Tiptoes* series, which appears to slightly deviate from some of the former national curricula's recommendations. It may be interesting to note that, even though the majority of current discussions have regarded the inclusion of Outer Circle varieties, the *Tiptoes* series seems to have gone a step further, allowing for the Expanding Circle varieties to become normalised, unstigmatized and widely accepted, without any accompanying differentiation between the value of a native-like and non-native-like pronunciation.

Evidently, a positive attitude towards paying attention to the full extent of a language, not just its standard form and norm, may be found among a number of the creators of EFL textbooks. How this extent is accepted by the students/future teachers of English, however, might be an entirely different question. According to Drljača Margić & Širola (2014), even the Outer Circle varieties seem to be somewhat disregarded. Furthermore, their study shows that varieties, such as Australian English and Irish English, are generally associated more with the non-native variety circles than the native variety one, while British and American English are considered "more standard and correct" (Drljača Margić & Širola, 2014, p. 52). Another study by Drljača Margić & Širola (2010) indicates that the majority of TEFL students feel that familiarising learners with language varieties is important, however, most of them would not tolerate grammar that does not conform to standardised norms of the English language.

Similarly, a study on Croatian EFL teachers' attitudes towards teaching non-native English language varieties indicates that 82% of EFL teachers find near-nativeness highly important and deem their teaching should be based on standard British English and standard American English norms (Drljača Margić & Kovačević, 2013).

All this being said, it appears that no actual consensus has been reached between Croatian (T)EFL students, teachers and textbook authors, which indicates that the ongoing discussions are to be continued and Croatian EFL textbooks are yet to be revised and advanced to the benefit of both teachers and students.

6. Conclusion

Perhaps the most adequate way to sum up and conclude the present study is to give a brief overview of the found answers to the research questions.

In reference to the previous chapters, it is safe to say that the selected EFL textbooks for early primary school children in Croatia appear to be culturally, socially and ethnically inclusive, providing space for different cultures, traditions, literary heritage, media and social values. There is, however, an undeniable imbalance between representations of white and coloured skin characters/figures, white ones being significantly greater in number.

When it comes to including margined social groups from another point of view, such as the medical one, the textbooks seem to have quite some room for improvement. In this aspect, *Tiptoes 4* (2021) seems to stand out by featuring sign language in one lesson and raising awareness about people with hearing impairment or complete hearing loss. It may, however, be quite puzzling how only one out of nine textbooks managed to open space for this rather important topic. Age-appropriateness and the sensitivity/complexity of the topic in this context cannot be used as an excuse, given that all of the analysed textbooks were meant for the same age group.

Although the materials may not always seem completely authentic, no textbook seems to fail to include references to popular culture, figures, media or literary works. The *Smiles/Smileys* series appears to be in the lead in the area; however, the *Tiptoes* series and the *Dip in* series seem not to lag far behind. When looked at in a broader context, all three series seem to be rather suitable for teaching intercultural competence, given that the textbooks are rich with cultural and social topics promoting tolerance, acceptance and union among the population. Room for improvement, however, lies in the way in which a large number of these topics is approached. There could be less focus on factual knowledge and more focus on communicative differences, nuances and implications, which would help equip the learner to avoid misunderstandings and adapt better to the communicative situation they find themselves in.

Stereotypes seem to be rarely used and represented in the textbooks and, when they are, they are mostly well-incorporated and relativised. On the other hand, there are a few cases of generalisations presented as absolute facts that could have easily been avoided with some hedging. Additionally, there are still some tendencies to assign gender roles to the characters and present them in a stereotypical way (e.g. girls in skirts and dresses whose favourite toys

are dolls). On a few occasions, there are dishes directly associated with nations, however, not in an absolute way.

When it comes to the varieties of the English language, the respective audio or video recordings do not seem to include any recognisable official English variety other than American English or British English. In this context, the *Tiptoes* series seems to stand out by having opted for promoting another type of variety, related to pronunciation and accent. This may be the reason why the majority of speakers have a discernible non-native accent. Such an approach may show itself to be extremely useful in stepping away from the common misconception that language knowledge is largely shown through native-like proficiency in pronunciation. Looking at the written/printed content, it may be noticed that there is a strong inclination towards British English, aside from *Tiptoes 4* (2021), which introduces the “Learn more” boxes with not only British and American versions of linguistic items but occasionally their Australian equivalents, as well.

The findings of this study may primarily be used to address and close the gaps in the structure and content of EFL textbooks, thus advancing them and reaching their full potential. The results may also serve as a guide for teachers who find themselves in a dilemma on which textbook to use in their own teaching.

There are, however, certain limitations that can be attributed to this study. The first is the limited corpus size, which may be considered insufficient for an objective analysis of the early primary school EFL textbooks. The market is undoubtedly bigger than the sample analysed and there are other textbooks to look at when discussing their sociolinguistic adequacy. The perimeter of this study, however, might not have worked well with a larger sample, which, on the other hand, opens up space for follow-up studies on the matter.

Another limitation may be a somewhat narrow theoretical framework at the base of the study that does not include many opposing opinions on the matter, thus limiting the criteria for evaluation to a certain standard. The standard, however, remains in line with the latest innovations and movements in the field of foreign language teaching and may, therefore, be considered appropriate.

The third limitation may be the fact that a significant part of this study was inevitably conditioned by the author’s ability to recognise and note certain phenomena/occurrences, which may have affected the level of objectiveness and comprehensiveness of the analysis.

Further studies may address these limitations or use the present study as an inspiration for a similar study on various social, cultural, psychological or pedagogical aspects of primary school foreign language textbooks.

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