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## A Contrastive Analysis of Linguistic Imperialism in Iranian & Lebanese TEFL Textbooks

**Mohammad Reza Tousinasrabadi\***

*English language department, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran*

**Navid Rasouli Azar†**

*English language department, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran*

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### Abstract

The dominance of English as a global lingua franca has significantly influenced educational materials worldwide, often reflecting underlying patterns of linguistic imperialism. This study conducts a comparative analysis of TEFL textbooks from Iran and Lebanon to examine how cultural, linguistic, and ideological content is represented. Using Content Analysis, the research highlights stark contrasts between the Prospect Series, which is fully localized to Iranian cultural and ideological values, and the Themes Series, which incorporates a mix of Western, localized, and neutral content. Quantitative findings reveal that the Prospect Series avoids any form of linguistic or cultural imperialism, while the Themes Series contains a significant proportion (40%) of imperialistic themes, overshadowing localized content. The results underscore the divergent educational philosophies of the two countries, with implications for policy and pedagogy in developing culturally inclusive TEFL materials. The study contributes to the understanding of linguistic imperialism and offers actionable insights for creating balanced educational resources.

**Keywords:** Linguistic Imperialism, TEFL Textbooks, Content Analysis, Localized Content, Educational Policy

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### 1. Introduction

In recent decades, the dominance of English as a global lingua franca has affected educational systems worldwide, a phenomenon that some scholars argue represents a new form of linguistic imperialism.

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\* *Corresponding author:* English language department, Farhangian University, Tehra, Iran.

*Email:* [mohammadrezatusil@gmail.com](mailto:mohammadrezatusil@gmail.com).

† *Email:* [Navid2navidrasuli@gmail.com](mailto:Navid2navidrasuli@gmail.com)

Particularly in countries where English is a foreign language, such as Iran and Lebanon, English teaching methods, materials, and curricula can reflect or challenge cultural, ideological, and political influences associated with Western or Anglo-American norms. Linguistic imperialism, a term coined by Phillipson (1992), states that the spread of English can reinforce socio-cultural hierarchies, privileging English-speaking cultures and values over local languages and identities. This phenomenon is particularly evident in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) textbooks, which often serve as cultural vehicles that convey values, ideologies, and worldviews. However, linguistic imperialism in TEFL has varied manifestations depending on each country's unique sociopolitical, religious, and educational contexts (Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 2017).

This article conducts a contrastive analysis of linguistic imperialism in TEFL textbooks used in the Iranian and Lebanese educational systems. Iran and Lebanon offer intriguing case studies due to their differing historical relationships with Western influence, language policies, and cultural values. While English plays a major part in both countries' national educational curricula, the approach to TEFL and the influence of English vary significantly. Iran, a country with a strong anti-imperialist and anti-western stance, maintains strict language policies that seek to preserve the Islamic-Iranian identity and limit Western influence (Rahimi & Riazi, 2005). On the contrary, Lebanon, with its history of French and Western influence, has adopted a more pluralistic approach to language education, and English often plays a pivotal role in higher education and global mobility (Shaaban & Ghaith, 2003). It is safe to say that foreign languages are perceived by many Lebanese as being more important than the native language because of their usefulness in terms of career opportunities and future education plans (Diab, 2000; Shaaban & Ghaith, 2003; Bahous et al., 2011).

By comparing TEFL textbooks from both countries, this study aims to identify patterns of linguistic imperialism and analyze how these patterns reflect or resist Western ideologies and cultural norms. The study employs **Content Analysis (CA)** to examine how textbook content represents or conceals the values of English-speaking countries, potentially reinforcing linguistic hierarchies. Content analysis offers a systematic approach to quantifying and interpreting textual data by categorizing themes and patterns. Through this approach, the study provides insights into how English teaching materials can either sustain or challenge linguistic imperialism within non-Western educational contexts.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *Linguistic Imperialism: Theories and Perspectives*

The concept of linguistic imperialism was introduced by Robert Phillipson (1992), who argued that the spread of English across the globe serves not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for maintaining cultural and ideological dominance. Phillipson's theory states that linguistic imperialism operates through structural and cultural means, embedding Anglo-American values and ideologies in local contexts via English language teaching (ELT). This process often marginalizes native languages and cultures, reinforcing global power inequalities. Phillipson's work has sparked extensive debate, with some scholars criticizing it for oversimplifying the motivations behind English language acquisition (Holliday, 2005). However, linguistic imperialism remains a foundational theory for examining how English functions in educational contexts, particularly within TEFL materials.

Beyond Phillipson's framework, Canagarajah (1999) and Pennycook (2017) expanded the discussion by examining the resistance strategies of non-Western societies to linguistic imperialism. Canagarajah, in particular, emphasized that linguistic imperialism is not an uncontested process; rather, it encounters varying degrees of resistance and adaptation within different cultures. In TEFL, this resistance is sometimes evident in the development of localized curricula that incorporate indigenous cultural values and languages. However, due to the global prestige associated with English, many TEFL textbooks continue to emphasize Western ideologies, making it challenging to produce culturally inclusive materials (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007).

#### *TEFL Textbooks as Cultural Vehicles*

TEFL textbooks are pivotal in spreading linguistic imperialism, as they provide not only language instruction but also cultural and ideological perspectives. Gray (2010) noted that global TEFL textbooks frequently portray an idealized view of English-speaking countries, promoting values such as consumerism and individualism, which may not align with the cultures where they are used. Risager (2018) similarly described TEFL textbooks as "cultural narratives" that introduce specific worldviews, which can subtly shape students' views on Western cultures and their own. Studies on textbook content have shown that Western holidays, traditions, and values are often highlighted, while non-Western cultures are underrepresented (Kramsch, 1993).

The cultural messages embedded in TEFL materials are particularly sensitive in countries where education and cultural identity intersect, such as Iran and Lebanon. For instance, Taki (2008) observed

that Iranian TEFL materials are controlled to prevent Western cultural influences, aligning with Iran's goals of cultural sovereignty. Lebanon, on the other hand, sees English as a gateway to international opportunities, resulting in TEFL materials that include more Western cultural references (Shaaban & Ghaith, 2003). These examples reveal the complex balancing act between leveraging English for practical benefits and safeguarding cultural values.

## ***2.2. Comparative Perspectives on TEFL in Iran and Lebanon***

Iran and Lebanon take divergent approaches to English language education due to their distinct political and cultural histories. Iran's strong focus on Islamic and national values influences language education policies that limit Western influence, aligning English education with Islamic and cultural sovereignty (Abbasian & Khajavi, 2015). This approach leads to tightly controlled, locally produced textbooks that reflect Islamic principles rather than Western ideals.

Lebanon, with its multilingual tradition and Western influence, views English not only as a valuable skill but also as a bridge to global education and career opportunities (Shaaban & Ghaith, 2003). Lebanese education tends to incorporate international textbooks more openly, showcasing Anglo-American norms and practices. Lebanon's open economy and tourism industry, which often require English proficiency, foster this approach, demonstrating a lesser resistance to Western cultural elements (Karmani, 2005).

By comparing these two approaches, this study aims to show how linguistic imperialism is negotiated within different sociocultural and political environments. While Iran's TEFL textbooks actively resist Western cultural norms, Lebanon's textbooks may incorporate them, reflecting each nation's distinct educational and cultural outlooks.

## ***2.3. Content Analysis (CA) as a Framework for Studying TEFL Textbooks***

Content Analysis (CA) is a valuable tool for examining linguistic imperialism in TEFL textbooks, as it provides a systematic and replicable approach to quantifying textual data and interpreting themes and patterns. Pioneered by researchers such as Krippendorff (2018) and Neuendorf (2017), CA focuses on identifying recurring linguistic and cultural representations in texts, enabling researchers to understand how these representations reflect or reinforce social power structures. In TEFL, CA can reveal the

prevalence of Western values and ideologies through the systematic coding and analysis of textbook content (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Krippendorff's CA framework, which emphasizes clarity in coding, thematic categorization, and replicability, is especially relevant for studying TEFL materials. This approach uncovers patterns at various levels, from specific word choices to overarching cultural themes. In the context of linguistic imperialism, CA allows researchers to quantify and interpret how TEFL textbooks integrate or resist Western cultural norms. Using CA, this study will analyze Iranian and Lebanese TEFL materials to evaluate how these textbooks represent English-speaking cultures and their potential implications for local identity.

#### ***2.4. Empirical Studies on Linguistic Imperialism in TEFL Materials***

Studies on TEFL materials show that English textbooks frequently include cultural content that can shape students' perceptions. Research has shown that Western-produced TEFL materials often favor Western narratives, portraying English-speaking societies as modern and successful while marginalizing non-Western cultures (Gray, 2010). These portrayals may implicitly create a hierarchy where Western ideals are valued over local perspectives (Risager, 2018).

In non-Western contexts, students and educators respond to Western-centric portrayals in various ways. Taki (2008) found that Iranian TEFL materials tend to avoid Western social and cultural references that could conflict with local Islamic values, reflecting a stance of cultural preservation. In Lebanon, where English is linked to global success, TEFL materials are more likely to embrace Western cultural references, positioning English as a tool for social and economic mobility (Shaaban & Ghaith, 2003).

#### ***2.5. Theoretical and Methodological Gaps in Existing Research***

While linguistic imperialism is widely studied, comparative research examining how different countries approach linguistic imperialism in TEFL remains limited. By comparing Iran and Lebanon, this study aims to bridge this gap, offering insights into how educational settings influence the acceptance or resistance of English. Furthermore, integrating qualitative CA with quantitative analysis could provide a fuller view of linguistic imperialism in TEFL materials. Conclusion of Literature Review and Study Objectives

Building upon the foundational theories and empirical findings reviewed above, this study seeks to expand the understanding of linguistic imperialism in TEFL materials through a comparative analysis of Iranian and Lebanese textbooks. By employing Content Analysis, the study will identify linguistic and cultural representations in TEFL textbooks and explore how these reflect or resist Western cultural ideologies. Specifically, it will address the following research questions:

1. How do Iranian and Lebanese TEFL textbooks represent English-speaking cultures, and what ideologies are embedded within these representations?
2. What similarities and differences exist between Iranian and Lebanese approaches to linguistic imperialism in TEFL materials, and how do these differences reflect each country's cultural and educational priorities?

This study, informed by the above theories and findings, will analyze linguistic imperialism in Iranian and Lebanese TEFL materials through a CA lens. The research questions focus on cultural representation and ideological content in TEFL textbooks, exploring differences in how each country negotiates linguistic imperialism within its unique educational and cultural priorities.

### **3. Methodology**

This study employs Content Analysis (CA) to investigate how linguistic imperialism is manifested in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) textbooks used in the educational systems of Iran and Lebanon. The methodological approach focuses on systematically categorizing and interpreting textual data to identify patterns of linguistic and cultural representation. By applying CA, the study uncovers the ways in which English language teaching materials reinforce or challenge the dominance of English-speaking countries, revealing embedded cultural hierarchies and power relations.

A comparative qualitative case study approach is employed, focusing on two distinct educational settings. The first case is Iran, where English language teaching has traditionally been structured to preserve the Islamic-Iranian identity and resist external cultural influences. The second case is Lebanon, a country with a more multilingual and pluralistic approach to education, where English is viewed as a tool for global mobility and economic success. This contrast provides a valuable opportunity to analyze the divergent ways in which English language textbooks propagate or resist Western ideological and cultural domination.

### 3.1. Data Collection

The textbooks selected for analysis are Prospect 1 (used by Iranian 7<sup>th</sup> graders) which consists of 8 overall chapters/lessons and Themes 7 (used by Lebanese 7<sup>th</sup> graders) which consists of 12 chapters overall (but only the first eight chapters were considered for our content analysis in order to get an equal comparison between the two books). These textbooks were chosen because they represent the standard English teaching curriculum in each respective country and serve as primary tools through which students engage with the English language and associated cultural values.

To ensure a comprehensive data collection, a purposive sampling strategy was employed. Key criteria for textbook selection included their widespread use in the respective educational systems, alignment with national curricula, and representation of cultural content relevant to the study objectives. The textual data collected from these textbooks includes:

1. Written text (e.g., dialogues, reading passages, exercises)
2. Visual content (e.g., images, illustrations accompanying the text)

This dataset provides a basis for systematically coding linguistic and cultural representations.

### 3.2. Data Analysis

The study utilizes Krippendorff's (2018) framework for Content Analysis, which involves a multi-step process to ensure reliability and validity in identifying themes and patterns:

1. **Unitization:** Defining the units of analysis, such as words, phrases, or themes within the textbooks. Both linguistic and visual content were examined.
2. **Coding:** Applying a coding scheme to categorize data into themes. Codes included cultural representations, references to Western values, local cultural symbols, and depictions of societal roles.
3. **Thematic Analysis:** Interpreting the coded data to identify patterns, such as the prevalence of Western ideologies or the inclusion of local cultural elements.
4. **Quantification and Interpretation:** Using frequency counts to assess the prominence of themes and interpreting the results in the context of linguistic imperialism and cultural dominance.

To ensure consistency and reliability, intercoder agreement was established by involving multiple coders in the analysis process. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion and refinement of the coding scheme.

#### 4. Results

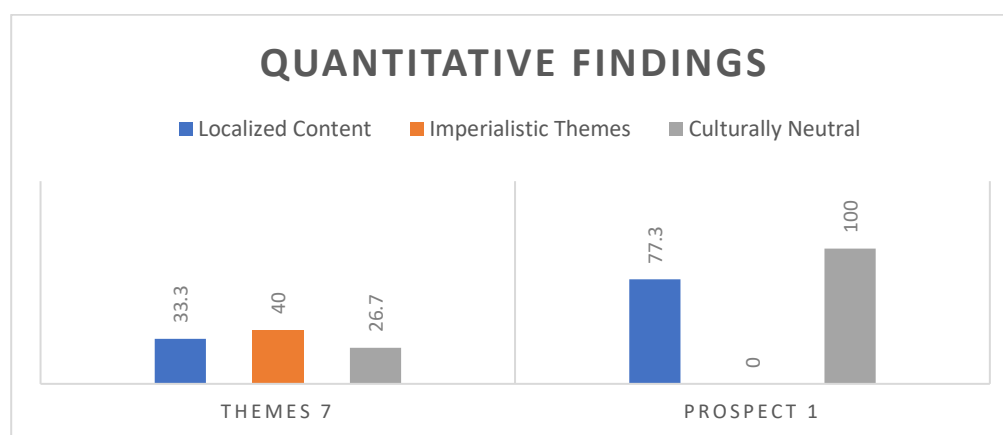
The findings from the Content Analysis of the Prospect 1 (Iran) and the Themes 7 (Lebanon) highlight significant differences in the representation of localized, culturally neutral, and imperialistic content across the two textbooks. The results are organized into key themes, with quantitative data and qualitative insights providing a comprehensive analysis.

##### 4.1. Quantitative Findings

Table 1 summarizes the coding distribution across the analyzed lessons in both textbooks:

CODE	<i>THEMES 7 (LEBANON)</i>	<i>PROSPECT 1 (IRAN)</i>
LOCALIZED CONTENT (LC)	33.3% (5 lessons)	77.3% (6 lessons)
CULTURALLY NEUTRAL (CN)	26.7% (4 lessons)	100% (8 lessons)
IMPERIALISTIC THEMES (IT)	40.0% (6 lessons)	0%

Chart 1 summarizes the coding distribution across the analyzed lessons in both textbooks:



Coding Tables for both *Themes 7* and *Prospect 1*'s Content Analysis are added in the appendix

*Themes 7* exhibited a balanced mix of localized, neutral, and imperialistic content, with a significant proportion (40%) reflecting imperialistic themes. In contrast, the Prospect Series demonstrated a strong emphasis on localized content, with no evidence of cultural or linguistic imperialism.

### **Theme 1: Representation of Western Cultural Norms**

- ***Themes 7:*** Western cultural values were prominent in lessons such as "The Little Prince" and "The Titanic," which romanticized Western achievements and societal structures. Visuals frequently depicted Western landmarks and lifestyles, reinforcing these themes.
- ***Prospect 1:*** Western cultural references were absent, aligning with the Iranian Ministry of Education's policies to preserve Islamic and national identity. All content was rooted in local traditions, with examples like Nowruz celebrations and Islamic teachings.

### **Theme 2: Emphasis on Local Cultural Identity**

- ***Themes 7:*** Localized content accounted for one-third of the lessons, with examples like Lebanese cuisine and cultural symbols (e.g., Cedars of Lebanon). However, these narratives were often juxtaposed with global or Western elements, diluting their impact.
- ***Prospect 1:*** Every lesson reinforced Iranian cultural identity, featuring traditional food, local architecture, and references to historical figures. This unwavering focus on local content reflects a deliberate resistance to external cultural influences.

### **Theme 3: Linguistic and Ideological Neutrality**

- ***Themes 7:*** Neutral topics, such as environmental awareness and scientific facts, represented 26.7% of the lessons. However, missed opportunities for localization were noted, such as a lesson on air pollution that referenced Tokyo instead of a local context.
- ***Prospect 1:*** Neutrality was absent, as all lessons were intentionally grounded in Iranian cultural and ideological contexts.

#### **4.2. Visual Content Analysis**

- **Themes 7:** Visuals reinforced Western narratives, showcasing iconic landmarks (e.g., Big Ben) and lifestyles. These images complemented the textual emphasis on Western norms.
- **Prospect 1:** Imagery aligned with Iranian traditions and landscapes, such as ancient architecture and traditional clothing, further emphasizing localized content.

#### **4.3. Broader Implications**

The comparison underscores starkly different approaches to English education. Prospect 1 exemplifies a localized strategy, aiming to resist linguistic and cultural imperialism. Conversely, Themes 7 integrates Western cultural elements alongside localized narratives, reflecting Lebanon's pluralistic educational philosophy. These findings contribute to the broader understanding of how linguistic imperialism manifests in non-Western educational contexts and provide actionable insights for developing culturally inclusive teaching materials.

### **5. Conclusion**

This study provides a comparative analysis of linguistic imperialism in TEFL textbooks used in Iran and Lebanon, highlighting the contrasting approaches taken by the Prospect Series and the Themes Series. Through Content Analysis, the study reveals how educational materials reflect or resist linguistic and cultural hierarchies, offering insights into the broader implications of English language teaching in non-Western contexts.

The Prospect Series exemplifies a localized approach to TEFL, with 100% of its content grounded in Iranian cultural and ideological values. This strategy aligns with Iran's policy of cultural resistance, demonstrating how localized curricula can act as a form of resistance to linguistic imperialism. However, this exclusivity may limit students' exposure to diverse global perspectives, potentially impacting their ability to engage in international contexts.

Conversely, the Themes Series integrates localized, neutral, and Western-centric content, reflecting Lebanon's pluralistic and globally oriented educational philosophy. While this approach prepares students for global opportunities, the disproportionate emphasis on Western cultural norms (40% of lessons) raises concerns about the marginalization of local narratives and the subtle reinforcement of linguistic imperialism.

### ***Implications for Policy and Practice***

- The findings underscore the importance of developing balanced TEFL materials that respect local cultural contexts while fostering global engagement. Policymakers and educators should:
- **Prioritize Localization:** Ensure that textbooks adequately represent local cultural and historical narratives, reinforcing students' identities.
- **Mitigate Imperialistic Influences:** Regularly evaluate TEFL materials for implicit biases and cultural hierarchies, ensuring alignment with national educational goals.

### ***Contributions to Future Research***

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on linguistic imperialism by offering a systematic, content-based approach to analyzing TEFL materials. Future research could expand on these findings by:

- Exploring the impact of TEFL materials on students' cultural and linguistic perceptions.
- Conducting longitudinal studies to assess how exposure to localized versus global content influences educational and career outcomes.
- Comparing TEFL textbooks across additional contexts to identify global patterns in linguistic imperialism. By shedding light on the cultural and ideological dynamics of TEFL materials, this study calls for a more inclusive and balanced approach to English language education that respects local identities while preparing students for a globalized world.

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**Appendix:**

Table 2: Themes 7 Coding Table:

Codebook:

CODE	DEFINITION
<b>LOCALIZED CONTENT (LC)</b>	Material grounded in local cultural, historical, or societal elements.
<b>CULTURALLY NEUTRAL (CN)</b>	Content free from cultural or ideological alignment.
<b>IMPERIALISTIC THEMES (IT)</b>	Content reflecting overt or underlying Western or imperialistic narratives.

CHAPTER	LESSON TITLE	EXCERPT/FOCUS	CODE (S)	JUSTIFICATION
1	Lesson 1: Animal Homes	“Animals adapt to their environments to survive.”	CN	General discussion of animal behavior with no cultural alignment.
1	Lesson 2: "The Little Prince"	“The lion rules as the king of his land.”	IT	Symbolism of monarchy suggests Western imperialistic themes.
2	Lesson 1: "Fast Facts..."	“The Cedars are a source of pride in Lebanon.”	LC	Directly references Lebanese heritage, a localized narrative.
2	Lesson 3: "The Delights..."	“Christmas celebrations dominate the season.”	IT	Emphasizes Western holidays over local traditions.
3	Lesson 5: "Customs"	“Lebanese cuisine includes lentils, olive oil...”	LC	Highlights traditional Lebanese food, fully localized.
4	Lesson 2: "Getting Around..."	“London’s subway system is among the best.”	IT	Imperialistic emphasis on London’s global superiority in transportation.
4	Lesson 5: "The Titanic..."	“The Titanic showcased the ambitions of its era.”	IT	Reflects imperialistic ideals of luxury and progress.
5	Lesson 1: "The Development of Writing"	"Early writing systems shaped modern communication."	IT	Highlights foreign histories without localized context.
5	Lesson 2: "The Viking Age"	"The Vikings were explorers, traders, and conquerors."	IT	Focus on imperialistic conquests.
5	Lesson 3: "The Maya Civilization"	"The Maya created one of the most advanced ancient societies."	IT	Foreign historical focus, no localized content.

5	Lesson 4: "The Inca Civilization"	"The Inca Empire thrived in the Andes before colonization."	IT	Imperialism implied through historical narrative.
5	Lesson 5: "The Navajo People"	"The Navajo are known for their cultural resilience."	IT	Focuses on indigenous history with no connection to the local context.
5	Lesson 6: "Lobo of the Tasaday"	"The Tasaday people offer a glimpse into primitive life."	IT	Foreign-centric content with imperialistic undertones.
6	Lesson 1: "Watching Television: For or Against"	"Television can be both educational and distracting."	CN	Mostly neutral but hints at Westernized perspectives on media.
6	Lesson 2: "What's on TV Tonight"	"Popular shows like "Friends" captivate audiences worldwide."	IT	Highlights Westernized media culture.
6	Lesson 3: "The Day We Unplugged the TV"	"Family bonding was stronger when the TV was off."	CN	Neutral with subtle Western family structure implications.
6	Lesson 4: "Board Game"	"Board games like "Monopoly" bring people together in fun ways."	IT	Focuses on Western recreational activities.
6	Lesson 5: "Gardening"	"Gardening is a fulfilling hobby."	CN	Neutral but includes Westernized imagery of gardening culture.
6	Lesson 6: "My Bank Account"	"Financial literacy is essential for independence."	CN	Attempts neutrality but reflects Western financial concepts.
7	Lesson 1: "Environmental Awareness"	"Reduce, reuse, recycle to protect the planet."	CN	Culturally neutral environmental message.
7	Lesson 2: "Our Garbage"	"Waste management is a growing concern worldwide."	CN	Neutral global perspective.
7	Lesson 3: "What Have We Done to Our Lovely Sea"	"Marine pollution harms ecosystems and livelihoods."	CN	General environmental topic.
7	Lesson 4: "A Different Beat"	"Eco-friendly habits create positive change."	CN	Neutral ecological focus.
7	Lesson 5: "Is This the Air Our Grandfathers Used to"	"Air pollution affects quality of life."	CN	Neutral environmental commentary.
7	Lesson 6: "Pollution in Tokyo"	"Tokyo has improved air quality through policies."	CN, IT	Missed opportunity to use a local example; reflects imperialism.
8	Lesson 1: "A Friend"	"True friends are hard to find."	IT	Western individualistic perspectives on friendship.
8	Lesson 2: "Not a One"	"Family values vary across cultures."	IT	Largely Western notions of family structure.

8	Lesson 3: "Charles"	"Charles represents the ideal friend in this narrative."	IT	Reflects Western interpersonal values.
8	Lesson 4: "The Nuclear Family: Women's Work in Home"	"The nuclear family places distinct roles on members."	IT	The idea of a nuclear family is inherently western and therefore hails from imperialistic cultures
8	Lesson 4: "The Nuclear Family: Women's Work in Home"	"Although women have started taking on major roles in the society..."	IT	The Idea of women leading the society outside of homemaking roles is inherently imperialistic!

Table 3: Coding Table for Prospect 1:

CHAPTER	LESSON TITLE	EXCERPT/FOCUS	CODE (S)	JUSTIFICATION
1	Lesson 1: "My Name"	"Excuse me. How do you spell your last name? Komijani, K-O-M-I-J-A-N-I.	LC, CN	Names reflect local cultural identity and avoid foreign influences.
2	Lesson 2: "My Classmates"	Sorry, what's your last name again? Behparvar. B-E-H-P-A-R-V-A-R.	LC, CN	Names reflect local cultural identity and avoid foreign influences.
3	Lesson 3: "My Age"	Nargess, when is your birthday? It's in Mehr.	LC, CN	References local calendar systems and avoids external influences.
3	Lesson 3: "My Age"	When's your birthday? It's in Bahman.	LC, CN	References local calendar systems and avoids external influences.
4	Lesson 4: "My Family"	And your mother? She's 35. She is a housewife.	LC	Focus on local family structure and cultural norms. And also traditionally gender-fixated roles
5	Lesson 5: "My Appearance"	She's the tall woman. She's wearing a black chador.	LC	Using Culturally and locally appropriate appearance choices as examples
5	Lesson 5: "My Appearance"	She's the tall girl. She's wearing a brown scarf.	LC	Using Culturally and locally appropriate appearance choices as examples
5	Lesson 5: "My Appearance"	She's the old woman. She's wearing a brown manteau.	LC	Using Culturally and locally appropriate appearance choices as examples